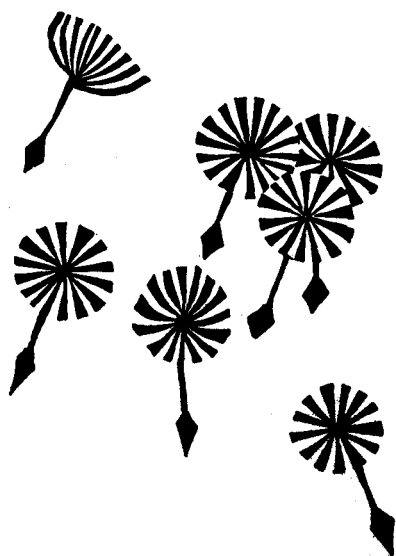


CANADIAN LITERATURE N^o. 112

Spring, 1987



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CARRIER,
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(POP)CORN LAWS

BY THE TIME THIS EDITORIAL APPEARS, the question it addresses may well be resolved. Such is one of the dilemmas of quarterly publication: a given moment's burning issues may be cinders by the time a commentary gets into print. I write this in November 1986, shortly after the federal government enacted its Corn Law. It is one of several measures of economic retaliation directed against the United States, a reaction to an American embargo against Canadian lumber products, which is in turn part of a tit-for-tariff dance of defensive political posturing before one election and anticipating another. The Corn Law put up a tariff against the importation of American corn because the Americans put up a tariff against Canadian wood. The measure has at least the merit of giving some Canadian economic advantage to a Canadian industry (though there are other measures — like improving the rural irrigation systems in southern Ontario — that would also affect the character of the Canadian crop). (This is metaphor, not just agricultural history.) The previous Corn Law the government enacted imposed a tariff on American books as a protest against the American tariff on Canadian shingles. This one seems to me more of a puzzle, especially when the whole dance is taking place in the name of free trade.

I have problems with the book duty for several reasons: (1) it seems an inadequate solution to a problem in the shingle industry (a problem, incidentally, which turns out not to have affected sales in the way that was expected); (2) it treats books as a commodity purely, and as a luxury rather than as a resource; (3) it does a disservice to those book-reading citizens with limited incomes (of whom there are many) and to those Canadian industries (publishers, book-sellers) who depend significantly on these sales; (4) it does not directly benefit a Canadian industry; (5) it imposes a tariff on the free flow of information, implicitly permitting at least two unacceptable practices theoretically to result: allowing an anonymous bureaucracy to control what information may cross borders, and equating wealth with accessibility to information — i.e., access to books is denied to those with limited incomes, a previous problem in yet another guise, affecting libraries as well as individuals. (6) A sixth problem involves language: this tax applies only to books written in English, a decision which is

open to a variety of interpretations. Is anglophone culture deemed to be more vulnerable than francophone to American influence, or richer and more able to pay taxes, or is it a punitive gesture against anglophone readers, or is it merely discriminatory, in a peculiarly rudimentary and offensive sense?

I don't know what the intent is, except to teach Americans a lesson. Except that it seems such an ambiguous lesson, I'm not sure what will actually be learned. If the legislation presumes that the Canadian book industry will thrive because American books have become (more) expensive, that's at heart a curious idea: it suggests first of all that Canadians will choose to read cheap books rather than choose to read books because of what they're about, and it also suggests that Canadian books are essentially no different from American books — that there's no difference in kind or character, only a difference in printer and (perhaps) setting. That's simply not the way books work. Books aren't just commodities, bought to occupy the eyes on bus rides. Books also occupy the mind. And however indirectly, they derive from — and express — the values of the culture in which they are written. Simply put, American books have something to say, and merit reading; Canadian books also have something to say and merit reading — but they do not earn their readership by saying American things more cheaply; they earn it by saying what they have to say well. And they have value in Canada and elsewhere not only for their quality but also for the difference in perspective to which they give voice.

Obviously there does exist a kind of gelid-dessert school of literary economics that equates any one book with any other. But I don't buy it. Literary economics is a pressing matter for quite other reasons. There's a cultural need to protect Canadian publishers from external control, and there's a continuing need to invest money as well as energy in enterprises like the Canada Council and the CBC which encourage Canadian expression, in all its variety. It's a way of ensuring options of our own choice, and continuity. But that's not the same thing as controlling Canadian access to others. I cannot believe that anyone would be a better Canadian for *not* having heard Bach, read Faulkner, seen Italian film, or danced to reggae. Part of the vitality of Canadian culture derives in fact from its continuing awareness of the rest of the world. Therefore allow free trade *in ideas*, by all means. But don't negotiate cultural independence away. The two issues are not mutually exclusive.

Eric Nicol's latest book, *The U.S. or Us: What's the Difference, Eh?*, attempts to take a comic stance towards the Free Trade debate that recurrently (and currently) preoccupies Canadian money-mindedness. At one point Nicol rewrites the national anthem, sardonically redressing the political and economic "inadequacies" of the present version:

God help our land
When trade is free!

Eh Canada
 We stand on God for thee.
 Eh Canada
 What will be in it for me?

In effect, Nicol asserts that the appositeness of such lines shows that Canadian and American culture are so little different that an economic union between the two societies would make sense. Other commentators take up the same issue more solemnly. Articles in *Queen's Quarterly* in July 1986 argue that Canadian economic survival depends on the guaranteed market that a comprehensive free trade treaty with the United States would provide. But there are also opposing views. Stuart Smith, head of the Science Council of Canada, argues in *Australian-Canadian Studies* that the theoretical design of a free-trade pact is based on a faulty (natural resource) limitation of Canada's economic potential: in effect, economics has not yet figured out how to deal with technology, he says. Resource economies do not need to defer forever to the status quo, because technology is not fixed in place; it is a process, which provides us a means of engineering our own economic advantage: irrigation and intellect in a time of stress are a kinetic solution to a static relationship. James Laxer's *Leap of Faith* further argues that a free-trade "deal" is both short-sighted and inopportune: "We will be adopting the American model just when its weaknesses are becoming most evident," he writes. And John Hutcheson's editorial in the November 1986 *Canadian Forum* applies the free-trade debate to issues affecting the broadcasting industry, in particular to the role as "public trustee" with which such industries are empowered.

Mel Hurtig, Nicol's publisher, nationalist to the core, fashions one of the most ironic features of *The U.S. or Us* when on the book's jacket there appears this disclaimer: "The opinions expressed in this book are definitely those of the authors [the co-author/illustrator is Dave More] and in no way, at no time, and under no circumstances whatsoever even remotely reflect the views of the publisher." Given the circumstances, the note seems more than a marketing strategy. The conflict here involves a disparity between two groups of people: those who ask how we do business, and those who ask how we live; those who see investment and culture as separate notions, with the amount of financial profit taking absolute precedence over all else, and those who see investment in culture as a necessary option, qualifying the desirability of "maximum" profit by the desirability of the shared values of a way of life. That "international" perspective I mentioned earlier is among these values.

Which brings me back to the Corn Laws and the prospect of free trade as it is currently being discussed. The problem is that what's being *called* "Free Trade" is not in fact what is being envisioned. What's being talked about is a trading *bloc*, an economic union between Canada and the United States, a restricted

Free Trade Zone, "Fortress North America," open to internal market competition but collectively, uniformly, closed to other borders. Hence the real arguments are not so much economic (about tariffs) as they are sociopolitical (about government investment and involvement in support for health care, the arts, the reduction of regional economic disparities: in short, in quality of life). Inevitably, they're about the character of the respective relations between Canada and the U.S. and the rest of the world. As long as the social structures, institutions, and services Canadians value are deemed to be "foreign" to the American economic model, it is more likely that Canada would be invited to bend to American postures rather than that America would bend to Canada's. Would Canada, in the kind of Free Trade Future currently being imagined, have to give up its special connections with the Commonwealth, Latin America, The People's Republic of China? The answer, so far as I can see, is "yes." And does this matter? *Most adamantly, yes*, for it's a cultural as well as a simple monetary decision. Now, a mainline economic free-trader would say "no," arguing that the U.S. is Canada's greatest market, and therefore that pragmatic concerns dictate economic posture. This version of reality seems to me to accept present circumstances as though they were ideal and as though they were fixed. Yet there are markets elsewhere that could be cultivated; and there are ideas in more parts of the world than one. The American dollar is not, as nightly news reports implicitly suggest, the only consequential point of economic comparison. If the Reykjavik Summit did nothing else, it advertised to the world that Iceland is self-sufficient in products like citrus fruit, that it produces food under glass, with sunlight and thermal energy. Such self-sufficiency is a quality that might be preferable to economic (and invariably, social) dependency. For to negotiate away the viability of an independent Canadian set of connections with the rest of the world would be to give up more than trading rights. It would mean giving up the options that the vicissitudes of history have granted, and which too few Canadians yet consciously recognize are theirs to *apply* and *enjoy*.

A 1944 David Low cartoon (collected in *Years of Wrath*, a Gollancz "cartoon history" of the years 1932-45) shows Winston Churchill offering a single-size suit both to Canada's short, round Mackenzie King and to South Africa's long, narrow Smuts. The suit is called "Commonwealth Unity"; but the caption reads "H'm. . . show us your outsizes." The two dominions, in mid-war, were resisting the invitation to wear one uniform, someone else's at that. They proclaimed the need for their "association" to remain "free." Much has happened to this association in forty years, and South Africa has retreated from it, into a mindset, a dogma, a structure of belief that barricades it from change. Such isolationism does not seem to me a model Canada can productively adopt, though it has its adherents. The Commonwealth, by contrast, though it seems to many people to be an historical dinosaur, remains surprisingly alive, valuable

because it has evolved outside the frame of current superpower territoriality and because it remains resistant to the old imperial uniform. It opens options, in other words. It is one of *several* relationships that opens options. The problem with the current invitation to “free trade” — though it seems *in name* to espouse openness — is that in reality it would isolate, and the isolation would be of someone else’s design.

“People like certainties,” writes Doris Lessing, in the 1985 CBC Massey lectures published as *Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*. “More, they crave certainty, they seek certainty, and great resounding truths. They like to be part of some movement equipped with these truths and certainties, and if there are rebels and heretics, that is even more satisfying” — for to the faithful, the presence of rebels simply confirms the wisdom of their own belief. Lessing’s talks begin by referring to South Africa, but they end up concerned less with that country in particular than with the more widespread pressures of group-thought. Group-thought is easy, attractive, apparently secure, dogmatic, therefore dangerous (because isolating, and because it stems more from the fear of insecurity than from the thoughtful consideration of consequences). Moreover, Lessing adds, history repeatedly shows us that one day’s dogma is another day’s absurdity — which nonetheless does not stop dogma from appealing in some form to successive generations.

The relevance of these observations to Canada today should be clear. The invitation to wear one economic face — inherently a political decision, not merely a monetary one — is just such an appeal, more tempting perhaps because it seems to come from within Canada. And more tempting because it verbally at least offers the illusion of adventurous security. But is “Fortress North America” the model Canadians should choose to live by? Should we barricade ourselves behind other people’s priorities? I think there are separate structures to value, and many different lines of connection to preserve. The invitation to wear one (uniform) suit before the rest of the world therefore continues to need resisting — not so much for corn’s sake as for culture’s.

Will Canada therefore act wisely? More to the point, will Canadians make their *own* choice of priorities rather than permit others to make such decisions for them? I don’t know. But consider the form of this editorial: it’s cast in the future. Perhaps it’s Utopian.

W.N.

POSTSCRIPT: Perhaps it is; perhaps it isn’t. On budget day, 19 February 1987, the tariff on books and computer parts was dropped, which importantly recognizes the invidiousness of the initial legislation. A tariff on Christmas trees was also dropped, the reasons unspecified. Unrelatedly (I think), a new tax was imposed on popcorn. But more important than the present set of new levies is

yet another one hinted for the near future — a Value Added Tax system, which would impose a tax on each business exchange in Canada, which cannot have any other result than to send prices spiraling. By such a system, wood would be taxed when it became paper, paper taxed when it became printer's stock, printer's stock taxed when it became a journal: possibly journals would also be taxed when the copies were put up for sale. The consumer will be asked yet again to absorb the costs; but this time the costs will be hidden in a product's manufacturing history and only announced at the end. The new invidiousness of a multiple set of covert percentage increases is obvious. So is the inflationary character of this taxation method. One would like to believe that the idea will be abandoned before it comes to pass, and perhaps it will. There's still time to object.

W.N.

ORCHARD MORNING

Kay Smith

In the first orchard morning
you wake to the divine visitor
in your bed.
Light opens like a lily.
Tangled in the sheet his body honours,
you marvel at the oceanic calm
upon him as he lies sleeping after love.
You see him as deliverer
as the sun kissing your cold breasts.

I too had a lover
now yours,
one who will not rise to me from the depth of our embrace,
my legacy from him a three-fold vision;
as god I saw him
as lion lying down with lamb and
(most poignantly and mercifully)
ordinary-extraordinary
man

who,
when from topmost tree
to earth I fell,
fed you my heart to keep you both well.

MARGARET ATWOOD'S "THE HANDMAID'S TALE" AND THE DYSTOPIAN TRADITION

Amin Malak

IN *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault impressively articulates the complex, formidably paradoxical relationship between sexuality and power, arguing how power dictates its law to sex:

To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounce itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed; do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification. Power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two nonexistences.¹

Any reader of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* needs to recall Foucault's observation to contextualize the agonies of the narrator-protagonist, Offred, the victim of such a prohibition ordinance. By focusing the narrative on one central character, Atwood reveals the indignity and terror of living under a futuristic regime controlled by Christian fundamentalists. The heroine is one of several "handmaids" who, because of their "viable ovaries," are confined to a prison-like compound in order to be available for periodically programmed sexual intercourse with their "Commanders of the Faith." This church-state regime, called Gilead, condones such an unorthodox practice out of necessity to overcome a fertility crisis amongst the dwindling Caucasian population; as one of the novel's epigrams suggests, the polygamy of the Old Testament provides the sanction. True to the precedent set in Genesis, the Commander's Wife arranges and supervises these sex sessions, in which the handmaid, desexed and dehumanized, is obliged to participate. The dire alternative for the handmaid is banishment to the Colonies, where women clean up radioactive waste as slave labourers. The dictates of state policy in Gilead thus relegate sex to a saleable commodity exchanged for mere minimal survival.

One of the novel's successful aspects concerns the skilful portrayal of a state that in theory claims to be founded on Christian principles, yet in practice miserably lacks spirituality and benevolence. The state in Gilead prescribes a pattern

of life based on frugality, conformity, censorship, corruption, fear, and terror — in short, the usual terms of existence enforced by totalitarian states, instance of which can be found in such dystopian works as Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *1984*.

In order to situate Atwood's novel within the relevant context of dystopia, I wish to articulate the salient dystopian features those three classics reveal. The ensuing discussion will be an elaboration on Atwood's rendition and redefinition of those features.

1. *Power, Totalitarianism, War:*

Dystopias essentially deal with power: power as the prohibition or perversion of human potential; power in its absolute form that, to quote from *1984*, tolerates no flaws in the pattern it imposes on society. Dystopias thus show, in extreme terms, power functioning efficiently and mercilessly to its optimal totalitarian limit. Interestingly, war or foreign threats often loom in the background, providing the pretext to join external tension with internal terror.

2. *Dream-Nightmare: Fantasy: Reality:*

While dystopias may be fear-laden horror fiction (how the dream turns into a nightmare), the emphasis of the work is not on horror for its own sake, but on forewarning. Similarly, while dystopias contain elements of the fantastic with a "touch of excess" carrying the narrative "one step [or more] beyond our reality,"² the aim is neither to distort reality beyond recognition, nor to provide an escapist world for the reader, but "to allow certain tendencies in modern society to spin forward without the brake of sentiment and humaneness."³

3. *Binary Oppositions:*

Dystopias dramatize the eternal conflict between individual choice and social necessity: the individual resenting the replacement of his private volition by compulsory uniformitarian decisions made by an impersonal bureaucratic machinery; Zamyatin's heroine poignantly sums up the conflict: "I do not want anyone to want for me. I want to want for myself."⁴ The sphere of the binary opposition expands further to cover such dialectical dualities as emotion and reason, creative imagination and mathematical logic, intuition and science, tolerance and judgment, kindness and cruelty, spirituality and materialism, love and power, good and evil. The list can go on.

4. *Characterization:*

Dystopias often tend to offer two-dimensional character types; this tendency is possibly due to the pressure of the metaphorical and ideological thrust of these

works. Moreover, the nightmarish atmosphere of dystopias seems to preclude advancing positive, assertive characters that might provide the reader with consoling hope. If such positive characters do exist, they usually prove miserably ineffectual when contending with ruthless overwhelming powers.

5. *Change and Time:*

Dystopian societies, consumed and controlled by regressive dogmas, appear constantly static: founded on coercion and rigid structures, the system resists change and becomes arrested in paralysis. Such a static life “shorn of dynamic possibility,” becomes for the underprivileged members of society mediocre, monotonous and predictable: “a given and measured quantity that can neither rise to tragedy nor tumble to comedy.”⁵ Accordingly, dystopias are not associated with innovation and progress, but with fear of the future. They use, however, the present as an instructive referent, offering a tacit alternative to the dystopian configuration.

6. *Roman à Thèse:*

To varying degrees, dystopias are quintessentially ideological novels: they engage the reader in what Fredrick Jameson calls a “theoretical discourse,” whereby a range of thematic possibilities are posited and polarized against each other, yet the novels eventually reveal a definite philosophical and socio-political outlook for which fiction proves to be a convenient medium.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES ATWOOD’S NOVEL from those dystopian classics is its obvious feminist focus. Gilead is openly misogynistic, in both its theocracy and practice. The state reduces the handmaids to the slavery status of being mere “breeders” (a term bearing Swift’s satirical coinage) :

We are all for breeding purposes: We aren’t concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us. . . . We are two-legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices.⁶

In addition to the handmaids, Gilead offers its own state-sponsored brand of prostitutes called the Jezebels: dolled-up women whose sole function is to entertain foreign delegations. In order to erase the former identity of the handmaids, the state, moreover, cancels their original names and labels them according to the names of their Commanders, hence the names Offred, Ofglen, Ofwayne, Ofwarren. The women then become possessed articles, mere appendages to those men who exercise sexual mastery over them. The handmaid’s situation lucidly illustrates Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion in *The Second Sex* about man defining

woman not as an autonomous being but as simply what he decrees to be relative to him: "For him she is sex — absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not with reference to her; she is the incidental, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute — she is the Other."⁷ This view of man's marginalization of woman corroborates Foucault's earlier observation about the power-sex correlative; since man holds the sanctified reigns of power in society, he rules, assigns roles, and decrees after social, religious, and cosmic concepts convenient to his interests and desires.

However, not all the female characters in Atwood's novel are sympathetic, nor all the male ones demonic. The Aunts, a vicious élite of collaborators who conduct torture lectures, are among the church-state's staunchest supporters; these renegades turn into zealous converts, appropriating male values at the expense of their feminine instincts. One of them, Aunt Lydia, functions, ironically, as the spokesperson of antifeminism; she urges the handmaids to renounce themselves and become non-persons: "Modesty is invisibility, said Aunt Lydia. Never forget it. To be seen — to be *seen* — is to be — her voice trembled — penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable. She called us girls" (p. 39). On the other hand, Nick, the Commander's chauffeur, is involved with the underground network, of men and women, that aims at rescuing women and conducting sabotage. Besides, Atwood's heroine constantly yearns for her former marriage life with Luke, presently presumed dead. Accordingly, while Atwood poignantly condemns the misogynous mentality that can cause a heavy toll of human suffering, she refrains from convicting a gender in its entirety as the perpetrator of the nightmare that is Gilead. Indeed, we witness very few of the male characters acting with stark cruelty: the narrative reports most of the violent acts after the fact, sparing the reader gory scenes. Even the Commander appears more pathetic than sinister, baffled than manipulative, almost, at times, a Fool.

Some may interpret Atwood's position here as a non-feminist stance, approving of women's status-quo. In a review for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Lorna Sage describes *The Handmaid's Tale* as Atwood's "revisionist look at her more visionary self," and as "a novel in praise of the present, for which, perhaps, you have to have the perspective of dystopia."⁸ It is really difficult to conceive Atwood's praising the present, because, like Orwell who in *1984* extrapolated specific ominous events and tendencies in twentieth-century politics, she tries to caution against right-wing fundamentalism, rigid dogmas, and misogynous theosophies that may be currently gaining a deceptive popularity. The novel's mimetic impulse then aims at wresting an imperfect present from a horror-ridden future: it appeals for vigilance, and an appreciation of the mature values of tolerance, compassion, and, above all, for women's unique identity.

The novel's thematics operate by positing polarized extremes: a decadent present, which Aunt Lydia cynically describes as "a society dying . . . of too much

choice" (p. 35), and a totalitarian future that prohibits choice. Naturally, while rejecting the indulgent decadence and chaos of an anarchic society, the reader condemns the Gilead regime for its intolerant, prescriptive set of values that projects a tunnel vision on reality and eliminates human volition: "There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (p. 34). As illustrated by the fears and agonies that Offred endures, when human beings are not free to aspire toward whatever they wish, when choices become so severely constrained that, to quote from Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*, "only the necessary is necessary," life turns into a painfully prolonged prison term. Interestingly, the victimization process does not involve Offred and the handmaids alone, but extends to the oppressors as well. Everyone ruled by the Gilead regime suffers the deprivation of having no choice, except what the church-state decrees; even the Commander is compelled to perform his sexual assignment with Offred as a matter of obligation: "This is no recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty" (p. 105).

Since the inhabitants of Gilead lead the precarious existence befitting victims, most try in varied ways to cope, endure, and survive. This situation of being a victim and trying to survive dramatizes Atwood's major thesis in her critical work *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, in which she suggests that Canada, metaphorically still a colony or an oppressed minority, is "a collective victim,"⁹ and that "the central symbol for Canada . . . is undoubtedly Survival, *la Survivance*."¹⁰ Atwood, furthermore, enumerates what she labels "basic victim positions," whereby a victim may choose any of four possible options, one of which is to acknowledge being a victim but refuse "to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable."¹¹ This position fully explains Offred's role as the protagonist-narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Offred's progress as a maturing consciousness is indexed by an evolving awareness of herself as a victimized woman, and then a gradual development toward initiating risky but assertive schemes that break the slavery syndrome. Her double-crossing the Commander and his Wife, her choice to hazard a sexual affair with Nick, and her association with the underground network, all point to the shift from being a helpless victim to being a sly, subversive survivor. This impulse to survive, together with the occasional flashes of warmth and concern among the handmaids, transmits reassuring signs of hope and humanity in an otherwise chilling and depressing tale.

What makes Atwood's book such a moving tale is its clever technique in presenting the heroine initially as a voice, almost like a sleepwalker conceiving disjointed perceptions of its surroundings, as well as flashing reminiscences about a bygone life. As the scenes gather more details, the heroine's voice is steadily and imperceptively, yet convincingly, transfigured into a full-roundedness, that

parallels her maturing comprehension of what is happening around her. Thus the victim, manipulated and coerced, is metamorphosed into a determined conniver who daringly violates the perverted canons of Gilead. Moreover, Atwood skilfully manipulates the time sequence between the heroine's past (pre-Gilead life) and the present: those shifting reminiscences offer glimpses of a life, though not ideal, still filled with energy, creativity, humaneness, and a sense of selfhood, a life that sharply contrasts with the alienation, slavery, and suffering under totalitarianism. By the end of the novel, the reader is effectively and conclusively shown how the misogynous regime functions on the basis of power, not choice; coercion, not volition; fear, not desire. In other words, Atwood administers in doses the assaulting shocks to our sensibilities of a grim dystopian nightmare: initially, the narrative voice, distant and almost diffidently void of any emotions, emphasizes those aspects of frugality and solemnity imposed by the state, then progressively tyranny and corruption begin to unfold piecemeal. As the novel concludes, as the horror reaches a climax, the narrative voice assumes a fully engaged emotional tone that cleverly keeps us in suspense about the heroine's fate. This method of measured, well-punctuated revelations about Gilead connects symbolically with the novel's central meaning: misogynous dogmas, no matter how seemingly innocuous and trustworthy they may appear at their initial conception, are bound, when allowed access to power, to reveal their ruthlessly tyrannical nature.

Regardless of the novel's dystopian essence, it nevertheless avoids being solemn; on the contrary, it sustains an ironic texture throughout. We do not find too many frightening images that may compare with Oceana's torture chambers: the few graphic horror scenes are crisply and snappily presented, sparing us a blood-curdling impact. (Some may criticize this restraint as undermining the novel's integrity and emotional validity.) As in all dystopias, Atwood's aim is to encourage the reader to adopt a rational stance that avoids *total* "suspension of disbelief." This rational stance dislocates full emotional involvement in order to create a Brechtian type of alienation that, in turn, generates an ironic charge. This rational stance too should not be total, because Atwood does want us to care sympathetically about her heroine's fate; hence the emotional distance between reader and character must allow for closeness, but up to a point. Furthermore, Atwood is equally keen on preserving the ironic flair intact. No wonder then that she concludes *The Handmaid's Tale* with a climactic moment of irony: she exposes, in a hilarious epilogue, the absurdity and futility of certain academic writings that engage in dull, clinically sceptic analysis of irrelevancies and inanities, yet miss the vital issues. "If I may be permitted an editorial aside," blabbers the keynote speaker at a twenty-second century anthropological conference,

allow me to say that in my opinion we must be cautious about passing moral judgement upon the Gileadeans. Surely we have learned by now that such judge-

ments are of necessity culture-specific. Also, Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free. Our job is not to censure but to understand. (Applause.) (pp. 314-15)

The entire "Historical Notes" at the end of the novel represents a satire on critics who spin out theories about literary or historical texts without genuinely recognizing or experiencing the pathos expressed in them: they circumvent issues, classify data, construct clever hypotheses garbed in ritualistic, fashionable jargon, but no spirited illumination ever comes out of their endeavours. Atwood soberly demonstrates that when a critic or scholar (and by extension a reader) avoids, under the guise of scholarly objectivity, taking a moral or political stand about an issue of crucial magnitude such as totalitarianism, he or she will necessarily become an apologist for evil; more significantly, the applause the speaker receives gives us a further compelling glimpse into a distant future that still harbours strong misogynous tendencies.

WHILE THE MAJOR DYSTOPIAN FEATURES can clearly be located in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the novel offers two distinct additional features: feminism and irony. Dramatizing the interrelationship between power and sex, the book's feminism, despite condemning male misogynous mentality, upholds and cherishes a man-woman axis; here, feminism functions inclusively rather than exclusively, poignantly rather than stridently, humanely rather than cynically. The novel's ironic tone, on the other hand, betokens a confident narrative strategy that aims at treating a depressing material gently and gradually, yet firmly, openly, and conclusively, thus skilfully succeeding in securing the reader's sympathy and interest. The novel shows Atwood's strengths both as an engaging story-teller and a creator of a sympathetic heroine, and as an articulate crafts-woman of a theme that is both current and controversial. As the novel signifies a landmark in the maturing process of Atwood's creative career, her self-assured depiction of the grim dystopian world gives an energetic and meaningful impetus to the genre.

NOTES

- ¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 84.
- ² Irving Howe in *1984 Revisited: Totalitarianism in Our Century*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 8.
- ³ Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (New York: Horizon Press, 1957), p. 242.
- ⁴ Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, trans. Mirra Ginsberg (New York: Viking, 1972), p. v.
- ⁵ *Politics and the Novel*, p. 240.

- ⁶ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), p. 146. All subsequent quotations will be followed parenthetically by the page number in this edition.
- ⁷ *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (1953; rpt. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. xvi.
- ⁸ Lorna Sage, "Projection from a Messy Present," *Times Literary Supplement* 4, no. 329 (21 March 1986), 307.
- ⁹ (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 36.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

SOCRATES AT THE CENTAUR

Irving Layton

I played Socrates at the Centaur
 for the townsfolk one night,
 the local yokels tagging me the 'stage sage'
 and the label stuck. I was the darling
 of Athens' gilded youth, making their heads spin
 with ideas that had their sleek Daddies
 scowling and biting their lower lip. Aristocrats,
 they knew in their bones what was good for them
 and what not, knew thinking was the bane
 of action, its greatest enemy; as it was
 of energy and the Will to Power.
 No ruling class that values its rights
 would have me around for a second.
 I was poison more lethal than hemlock,
 more dangerous to them than one of Sparta's
 uncovered spies. But the conceited fools,
 freshly scented from their baths and letting
 the folds of their togas slip down to display
 their exercised bodies were rivals
 for my interest, my affection. Not for them
 to smell a rat, one already gnawing their vitals.
 I dazzled them with my specious logic,
 had them hanging on to every word I spoke,

mostly when I chided them for neglecting
 the care of their souls. Inwardly I laughed
 to see them swallow the hook I'd baited
 with their own vanity, their faces made
 suddenly grave from that self-importance
 every possessor of a soul feels
 between one evacuation of his inflamed
 bladder and the next. Their innocence
 allowed me to relax among those whom wealth
 or appearance favoured more than myself
 and to call my relaxation love —
 love of the Good, the True and the Beautiful.
 Love of God. Diotima spoke those words so well,
 even our comic genius held his biting tongue
 and stayed silent. So did everyone else
 till Alcibiades stumbled in drunk as a lord
 and spoiled the mood, bringing me down to earth
 with a thud and back to my ungainly self,
 an earthling no different from the common herd
 in search of measures to keep life's pendulum
 moving between tedium and violence.
 But now our play's done
 do please note: Plato ends his Symposium
 with the old windbag trying his dialectical tricks
 on Agathon and Aristophanes, two poets.
 Why, I ask you, of all that crowd
 is Socrates left dialoguing with them
 at the end? Odd, eh? Well, I hope I've given you
 something to think about. But when tomorrow
 comes around and you still haven't puzzled out
 why two poets, I advise you to leave philosophy
 and to take up basket-weaving instead.
 Better yet, you might buy into
 a flourishing bawdy-house and consider that to be
 (most of your friends certainly will)
 the wisest if not the most profitable thing
 a man can do in this wretched life
 where no soul's left untouched by madness or grief.



GEORGE, LEDA, AND A POURED CONCRETE BALCONY

A Study of Three Aspects of the Evolution of “Lady Oracle”

Carol L. Beran

ALTHOUGH MARGARET ATWOOD has stated that the problem with writing a novel is “sustaining your interest long enough to actually sit down and work it out” (Gibson 6), the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto has five boxes of manuscripts of *Lady Oracle*.^{*} Studying three different kinds of revisions Atwood made as she created *Lady Oracle* suggests that the organizing principle that unifies the novel is that each element in *Lady Oracle* is chosen to heighten the reader’s awareness of the interrelationships between fantasy and reality, art and life. A close examination of the effects of changing the audience of the novel from Joan’s husband to the reader, adding the character Leda Sprout, and revising the first paragraph of the initial draft reveals Atwood’s concern with our perceptions about fiction and reality.

In the early drafts of *Lady Oracle* Joan speaks not to the reader, as she does in the published novel, but to her husband George (later called Arthur) — in her mind — in a voice totally unheard:

I would have preferred to have maintained your illusions for you intact, and I could have done it by never telling you any of the real things about myself. Most of the time I never did, which may account for my need, my compulsion to tell them to you now, if only in fantasy. (early typed draft, 10)¹

In fantasizing her life story to George, Joan completely denies our existence as readers:

... I wonder how long I will continue to make these feeble jokes about myself, how long I will continue to apologize even though there is no longer any one to listen to me. (First Draft, 3)

Listening to Joan tell her life story to her husband is quite different from listening to her tell it to us. Not only is the reader a voyeur rather than a participant,

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but in a sense there is also no layer of reality to cling to: even the telling is sheer fantasy. This mode of narration denies all reality but that happening within one mind, taking the form beyond that of Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business* in which Ramsay's writing an *apologia pro vita sua* to the headmaster ultimately invites us to judge in the place of the fictitious headmaster who fades from our notice as we become engrossed in Ramsay's autobiography. Atwood keeps George before us as Joan continually refers to "you" as she narrates. By choosing ultimately to eliminate George as the fantasy audience of Joan's narrative, Atwood allows the reader to enter the novel. The novel is no longer wholly Joan's fantasy; it begins in Joan's mind but reaches out, combining Joan's fantasies with the "reality" of her (fictional) life.

The form of narration Atwood ultimately uses in *Lady Oracle* has two literary counterparts: the autobiographical form used by celebrities (Joan is, after all, a celebrity who has had an extramarital affair with another celebrity, so her story and her willingness to reveal all fit the typical pattern² and the fictional spiritual autobiography used, for example, by Margaret Laurence in *The Stone Angel*. Partaking of two conventions yet failing to fulfil the expectations generated by either form, *Lady Oracle* calls into question generic expectations in such a way as to make us question not merely what is a novel,³ but also what is the relation of a novel which purports to be autobiography to autobiography — specifically, to a form of autobiography that often impresses readers as distinctly fictional. Juxtaposing a real form that seems fictional with a fictional form that seems real reminds us that the conventions of the fictional autobiography are shaped to allow us the lifelike experiences of being in one person's mind, aware of what she sees, looking at the outside from inside — the same conventions that obtain in the autobiography. In both cases we may question the validity of the perceptions: in reading autobiography we frequently wonder, "Did that really happen that way?" questioning whether the subject is being fully honest with us, and often separating ourselves from the speaking consciousness with responses like "How naive!" or "How callow!" that the speaker is presumably not trying to evoke; in reading fictional autobiography we experience the same detaching effects, but attribute them to the controlling hand of the author (Rader). Atwood insists we remember these effects of both conventions in Chapter 39 of the published novel when Joan describes telling her story to the reporter:

and the odd thing is that I didn't tell any lies. Well not very many. Some of the names and a few other things, but nothing major. (378)

Thus we are directly invited to question the truth of Joan's narrative — to think about the problem of how we respond to an autobiographical speaker, to question the veracity of a fiction the way we might question the veracity of a true life story, to think about how we separate fact from fiction, fiction from fact. We are

forced, then, to become aware of conventions, aware that either mode reflects conventions rather than things as they really are.

In the celebrity autobiography the speaker generally takes us through the difficulties of her rise to fame, ending on a positive note that suggests, "Now I'm a success and my troubles are behind me." A fictional autobiography conventionally progresses to an epiphany; in dual-time fictional autobiography like *The Stone Angel* and *Lady Oracle*, we expect that when the past and present times converge, the speaker will come to some significant realization about herself. Atwood has Joan call our attention to this convention: "I keep thinking I should learn something from all this, as my mother would have said" (379). The epiphany in *Lady Oracle*, however, is dubious enough that critics have argued about whether it is there or not;⁴ we are left to doubt whether Joan will act on her new sense of responsibility "to get Sam and Marlene out of jail" or continue to say, "Right now, though, it's easier just to stay here in Rome" (379). Joan has neither clearly overcome her problems nor made a discovery that will definitively alter her life.⁵ Our expectations of both forms, then, are only partially fulfilled, leaving us questioning our generic expectations, questioning what is art and how does it work.

In moving from having Joan speak to her husband to having Joan speak to us, Atwood changes the questions we must ask as we read: "Why does she want to tell her husband this?" becomes "Why does she want to tell the whole world this?" In speaking in fantasy to her husband only, Joan's speaking is a justification of herself for herself. In speaking to us all, her discourse becomes a very public self-justification, suggesting a more significant guilt needing confession than Joan's final admission: "It did make a mess; but then, I don't think I'll ever be a very tidy person" (380). The trivialization of Joan's motive for public confession forces us to look beneath what she says for a true motive — or beyond that for Atwood's motive in having Joan confess. Joan's need to speak might stem from her need to emerge from inside her mountain of flesh, to unify her various personalities. Atwood's motive in having Joan confess could include Joan's and extend beyond it. Mitchell suggests Atwood is making a statement about "the tendency for human beings to disintegrate, to split apart, under the pressures of modern living" (52).

This splitting is reflected in the multiple settings, the flashback format, and the excerpts from Joan's costume gothics (Mitchell 52). The gothic excerpts are particularly significant in analyzing Atwood's purpose behind Joan's narrative because as the novel progresses, the plots of the gothics intertwine more and more with the story of Joan's life, insisting we compare the two modes of describing reality that they represent.⁶ For example, when Redmond first touches Charlotte in the gothic, violent, menacing descriptive words like "crept," "distorted," "savage," "pulled," "wildly," "seized," "humiliate," "strike," "importunate,"

and “fend off” contrast with formal words like “approached,” “disengaged,” “tendril,” “sought,” “seeking,” and “not scruple”:

He approached her and disengaged a tendril of her hair; then his hand crept towards her throat, his lips sought hers, his features distorted and savage. Charlotte pulled away, seeking wildly for some object with which to defend herself. She seized a weighty copy of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*: if he attempted to humiliate her in this way again she would not scruple to strike him with it. He was not the first importunate nobleman she'd had to fend off, and it was not her fault she was young and pretty. (143)

The juxtaposition of violence and formality in the gothic passages parallels the juxtaposition of reality and fantasy in the autobiographical passages; the fantasy derives from the violence and formality of the gothic passages, calling our attention once again to the relationship of a literary convention — gothic romance — and life. Charlotte's choosing the weighty *Life of Johnson* as a weapon prefigures Joan's arming herself with and ultimately using the Cinzano bottle. The physical contact via hair recalls what Joan terms “my first sexual experience” (105), filled not with violence on the man's part and defensiveness on the woman's, but bland matter-of-factness expressed in common, everyday details like “mud puddle — it was April and had been raining” and “the knees of his pants dripping wet” made ludicrous by the romantic touch of his kneeling and the non-romantic image of Joan's “enormous stomach” (106). Rather than being angry and humiliated like Charlotte, Joan strokes his hair (reversing the action in the gothic) and unemotionally states, “My hand smelled of Brylcreem for days” (106), setting the scene as clearly in the ordinary world of North America in the 1950's as Boswell's *Life* — obviously not a paperback — sets Charlotte's scene in the romantic past in England. Charlotte's fending off importunate noblemen with designs on her virtue serves as a proleptic image of Joan's seduction by the Polish Count, which she describes as “not at all erotic. My ankle hurt, the pajamas turned me off, and he looked weird without his spectacles” (167). Unlike Charlotte, Joan is not frightened or hysterical, merely noting, “Also, it was painful” (167); the Count is “filled with remorse” (167) — formal, violently emotional words out of the gothic convention — but Joan merely puts her flannel gown back on, commenting “it was just as cold and damp in his flat as it had been in mine” (168).

The ironic parallels between the scene in the gothic and those in the autobiographical narrative serve to point up the relationships between Joan's fiction and Joan's “real” life, which again reminds us that Joan's “real” life is also a fiction, fabricated both by Joan — “This was the reason I fabricated my life, time after time: the truth was not convincing” (167) — and by Atwood. Atwood's motives in creating a character who writes a fictional autobiography which is itself fictionalized — as well as a book with the same title as the fiction

Atwood herself creates⁷ — would seem to be to create an opportunity to make us question the relationship of fiction and reality.

ATWOOD'S MOVING, then, in revising her manuscripts, from having Joan speak to her husband to having Joan speak to the reader changes the effect of the novel, making us aware of the conventionality of two popular modern literary conventions, calling on us to question these conventions, even as the presence of the gothic conventions within the novel evokes further questions about how the three modes of writing set up modes of perceiving reality which emphasize certain aspects of life while subordinating or repressing others. As Atwood put it in an interview, " 'I think in an anti-gothic what you're doing is examining the perils of gothic thinking' " (Struthers 23).

Leda Sprott does not appear in the early drafts or the first typed draft of *Lady Oracle*. The scene in Chapter 10 of the published novel (in which Joan visits the Spiritualist Chapel) has no counterpart in these drafts; the scene in Chapter 19 in which Joan and Arthur are married by Leda Sprott under her new identity as Eunice P. Revele appears in the first typed draft but with an oriental couple, Dr. and Mrs. Wang, presiding over the ceremony instead of Leda and her former medium, Mr. Stewart. The wedding scene with the Wangs reads simply as a parody of the romantic wedding girls are taught to dream of; details of the room and ceremony achieve humour, just as they do in the comparable scene in the published version of the novel, by their distance from the romantic ideal. The scene reveals something about the fictions women live by and their relationship to reality; however, with Leda Sprott as presiding minister of the wedding chapel, the scene takes on added dimensions that force us to consider the relation of fiction itself to reality.

Consider Leda's name. Joan introduces her with a pun: "the Reverend Leda Sprott, the leader" (116). She is, however, not merely a leader for Joan, introducing her to Automatic Writing (an idea absent from the early drafts); as a character with a name from Greek mythology, she is both a channel between spiritual beings and humans like her mythological predecessor and a reminder that a supposedly "real" person in Joan's "real" life is connected with one of the best known fictions in Western Culture; Leda is an especially interesting mythological character because while we may consider her encounter with the swan as fiction, the Trojan war was not fiction. In the wedding scene Leda Sprott's new name, E. P. Revele, French for "she discloses," sets up an additional reverberation about art and reality which is reinforced by details and persons Joan recognizes from the past and by Leda's sermon which focuses on the image of a diary,

a form of autobiography: “ ‘Avoid deception and falsehood; treat your lives as a diary you are writing that your loved one will someday read’ ” (227).

Leda Sprott, as a returning character from Joan's past, carries the potential of producing the *cognitio* or *anagnorisis* that Frye sees as central to the comic and tragic modes (163, 192): she could unmask villains and reveal heroines or produce in Joan a recognition of who she is and her relation to the universe. The coincidence of her reappearance under a different name is the sort of event critics find “unreal” in novels, and yet this coincidence occurs not in the fantasy level of Atwood's novel but in the supposedly real level. If Leda were to bring about the expected *cognitio* or *anagnorisis*, the scene would fit the conventional pattern of comedy and/or tragedy. Failing to do so, Leda marks for us where literary conventions and “real life” diverge,⁸ and yet in telling Joan to try Automatic Writing, Leda does become a sort of spiritual mother to Joan, enabling her to discover a latent part of herself later in the novel.

Leda Sprott is not only a spiritual mother for Joan, she is also like a novelist—like Joan and Atwood. In the scene in the Spiritualist Chapel Leda creates characters and gives voice to their speech:

“There's an old white-haired lady with light coming out from around her head, and she is saying, ‘Be careful going down stairs, especially on Thursday.’” (117)

Joan reacts to the ceremony as Coleridge describes reacting to literature: “I was willing to watch it all, with the same suspension of disbelief I granted to movies” (120). The Spiritualist, like the novelist, evokes people who are not present, making it seem as if they are, and brings messages from or through them. Thus Leda as Spiritualist leader also calls into question the relation between fiction and reality: is Leda's performance faked?

Because of the effects generated by her name, her reappearance and the expectations it fosters, and her art and the questions it necessitates, the overall effect of adding Leda Sprott to the novel is to heighten our consciousness of questions about the interrelationships of fantasy and reality, art and life.

At the linguistic level, Atwood's interest in counterpointing various conventional frameworks for describing reality is abundantly evident. The metamorphosis of the material in the first paragraph in the earliest handwritten manuscript into new contexts with new meaning in paragraphs 3, 8, 12, and 14 of the finished novel provides evidence of Atwood's re-envisioning to create a stronger emphasis on the relationship of reality to the worlds we imagine.

The initial paragraph reads as follows in the manuscript, with four marginal additions described below:

Every afternoon from two oclock [*sic*] to three I sit here on the balcony. It used to be from one to two, but that is the hour at which the old man who owns the land around this house and a granter of the land under the house comes to tend

his garden of artichokes, reaping the weeds with a tiny scythe, slicing off the ready heads. "Dey're jost tissles," Reno used to say in his New York accent. "Dey're jost big tissles." I was trying to get a tan then, and he would stare with his old-man eyes out from under his hat at my bare arms and shoulders. I've given it up now anyway.

Between the first two sentences an arrow pointing to the upper margin inserts more physical detail:

I sit in the middle; to my left is the area of broken glass, from a window that broke & has never been repaired; to right is a lizard, green with iridescent [*sic*] blue eyes, which will remain in the sun as long as I do not move.

An arrow from the left margin inserts before this:

It is not a romantic balcony; it is poured concrete, with a prosaic railing.

"Stare" is replaced by a margin note, "glare convertly." And finally a line from after "shoulders" to the left margin inserts twenty-three words, including three inserts:

his white eyes going in and out from the shadow on his face like a snake's tongue, his hands never stopping their motion.

Without the margin inserts, the paragraph is rather straightforward description; even with them it lacks the continual intermixing of realistic and romantic discourse that characterizes Joan's narrative voice as we know it in the finished novel.

The emphasis on repeating actions at the same time each day in the first two sentences of the initial draft, reinforced by three similar statements in the ensuing two paragraphs ("at three oclock [*sic*] I get up out of the chair," "I go inside and cry for three quarters [*sic*] of an hour," and "I take fifteen minutes to recover"), suggests the routine humdrum of Joan's everyday life in Terremoto. In contrast, the finished novel presents Joan's life transcending temporal and spatial limitations, and changes in the language and contexts of the particles of this original paragraph reveal how Atwood transcended concrete description to create a unique voice for Joan that would underscore considerations of the interrelationships of fantasy and reality. Paragraph two of the finished novel begins with a transformation of the initial sentence of the original opening paragraph: "The day after I arrived in Terremoto I was sitting outside on the balcony" (3). Coming after the paragraph on how Joan planned her death, the humdrum quality of everyday life takes on new meaning: because the speaker/actor is someone resurrected from the dead, the very normality of words and action becomes extraordinary. Joan's narration rushes from the facts into fantasy: "I had visions of myself as a Mediterranean splendor" (3), and back into the mundane reality of freckles and her lack of a swimsuit, producing a humorous effect on top of the miraculous, humdrum, and romantic effects of the passage.

Joan in this version is doing more than simply describing herself on a balcony; she is evoking a world for us through her own “idiosyncratic mode of regard” — to borrow Thomas Hardy’s phrase (225) — a mode that includes popular culture’s suntan commercials and jumbles together multiple conventional ways of describing reality.

The sentence describing the balcony as non-romantic in the initial version also appears in an altered form in the finished novel. Located ultimately in the middle of paragraph three, broken into two sentences and extended by a simile to contrast with and reinforce its context — Joan’s fantasy of romantic adventures possible on the right sort of balcony — this thought serves to enhance our sense of the romantic/realistic split in Joan’s mode of perception:

But this wasn’t a very romantic balcony. It had a geometric railing like those on middle-income apartment buildings of the fifties, and the floor was poured concrete, already beginning to erode. (4)

Adding “very” gives a new twist to the disclaimer, since “very” can either function as an intensifier or suggest that romance is possible if not likely here, foreshadowing all the romantic imaginings Joan will associate with this balcony in the ensuing chapters even as it implies that her fantasies are unlikely to be actual. The comparison to fifties apartment buildings heightens our awareness of the non-romantic aspects of this balcony and calls attention to the role of the past in shaping perceptions, reminding us early in the novel that we must be aware of how Joan’s past colours her perception of reality throughout her story. “Middle-income” hints at the role of social class in formulating a view of the world, significant later in understanding Joan’s perceptions of her mother, the Count, and Arthur. The detail of eroding concrete focuses on the reality of the balcony in contrast with the romantic images in the next sentence of a man “playing a lute and yearning” or “bearing a rose in his teeth or a stiletto in his sleeve” (4).

The details about the broken glass and the lizard in the initial version of paragraph one similarly, in being revised and placed in paragraph eight of the final version, undergo a metamorphosis that makes them more than sheer realistic visual details. The initial “area of broken glass” has become “a puddle of glass fragments” that “shimmered like water” (6). The mundane word “puddle” counterpoints the romantically connotative “shimmered,” while both are joined by the “water” comparison. The “iridescent blue eyes” of the lizard becomes more than a visual detail when Atwood sets the animal as Joan’s fellow sunbather (“it warmed its cool blood on the railing”), compelling us to contrast its eyes with Joan’s, which have just been described as crying, turning “the color and shape of cooked tomatoes” (6). Again Atwood’s final version compels consideration of romantic beauty in juxtaposition with unromantic reality.

The artichoke cutter who “glares covertly” at sunbathing Joan in the initial version of paragraph one slices off “the ready heads” of “weeds,” a natural

occupation. His New York accent and the details about his owning and granting the land make him seem ordinary although his eyes, moving “like a snake’s tongue,” seem slightly sinister. His reappearance in paragraph twelve of the finished novel is much more sinister, much more an outgrowth of Joan’s gothic imagination:

There, at the level of my ankles and only three feet away, floated a head, an old man’s head, topped by a ravelling straw hat. The whitish eyes stared at me with either alarm or disapproval. (8)

Unlike the details about land ownership in the initial conception, the details locating him spatially and describing his hat show Joan’s realistic mode of regard, while the floating head counterpoints it with an element from her romantic mode of perception. He is both normal and sinister; the suggestion of alternative interpretations of his stare heightens the dualistic mode of thinking, presaging her innumerable double impressions of men later in the novel.

The conversation with the old man moves us out of Joan’s dualistic mode of perception. In the final version Atwood lets Joan, rather than the old man, speak:

I’d recognized the old man. It was the same old man who used to come one or two afternoons a week to tend the artichokes on the arid terrace below the house, cutting the larger weeds with a pair of rusty shears and snipping off the leathery artichoke heads when they were ready. Unlike the other people in the town, he never said anything to me or returned a word of greeting. He gave me the creeps. (8)

The recognition and use of the words “same” and “used to” emphasize the multiple temporal perspective of Joan’s voice, reminding us to question her perceptions. Once again the gothic vision is added to the final version with the word “creeps” although at the same time, as a slang word, it evokes Joan’s everyday modern world.

W

HAT BEGAN, THEN, as a fairly straightforward descriptive paragraph with some local colour became ultimately a series of distinct particles spaced throughout chapter one, metamorphosed and juxtaposed so as to heighten our perception of Joan’s multiple perspective in such a way as to work together with other elements in the novel to keep us asking questions about the relationship of the world we live in and the worlds we imagine.

Atwood’s changing the audience Joan speaks to, introducing the character of Leda Sprott, and reworking the first paragraph of the initial manuscript all have the effect of making us aware of questions about the relationships between art and life, fantasy and reality. The effect is not precisely the blurring of distinctions

between life and art that Godard posits (23), for we are aware that Joan's "real" life is Atwood's fiction.⁹ Nor is the effect of the novel exactly that of what Brown defines as "metafiction — that self-reflexive mode that calls attention to its own fictive nature and thus to its own surfaces" (40), for *Lady Oracle* makes us conscious of fictions, including itself, as modes of perceiving, each having inherent limitations as ways of describing reality. Ultimately the unifying principle of *Lady Oracle* is not "What is fiction?" but "What is reality — and how is it shaped by our fictions?"

NOTES

¹ Compare the published version: "The trouble was that I wanted to maintain his illusions for him intact, and it was easy to do, all it needed was a little restraint: I simply never told him anything important" (36-37).

Permission to quote from Atwood's manuscripts has been granted by Phoebe Larmore, agent for Margaret Atwood, 16 December 1985.

² Pecker suggests that it is the reporter, not Joan, speaking (194); he apparently hears the typical celebrity autobiography "as told to. . . ."

³ Rule says *Lady Oracle* examines the "motive and craft of fiction" (49).

⁴ Davey notes that although Joan does not escape once again at the end, she may be staying to act out a fantasy from one of Paul's nurse novels (75). Pecker says she multiplies personalities rather than unifying them at the end (177). Godard feels Joan finds herself when she accepts the multiplicity of her being (16, 21). Grace doubts that Joan has progressed at the end (117). Atwood herself says Joan develops "¾ of an inch" (Struthers 25).

⁵ As Pecker notes, Atwood's novels parody search for identity novels (192).

⁶ Grace says that the novel satirizes both gothic and realist conventions; *Stalked by Love* becomes a parody of Joan's life and Joan's life a parody of the gothic (124-25). Grace's theory that "violent duality" is characteristic of Atwood's work influences my comparison in this paragraph as well as my discussion of details in the opening paragraph of the manuscript later.

⁷ Rosenberg notes Atwood "uses patterns of experience closely derived from her own life" but writes neither an autobiography (96) nor a *roman à clef* (111).

⁸ Hutcheon describes *Lady Oracle* as a novel

in which the novelist heroine reconciles the process/product or life/art opposition, first by her dual identity as Joan Foster/Delacourt, and then, by increasing merging of her fantasy world and her lived world experience. (21).

The climactic scene, however, in which the mysterious stalker (from *Stalked by Love*) reaches Joan in Terremoto does not indicate art and life merging but their failure to merge. Joan's using the Cinzano bottle against the reporter, while foreshadowed in the scene discussed from *Stalked by Love*, diverges from the typical gothic plot: Charlottes are eternal victims until rescued by a strong male; Joan rescues herself. Pecker's comment offers a more accurate assessment:

The disruption of traditional romance structures provides an implicit comment on the contemporary impossibility of ever finding the final sense of identity and completion or the ultimate vision of happiness which, as Joan well realizes, is usually offered by romance. (201)

- ⁹ Cude, for example, acknowledges that he hears Atwood speaking as Joan speaks: "‘Because my narrator cannot get the lesson,’ Atwood in effect addresses us: ‘you, my readers, must’" (154).

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FIELD

M. Travis Lane

Field:
is the detail of the field,
and the relations of the field
to fields — to fields
composing planes
 that deliquesce
in decomposing, battered ferns
crisping like drying seaweed, foam,
no — fluff. Like seedheads, or like feather puffs,
like dry mists hanging in the bush,
snagged wool.

That valley into that
long gully where the stream comes out;
you have a map for what it was,
a farm —
where we found those rusted pails,
containers for the things contained,
their bottoms gone.

The road
is colour of old brick, its ruts
popping with frogs.
They spatter into grass.
Bear tracks, dog, deer, moose, human —
nothing's here
but last week's newsprint,
invalid

and the chartreuse, purring, insect,
the machine
that so delicately picks,
as if with mandarin nails, its coarse
fistfuls of logs.
It changes everything, the field
made plain.

but raspberries creep into it,
small spruce.
They recompose.

LONDON, CERTAINLY

Colin Morton

why don't you listen	I'm trying to tell you	
	certainly	certainly
why don't you listen	I'm trying to tell you	
	certainly	certainly
LOOK LEFT	LOOK RIGHT	
	GIVE WAY	WAY OUT
why don't you tell me	I'm trying to listen	
	STAND CLEAR OF THE DOORS	
why don't you tell me	I'm trying to listen	
	X X X X	
		GIVE WAY
why don't you listen	c	WAY OUT
	e	I'm trying to tell you
	r	LOOK RIGHT
why don't you listen	t	I'm trying to tell you
	a	LOOK LEFT
why don't you listen	i	I'm trying to tell you
	n	
why don't you listen	l	I'm trying to tell you
	y	
	X X X X	
why don't you tell me	EVERYBODY	I'm trying to listen
	NEEDS	
why don't you tell me	STANDARDS	I'm trying to listen
	STAND CLEAR OF THE DOORS	
		To let to be let
		To let to be let
why don't you listen	c	I'm trying to tell you
	e	
	r	X
why don't you listen	t	I'm trying to tell you
	a	X
why don't you listen	i	I'm trying to tell you
	n	X
why don't you listen	l	I'm trying to tell you
	y	
		NOW WASH YOUR HANDS

AUDITORY CAMOUFLAGE

Colin Morton

that cow you just heard is
meaowing in a tree

a stampede of elephants
preens its feathers

you have sighted the liarbird
so named for its tail
which looks like a lyre
and because its call is

crickets
thunder

balalaikas

drops of water

CLING

John V. Hicks

How the pages cling
in winter;

how earth's small charges
clasp hands

ion with ion
in dry air,

cling under influence
of atmospheric,

wish to be one
in the charged hours.

Open our book of days
in yellow light;

love me as in winter
when the pages cling.

THE RE/MEMBERING OF THE FEMALE POWER IN "LADY ORACLE"

Roberta Sciff-Zamaro

THE MAIN THEME OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S *Lady Oracle* is represented by the quest the main character is engaged in, to find her real hidden self out of a split identity. Such a quest, which can be seen as a journey through different stages of self-consciousness, is epitomized by the archetype of the Great Mother, or White Goddess, which recurs throughout the novel and which represents its mythological dimension.

As Robert Graves remarks in his *The White Goddess*, around 1900 B.C. Greece was invaded by the Achaeans; at first their society was a strictly patriarchal one, but later on it interwove with a semi-matriarchal one:

The first Greeks to invade Greece were the Achaeans who broke into Thessaly about 1900 B.C.; they were patriarchal herdsmen and worshipped an Indo-European male trinity of gods. . . . Little by little they conquered the whole of Greece and tried to destroy the semi-matriarchal Bronze Age civilization that they found there, but later compromised with it, accepted matrilinear succession and enrolled themselves as sons of the variously named Great Goddess.¹

The Great Goddess appears to have been worshipped, under different names and different forms, by several civilizations, from the Greeks to various societies of North Africa and Asia Minor and, eventually, to the Romans. Graves gives her the appellation of White Goddess because of her prominent colour, "the colour of the first member of her moon-trinity";² in her cycle she undergoes a series of metamorphoses which correspond to the three phases of the moon: "the New Moon is the white goddess of birth and growth; the Full Moon, the red goddess of love and battle; the Old Moon, the black goddess of death and divination."³ Originally, the Great Goddess was the only power to be worshipped in Europe since there was no male god ruling with her. She had, however, a lover who was represented by the dichotomy Serpent/Star-Son. The former, the Serpent of Wisdom, was in a sense the father of the latter, the Star of Life. But the Son, in due course, would become the Goddess's lover and eventually would kill his father, which established a cycle of birth-growth-death-regeneration:

The Son . . . was reborn every year, grew up as the year advanced, destroyed the Serpent and won the Goddess's love. Her love destroyed him, but from his ashes was born another Serpent which, at Easter, laid the *glain* or red egg which she ate; so that the Son was reborn to her as a child once more.⁴

After a while, however, a change took place, since from the East was brought into the European countries the new institution of monogamy. Up to that moment, in these societies the role of the father had been unimportant; the marriages were characterized by group-unions of women belonging to one society with men belonging to another. Thus the mother was the only parent who could be established without any doubt. As again Graves points out:

Once this revolution had occurred, the social status of women altered: man took over many of the sacred practices from which his sex had debarred him, and finally declared himself head of the household, though much property still passed from mother to daughter.⁵

Thus the Great Goddess became of secondary importance since her status was reduced to consort of the Father-God. Later on, in "later Judaism, Judaic Christianity, Mohammedanism and Protestant Christianity,"⁶ the Goddess's worship disappeared completely to give way to an entirely patriarchal society.

If we read *Lady Oracle* keeping in mind its mythological dimension, we will realize that it represents a journey into the past from which its author wishes to bring back a society where the woman's authority was acknowledged and her role respected. In her article "My (m)Other, My Self" Barbara Godard notes:

Atwood . . . take[s] the quest motif from men's writing (a quest for the Holy Grail) and drape[s] it in the garments of the Great Mother. In [her] novels, the discovery of the self comes not from a movement towards unity of being, but, rather from a recognition of the lost tradition of the goddess, triple in nature. . . .⁷

At the opening of *Lady Oracle* its heroine, Joan Foster, is in a small village in Southern Italy where she has decided to retire to create her new self. Her quest for a new identity has already reached its climax before the actual beginning of the narrative; when the novel starts Joan is in fact trying to build her new identity after having apparently let her former self drown in Lake Ontario. Joan's two selves represent the first dichotomy in the novel: two selves which, as a matter of fact, will appear to be more than two. Referring to the clothes she was wearing when she threw herself into the water, she describes them as "jeans and navy-blue T-shirt, my funerary costume, my former self, damp and collapsed, from which the many-coloured souls had flown."⁸ The colour of her clothes recalls that of the third member of the Triple Goddess, the black goddess of death. The black goddess is destroyed, "buried" in the depths of the lake, but from her a new deity rises again. The goddess rising from the waters is Aphrodite, the red goddess of love and battle, and second member of the trinity, symbolized by Joan's waist-length red hair. As Graves points out, "Aphrodite . . . can

be identified with the Moon-goddess Eurynome . . . ,”⁹ thus we have here reunited all the three members of the Great Goddess. As the novel proceeds, we become acquainted with Joan’s “many-coloured souls.” The first one is represented by Joan when young, the fat Joan who has spent her whole infancy and adolescence prisoner of her own grotesque body which, eventually, she has decided to get rid of. It appears that she has never had a complete and realistic perception of her body till the moment she takes this decision. Joan is aware of her fatness but at the same time she overcomes it since she is totally projected toward the “thin girl” entrapped in the monstrous body. When, at last, she will resolve to lose weight and her grotesque body will become a normal one, her perception of it will still be a distorted one. Once thin, she is still haunted by her other self from which, as Joan herself states, she is unable to free her mind: “when I looked at myself in the mirror, I didn’t see what Arthur saw. The outline of my former body still surrounded me, like a mist, like a phantom moon, like the image of Dumbo the Flying Elephant superimposed on my own” (*LO*, 216). Thus Joan has always had a double identity: she has been an imaginary thin girl when she was actually fat, and she is an imaginary fat woman while actually thin. Yet, her double identity does not exhaust itself here, since Joan is constantly confronted with an endless reflection of infinite images of herself which multiply in the distance; “I was more than double, I was triple, multiple, and now I could see that there was more than one life to come, there were many” (*LO*, 247). She is in fact also Louisa Delacourt, writer of Costume Gothics and unknown counterpart of Joan Foster, Arthur’s wife and celebrated author of *Lady Oracle*. Moreover, even the Joan-narrator of the story defines herself as different from the Joan Foster-writer; “it was as if someone with my name were out there in the real world, impersonating me, saying things I’d never said but which appeared in the newspapers, doing things for which I had to take the consequences: my dark twin, my funhouse-mirror reflection” (*LO*, 252).

THROUGHOUT HER SEARCH for her real self, Joan is always haunted by the figure of her mother who is portrayed as a real tyrant during Joan’s childhood, and as a phantom haunting her mind during her maturity. Joan has already freed herself once from her mother’s influence by getting rid of her fatness and by plunging herself into a new life apart from her mother. However, even though she has been able to free herself in a physical sense, her mother has become an obsession for her, another reflection of herself, or better, a projection of Joan’s fear of becoming a reflection of her own mother. What Joan does not yet realize, at this stage, is the fact that she cannot reject the figure of her mother since she is actually part of her. This very fact brings us back to the

archetype of the Great Mother. When the Goddess lost the great part of her power and became the Father-God's consort, the daughters she had from him were "limited versions of herself — herself in various young-moon and full-moon aspects."¹⁰ Joan does, however, realize the connection at an unconscious level, since in her dreams her mother appears as having three heads; "In the dream, I suddenly realized that instead of three reflections she had three actual heads, which rose from her toweled shoulders on three separate necks. This didn't frighten me, as it seemed merely a confirmation of something I'd always known . . ." (*LO*, 63-64). At this stage Joan, still a child, is not afraid of her three-headed mother's apparition since, being still endowed with that instinct that only children have, she perceives in it something natural. And what else could that be if not the Great Mother who, at the beginning, was the main and the only principle of the world? But as Joan grows older, she begins to consider the dream of her mother as monstrous, probably because she does not have the intuition of the triple nature of the Mother represented in the dream but, instead, is overwhelmed by the third member of the trinity, the black goddess, who becomes a negative power if separated from the other two. Margaret Atwood herself is well aware of the three-fold nature of woman. In *Survival*, referring to the three mythological categories of identities into which women are divided, she comments that:

First comes the elusive Diana or Maiden figure, the young girl; next the Venus figure, goddess of love, sex and fertility; then the Hecate figure, goddess of the underworld, who presides over death and has oracular powers. In Robert Graves' mythology, . . . the three phases together constitute the Triple Goddess, who is the Muse, the inspirer of poetry; she is also Nature, a goddess of cycles and seasons. Hecate, the most forbidding of the three, is only one phase of a cycle; she is not sinister when viewed as part of a process. . . .¹¹

In *Lady Oracle* all the three phases are present, but the first two, Diana and Venus, the white and the red goddesses, are trapped inside the black goddess. The Diana figure, represented by Joan's infancy and adolescence, is shown as prisoner of Hecate by the symbol of the monstrously fat body imprisoning the "thin girl." From the Hecate phase, Joan will eventually free herself, thus giving life to her Venus phase, Venus seen as capable of love, both maternal and sexual. The beginning of her Venus phase is symbolized by her encounter and her following relationship with the Polish Count. With him Joan has her first sexual experience, and she is even seen by him as a goddess; "'You have the body of a goddess,' the Polish Count used to say, in moments of contemplative passion" (*LO*, 141). These comments are followed by Joan's ironic speculations about which goddess he meant; she is unable to accept her Venus phase since she is still victim of the Hecate figure. Even though her body has been freed from Hecate, her mind is still imprisoned, and she has a perception of this fact during her

experiments of automatic writing. The words she collects during these experiments appear to be:

all centered around the same figure, the same woman. After a while I could almost see her: she lived under the earth somewhere, or inside something, a cave or a huge building; sometimes she was on a boat. She was enormously powerful, almost like a goddess, but it was an unhappy power. This woman puzzled me. She wasn't like anyone I'd ever imagined, and certainly she had nothing to do with me. (*LO*, 224)

It will not be till she is in Terremoto that Joan will realize who this woman is: namely her mother and, at the same time, a reflection, a part of herself. The woman appears powerful, almost like a goddess, like the goddess Hecate who lives under the earth somewhere being the goddess of the underworld; who at the same time lives inside a huge building, Joan's former huge body; who has oracular powers, Lady Oracle herself; and who is an unhappy power because not yet in harmony with the other two goddesses, Diana and Venus.

The above quoted passage introduces the image of the cave which is recurrent in *Lady Oracle*. As underlined in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, "in patriarchal culture, the woman's cave-shaped anatomy is her destiny. . . . Destroyed by traditional female activities . . . women . . . are buried in (and by) patriarchal definitions of their sexuality."¹² At the same time, every woman can "have metaphorical access to the dark knowledge buried in caves."¹³ The knowledge buried in the cave, which is a place belonging to women, was once conveyed by the Sibyl, the prophetess who inscribed her "divine intuitions on tender leaves and fragments of delicate bark."¹⁴ But as Gilbert and Gubar notice in their comment on Mary Shelley's story of a cave (in "Author's introduction" to *The Last Man*),¹⁵ the "truths" inscribed on the leaves are now difficult to interpret since the leaves are shattered so that their meaning is confused. The cave symbolizes the mind where the woman has to descend to recover her own past, a past in which women's power was recognized; she has, in a sense, to recover the myth of the Great Mother. This is, however, a hard task, since women in general, and women-artists in particular, seem to be prisoners of a patriarchal tradition which prevents them from expressing themselves, from creating. As Margaret Atwood remarks in *Survival*, in Canada the heroines of many feminist novels (heroines who are projections of their own authors) have internalized the values of their cultures to such an extent that they have become their own prisons. In Joan's case, even symbolic death is not able to free the heroine from her phantoms; she is still imprisoned, and the ghost of her mother, which is a reflection of her former self, will continue to haunt her even in Terremoto. A glass seems to be always between herself, the world she has built around her, and real life, but eventually she will realize that she has to go through that glass to get rid of her phantoms, of her mother:

She was smiling at me now; with her smudged face, could she see I loved her? I loved her but the glass was between us, I would have to go through it. . . . She'd never really let go of me because I had never let her go. It had been she standing behind me in the mirror, she was the one who was waiting around each turn, her voice whispered the words. . . . How could I renounce her? She needed her freedom also; she had been my reflection too long. . . . Why did I have to dream about my mother, have nightmares about her, sleepwalk out to meet her? My mother was a vortex, a dark vacuum, I would never be able to make her happy. Or anyone else. Maybe it was time for me to stop trying. (*LO*, 330-31)

Joan has to go through the glass to come to terms with her real self. At last she realizes that only trying to accept her real essence, only stopping to try to get rid of her mother and of her past and accepting them under their proper light, she will be able, perhaps, to find an equilibrium. Her mother, who is a projection of Joan herself, will continue to be a monster until Joan will be able not to destroy her, but rather to free her mother from her own intimate nature, which can be achieved only by accepting also this side of her personality. In accepting her mother, she is able both to revive the myth of the Great Mother and to find a unity in multiplicity.

To free herself, Joan has to descend to the Sibyl's cave which is symbolized by Joan's entering the maze of her own mind through the experiments of automatic writing. What she ends up with are only scattered words with no meaning, like the Sibyl's leaves, and she has to try to give a sense to them. As we have already noticed, the message these words convey seems to lead always to the same figure, a woman, a mother, a goddess. The scattered words represent the shattering of female power, and in particular of woman-writers; only through a long and hard work of interpretation and revision will their meaning become clear and the original power recovered. We could comment on Joan's attempt to interpret the message of her automatic writing experiments by referring to Gilbert & Gubar's comment on Christina G. Rossetti's poem "Mother Country":

The attempt of reconstructing the Sibyl's leaves . . . haunts us with the possibility that if we can piece together their fragments the parts will form a whole that tells the story of the career of a single woman artist, a "mother of us all," . . . a woman whom patriarchal poetics dismembered and whom we have tried to remember.¹⁶

Entering her mind, Joan will recover her past, but this very recovery opens the possibility of artistic creation for women-artists since, again in Gilbert & Gubar's words, "the cave is not just the place from which the past is retrieved but the place where the future is conceived, the 'earthen womb' . . . from which the new land rises."¹⁷ In *Lady Oracle* Joan's imprisonment clearly symbolizes also the feminist writer's imprisonment in canons dictated by a society in which art has always been the domain of men, and her quest for a new self represents the

woman-writer's quest for a new identity as an artist, an identity freed from the traditional stereotypes imposed by a patriarchal culture.

The novel is, however, open-ended. In fact it is not certain whether its heroine will avail herself of the knowledge she has achieved during her quest: namely that in order to find her true self she has to accept her multiplicity. Or whether she will just slip into another identity, again entirely separated from the former ones, without thus achieving that unity of self which arises from a multiplicity in which every version of the self is only a "phase" of a cycle.

NOTES

- ¹ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1966), p. 62.
- ² Graves, p. 70.
- ³ Graves, p. 70.
- ⁴ Graves, pp. 388-89.
- ⁵ Graves, p. 389.
- ⁶ Graves, p. 389.
- ⁷ Barbara Godard, "My (m)Other, My Self: Strategies for Subversion in Atwood and Hébert," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, No. 26 (1983), p. 24.
- ⁸ Margaret Atwood, *Lady Oracle* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), p. 16. All further references to this work will appear in the text.
- ⁹ Graves, p. 395.
- ¹⁰ Graves, p. 389.
- ¹¹ Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 199.
- ¹² Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 94.
- ¹³ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 95.
- ¹⁴ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 96.
- ¹⁵ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 95.
- ¹⁶ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 101.
- ¹⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, p. 102.



OLD WOMEN AND LOVE

Kay Smith

Dreaming
no end to it

Yeats should have discovered Byzantium
as no country for old women
yet they refuse to die
they clutter up the earth
the blood of old women continues to cry out
to sing even to dance wildly in the veins
Sometimes the blood of an old woman rustles
like a startled bird when love's stealthy step
cracks the dry undergrowth in the frosty air
as if a firecracker were exploding

It seems that love is a hunter of indiscriminating taste
Women old enough to know better — though God is never old
enough —
dream deeper and deeper into the wood
like the misty-eyed girls they once were
Suddenly one will stop astounded as the trap
love has set closes its steel jaws on a foot of frail bones.

This morning very early in this silent house of sleepers
when my eyes opened from the mercy of my own darkness
the world came at me like a blow
Its beauty burned gold in every resurrected leaf
burned with a still flame Spring never relents
What was I doing here? What was I doing here?
Behind the house the trees slept paired in their cool shadows

At night an old woman on her narrow bed
probing the dark with a stubborn mind
demanding answers she knows she will not find
tends with a fierce joy the unextinguished embers
of a not so temperate love

L'ESTHÉTIQUE DE "JOLIS DEUILS"

Cécile Cloutier

ESSAYER D'ÉCRIRE l'esthétique de "Jolis deuils," c'est partir, à pleines voiles, vers les autres et vers soi, vers l'aventure d'une sensibilité bonneheureuse. Évidemment, ce texte ne présente que quelques aspects de ce beau voyage, tentant d'expliquer un tantinet, au sens étymologique, des réalités esthétiques comme l'imagination créatrice, le merveilleux, le rôle de l'archétype, la sociologie artistique de même que la québécoité, la fête, la sagesse et la poésie.

Tout d'abord, en quoi consiste l'imagination dans la création du conte? Il semble que, lorsque l'on imagine d'une façon artistique, c'est-à-dire que l'on crée des fictions imaginées qui prennent plus ou moins à nos yeux la place des choses, il ne s'agisse pas simplement d'avoir des images, mais aussi d'en donner dans un but d'enchantement esthétique ou de fabulation symbolique. Par imagination créatrice, on entend tout d'abord la faculté de créer des images ne correspondant rigoureusement à aucun objet donné dans l'expérience. Il s'agit de les combiner en successions pour imiter les faits de la nature qui ne représentent rien de réel, par exemple, dans la rêverie ou, ici, dans le conte. L'imagination créatrice va donc mettre ensemble toutes sortes de données et alors on parlera d'invention. L'imagination ne crée évidemment pas, au sens biblique, de faire de rien. Les éléments qui entrent dans sa construction lui sont donnés mais elle les transforme, en fait une forme nouvelle. Les esthéticiens parlent alors d'imagination novatrice, de pensée intuitive ou d'intuition imaginative. Il semble donc qu'il y ait deux temps dans le travail de l'imagination créatrice: d'abord, une analyse allant du complexe des données de l'expérience passée, à ses éléments et ensuite une synthèse de ces éléments pour produire un ensemble nouveau et aboutir, dans le cas qui nous occupe, à un imaginaire littéraire qui passe par la rêverie lorsqu'il s'agit d'écrire un "joli deuil." Celle-ci pourrait alors se définir comme un état psychologique esthétique dans lequel la pensée se déroule spontanément sans que nous en fassions la critique ou que nous cherchions à en modifier le cours. Il s'agit d'un état dans lequel peuvent se succéder des constructions multiples. Notons que la spontanéité de la pensée, durant la rêverie, n'implique pas une totale indépendance à l'égard des expériences antérieures, ni de sa civilisation, ni de sa culture. D'ailleurs, l'invention, au sens étymologique, du latin *invenire*

qui signifie trouver, rencontrer, est la découverte d'une chose cachée. Aujourd'hui, la sémantique de ce mot a évolué et inventer signifie créer une chose qui n'existait pas, alors qu'on découvre ce qui existe.

Cet article essaie donc, dans le cas précis de "Jolis deuils," d'analyser sommairement quelques — uns des aspects de l'imagination créatrice. D'ailleurs, Roch Carrier nous précise lui-même à la fin de son conte intitulé "La Robe" les limites de cet imaginaire: "Cela, jamais, on aurait pu l'imaginer." C'est pourtant cet imaginé qui aboutit presque naturellement à l'imaginaire du merveilleux où le conteur apparaît comme celui qui raconte une fable. En un sens, l'écriture est un beau mensonge où les êtres font parfois des choses qui les dépassent. Dans "Jolis deuils," le merveilleux joue un rôle immense. Il vient très souvent de la métamorphose, tant d'êtres étant à la fois eux et autres, là où l'extraordinaire est ordinaire et où la magie intervient quotidiennement. Il s'agit de "beautifiser" le réel, de dire grand et beau.

L'oiseau apparaît alors comme le symbole par excellence. Dans le conte intitulé "La jeune fille," la tête du gendarme devient un oiseau qui se met à chanter perché sur la guillotine. Dans "Le destin," l'oiseau vient jeter sa fiente sur son propre monument, condamnant ainsi la représentation. Dans "L'oiseau," c'est hirondelle qui apporte ce froid apocalyptique qui détruira tout.

Car l'intervention des éléments apparaît comme particulièrement merveilleuse. Retenons l'eau, la neige et justement le froid dont l'envahissement spatial, dans des circonstances différentes, rappelle, "L'enfant de la haute mer" de Supervielle au "Malicroix" d'Henri Bosco. En un sens, il s'agit d'un cadavre d'Amédée revu et corrigé. Les éléments abolissent toute la réalité. Ils sacrifient et sacralisent. Ils purifient et consacrent. Ils ramènent la réalité au primordial. Ils unifient le monde. Et l'encre, cet élément premier de l'écriture, joue le même rôle. Elle accomplit la cérémonie du dire dans une prolifération de déluge.

Des réalités abstraites, comme le travail ou la science, sont aussi pénétrées de merveilleux. Ainsi, l'ouvrier de Monsieur Black use ses quatre membres jusqu'au moignon, à force de frotter la plaque sur laquelle on peut lire "The Scott Black Company Limited." De même, Ouke, qui cherche sa voix à cinquante-sept ans, cause toujours avec des savants "cynocéphales marqués par la consommation, l'inertie, l'anémie, le rachitisme, la chlorose, l'atreplie, l'étiologie ou l'asthénie et atteint le merveilleux par l'amour. Le thème de la jeune fille contribue encore au merveilleux, celle-ci devenant lumière ou fumée ou bien passant à travers une vitre, "comme on plonge dans l'eau claire," pour enfiler une robe de mariée.

De même, l'orgueil des humains prend des proportions merveilleuses, par exemple lorsque l'empereur veut s'édifier une statue qui sera plus grande qu'une montagne ou lorsque le narrateur du conte, ne s'aperçoit pas qu'il vieillit ou quand celui de "La fin" ne se rend pas compte qu'il est mort.

Notons encore ce personnage tyrannique du réveil-matin qui accomplit ses petits travaux d'Hercule en réveillant le jour et la nuit, à moins qu'on ne le comble de cadeaux. Il est à sa manière un géant de l'imaginaire.

Mais celui-ci se dévoile encore sous de nombreux archétypes mi-réels, mi-irréels. Ces types, qui tiennent de l'idéal, servent de modèles et reviennent dans plusieurs manifestations artistiques de notre civilisation.

Il y a tout d'abord le juge, dans le conte intitulé "La Tête," ce personnage qui porte la tête de monsieur Cro oubliée au vestiaire un soir de première et que celui-ci retrouve sur celui qui doit le juger. C'est délicieusement freudien, cornélien et chrétien. La tête, la raison doit juger les actes du coeur et des mains et on se croirait dans l'un nos vénérables collègues classiques en train d'écrire une dissertation. Peut-être que l'on n'avait jamais imaginé un juge autant autre et même. C'est la conscience individuelle et collective et aussi le jugement et la punition. Il s'agit de la grande culpabilité universelle dont chaque petite crime individuel, tout pénétré de névrose, n'est qu'une émergence.

Dans "La jeune fille," "Histoire d'amour" et "La robe," le personnage de jeune fille se fait respectivement lumière, fumée et nuage. Dans les trois cas, celle-ci retourne à l'air, à l'élémentaire. Elle devient évanescence et ainsi la vierge ne peut plus être touchée. Elle a aussi tendance à toujours monter, à vivre des sortes d'assomptions qui sont des morts fabuleuses. Il y a, bien sûr, des restes de romantisme dans cette imagerie mais peut-être, avant tout, l'immense besoin de purification de la race humaine. Car la jeune fille, surtout celle du dernier conte, qui signe d'une tache de sang, la robe de mariée tellement convoitée, est une victime et dans ce sacrifice, on célèbre peut-être déjà le mystère de la naissance.

Un autre personnage très émouvant et très universel est celui de Dieu, que Roch Carrier représente avec une longue barbe blanche, comme dans le catéchisme en images de notre enfance, où il apparaissait toujours comme un vieillard, un monothéisme chrétien macho ayant évacué les déesses de la religion. Ce Dieu, c'est celui qui fait des explosions à faire frémir la théorie de l'évolution de Teilhard de Chardin. Selon lui, c'est ainsi que la terre est née. Il agit donc selon les doctrines de la souffrance et de la grâce. Il détruit pour construire et nous revenons à la théorie de la privation de la philosophie scolastique.

Un autre archétype attachant est celui de l'empereur que l'on trouve dans "Le destin." Évidemment, dans notre inconscient collectif d'occidental, s'accrochent à ce personnage des réminiscences d'Andersen. Cet empereur rêve d'une statue énorme qui est un miroir, un reflet de ce Narcisse qui existe en chacun de nous.

Enfin, il y a dans le conte intitulé "La science" cet être merveilleux qui s'appelle tout simplement la femme, alors que ce pauvre Ouke tente vainement de pénétrer le mystère, en ouvrant les 3333 portes de la science et en causant avec des mots cynocéphales.

MAIS LES CONTES DE ROCH CARRIER nous présentent aussi une sociologie artistique de même qu'une façon québécoise de parler de la beauté du monde et une esthétique de la fête, de la sagesse et de la poésie. La société se divise ici en gros et en petits qui ne sont pas gros bien qu'ils soient souvent grands. Nous retrouvons l'image d'autorité qui s'incarne dans des personnages comme Dieu, le juge, le président général, le policier, voir le pompier. Ils sont souvent caricaturaux et théâtraux.

Certains contes nous peignent des situations plus sociales comme le téléphone où Ug, le téléphoniste vit la situation absurde de répondre toute sa vie "Monsieur le Président général est absent, il est en voyage d'affaires aux Îles Canaries." Il lui faut attendre de devenir fantôme pour visiter enfin ces îles mythologiques.

De même, dans "Magie noire," nous vivons le racisme d'une façon presque biologique, puisque, à la suite du refus de Syphur, le patron de l'hôtel, d'accepter des voyageurs de couleurs, nous voyons à la fois, les clients, les employés et Syphus lui-même devenir noirs. Le métamorphose entre ici dans l'esthétique sociologique.

Ainsi, dans "le Métro," cette illusion de l'éternelle jeunesse relève de la sociologie faustienne. Il s'agit en quelque sorte de la recherche magique d'une pierre philosophale propre à reculer le temps.

Quant au dompteur de lion, il répond à ce désir très profond de puissance inscrit au fond de chacun de nous. Qui n'a pas rêvé de renverser le réel? Qui ne sent pas au fond de lui ce joyeux besoin d'être le dompteur qui mange le lion?

Mais, c'est peut-être dans "l'âge d'or" que notre La Fontaine québécois se surpasse. Il poursuit ici son goût de l'inversion dans le sens grammatical, alors que le mendiant comblé d'or nous dit: "Faites-moi la charité d'accepter un peu d'or?"

Quant au dernier conte, il exalte un personnage d'étranger dont la langue, la couleur de la peau, la démarche et la douceur ne sont pas d'ici. Cet être mythologique pour qui la ville est un grand "mots-croisés" se perdra dans l'hic et nunc lorsqu'on lui confiera le tâche de balayer la ville. Il finira par tout détruire avec son balai de mythologie sans arriver au pain promis comme récompense de son travail. C'est le pain sûr et amer de la Squine qui prépare le geste du Père Didace qui savait couper le pain.

Il semble donc que Roch Carrier ait souligné des émergences de notre société et que le conte carriéresque ait intégré, dans son esthétique, de grands pans de notre vécu ensemble. Car cette réalité universelle est d'abord faite de cas de la réalité québécoise. Évidemment, nous sommes rigoureusement et paresseusement semblables aux autres, mais, comme tous les peuples, nous avons mis l'accent sur certains aspects qui nous expriment peut-être davantage et que nous retrouvons

dans “Jolis deuils,” comme le goût du conte, de l’histoire d’amour ou de l’or et des thèmes aussi disparates que le téléphone, la neige, l’oiseau or la pomme.

Tout d’abord, bien avant d’être des écrivains, nous avons été des conteurs. Chaque village et chaque enfance d’ancêtre eut les siens. Ma génération n’a pas eu à connaître bien longtemps ses grands-pères ou Félix-Antoine Savard, ou Marius Barbeau ou Luc Lacourcière, pour comprendre jusqu’à quel point, nous, déjà enfants des villes, nous vivions de cet héritage qui constitua bien souvent la seule forme de littérature vécue pas nos aïeux. C’est aussi l’explication de cette extraordinaire cote d’écoute du “Temps d’une paix,” le Québécois d’aujourd’hui se sentant trop souvent une mère sans enfant qui s’inquiète avec linguistes, politologues et sociologues, de l’avenir de sa langue et de son peuple et se sent rassuré par sa légende, la seule certitude qui lui reste. Il aime donc se l’entendre raconter entre deux poussées d’ordinateurs, au retour d’un voyage à New York. C’est tout le sens de ce très beau livre, de cette très sensible épopée que Roger Fournier nous a livré dans “Les sirènes du Saint-Laurent,” là où le psy le plus affamé de névroses devrait se mettre d’urgence su l’chomage tant tous ces personnages sont d’une santé psychologique à toute épreuve et vivent très bellement les travaux et les jours de cette merveilleuse tante Obéline que nous conservons tous en coin de coeur.

Roch Carrier répond aussi à notre goût pour l’histoire d’amour qui continue à faire le succès des romans Harlequin et que les jeunes Québécois retrouvent en eux bien plus profond que le rock, la moto ou le “trip.” “Jolis deuils” nous confie des belles filles, une robe de mariée et les songes de nudité qui sommeillent en tout homme. Il répond à ce très beau cri de la vie qu’entendent nos chats au mois de mars et nos oignons au mois d’avril. Et il y a dans tout cela notre continuité de famille de quinze enfants qui parlaient français.

L’or est aussi un mythe de “Jolis deuils” de même que la pauvreté qui y correspond. Le rêve de richesse que nous retrouvons si profondément inscrit dans le folklore de tous les peuples et qu’expriment si bien certaines fables de La Fontaine prend ici des dimensions fantastiques et invoque le surréel.

L’oiseau rejoint aussi la grande thématique universelle et le rêve très profond de l’homme de voler. Ce n’est pas du wesi-weso de Duguay ou du bird watching que Pierre Morency nous a montré dans “l’Oeil américain” dont il s’agit ici. Non, celui de Roch Carrier est un oiseau de conte, un oiseau de métamorphose, qui devient empereur et se fait ériger un monument.

Un autre symbole bien québécois est celui de la neige qui prend une forme mythique dans “Les pas,” une neige à la Grandbois, à la “Kamouraska,” qui se durcit et devient du roc blanc, à la manière du sel de Loth, une neige qui ne veut pas se laisser marquer par les pas, une neige qui refuse d’être signée. Il s’agit d’un très beau conte né de l’angoisse des nuits de Noël de tous nos Français Paradis.

Notons encore ce que l'on pourrait appeler le personnage de la pomme, l'apple, la McIntosh qui encore aujourd'hui, continue de donner de l'inspiration à nos ordinateurs. La pomme avec ses belles joues rouges d'hiver, constitue notre fruit national. Elle est dans notre inconscient collectif, plus près de l'amour que du péché d'Ève. Et qui n'a pas la tarte aux pommes généreuses de sa grand-mère dans son inconscient collectif?

Enfin, pour terminer cette expression de la québécoïté, parlons du téléphone, ce communicateur presque mythologique auquel Gabrielle Roy consacra aussi l'une de ses tendres nouvelles. Souvenons nous que, dans un village, les lignes à abonnés multiples continuent de constituer "l'âme du rond" et qu'on y rend un culte de latrie au dieu du placotage. C'est une source d'émotions et de potins incommensurable, si bien que le maire de Natashquan me disait un jour "Quand j'veux faire une annonce pour tout le monde, j'appelle ma soeur et je lui communique le renseignement et tout le village est immédiatement au courant," écouter au téléphone à grands et à petits coups constituant l'une des premières tâches des ménagères.

Et cela fait aussi partie du sens de la fête une autre réalité typiquement québécoise. "Jolis deuils," c'est peut-être avant tout une célébration de la vie qui veille toujours au devant de la mort. Elle ne peut être loin, aussi longtemps que les pas d'une jeune fille suffisent à réveiller la lumière. On ne meurt pas souvent irrémédiablement chez Roch Carrier. À l'ombre d'une noirceur veille presque toujours une clarté. Même lorsqu'il ne se passe rien, une petite fleur rouge palpite au milieu de la place publique. Comme dans plusieurs contes folkloriques traditionnels, la vie constitue très souvent une récompense, là où règne la justice très profonde de la nature.

"Jolis deuils" célèbre aussi le rêve. Les mots font ce qu'on n'arrive pas à faire dans la réalité. Des gestes de géants vainquent pesanteur, peur, solitude, faiblesse et petitesse. Il n'y a plus de distance, plus de passé ni de futur et les fins sont presque toujours des commencements.

"Jolis deuils," c'est une fête extraordinaire de l'évasion. Le conte est à la fois un alcool, un beau verre de vin, une émergence du possible que l'on porte tous en nous, une exaltation du sentiment de puissance. La distance est abolie et partout, des ailes nous sont données si bien il nous semble tout naturel de vivre le magique.

ENFIN, LES CONTES DE ROCH CARRIER constituent une immense fête du langage. On peut tout dire dans un conte et le caricatural et le sublime apparaissent comme naturels. Les verbes volent, les adjectifs nagent, les conjonctions sont bleues, les adverbes sentent le muguet, les articles dansent et

les prépositions font l'amour entre compléments. Le sentiment de limite est dépassé. Les syllabes sont des bouteilles à la mer ou des ballons en errance vers l'ailleurs. Il neige des améthystes et des étoiles poussent au jardin.

Le conte demeure toujours une certaine possession de l'enfance, là où le démesuré et le jouyeux sont toujours raisonnables, là d'où partent et où retournent les poètes, les génies et ceux dont la tradition nous a dit qu'ils étaient des saints.

C'est un peu de tout cela qu'est faite la sagesse de "Jolis deuils" qui est peut-être avant tout une façon d'être heureux. Et peut-être que le moyen d'arriver au bonheur, ce serait de ne pas mourir, d'éviter le "joli deuil." Roch Carrier nous enseignerait alors la recherche de l'éternité. On évite le temps qui tue par la métamorphose et le merveilleux. Dans plusieurs contes, le personnage principal change d'essence, est à la fois lui, autre et autrement. Il est souvent d'abord malheureux, puis magiquement heureux même si le bonheur n'est souvent qu'un joli deuil. La mort ici ne tue pas, elle tait plutôt. L'humanité s'arrête très souvent simplement en se transformant bellement. La mort, qu'elle soit destin, cosmos, froid ou encre, est enchantée et la tristesse en est presque toujours absente. Parfois cependant, le personnage meurt à sa magie et redevient ce qu'il est naturellement comme dans "Le pain."

Mais, s'il y a une sagesse du bonheur, il y en a aussi une de la vérité que nous retrouvons tout particulièrement dans des contes comme "Le destin" ou "La tête." Il faut être honnête envers soi-même, laisser tomber ses masques, nous dirions: "ne pas se prendre pour un autre." Nos statues ne doivent pas être plus grandes que nous. Si on dépasse les autres, ce doit être à la suite d'un don de la nature, comme cela se passe avec Léon, le dompteur de lion qui dévore son dompté, le tue.

La mort est donc aussi le bon sens suprême. C'est le retour au premier, à l'élémentaire. La mort a du jarnigousne. Comme le répète parfois l'ami Réjéan Robidoux, "on a encore de la terre entre les orteils." C'est tout le sens de cette sculpture fontaine que, après bien des concours, nous avons édifiée sur, ou plutôt dans notre Place Québec, à Paris, dans Saint-Germain-des-Prés et qui consiste en un arrangement esthétique de pavés, exaltés au-delà de leur travail de pavage, comme si, en plein coeur de la Ville-Lumière nous sentions le besoin de briser l'écorce pour retourner au coeur de la terre et de l'eau, dont nous portons au fond de nous le "joli deuil."

Enfin, cette sagesse, elle est toute pénétrée de poésie. Évidemment, on peut longtemps ergoter et se perdre en disputationes avant de découvrir en quoi consiste la poésie, mais peut-être vaut-il mieux demander tout simplement à sa sensibilité comment ces contes nous parlent.

Il faudrait souligner d'abord la tendresse, qui fait source tout le long de "Jolis deuils." Comme l'écrivain doit aimer les hommes, leur tendre la main et vivre avec eux de délicates connivences, jusqu'au jaillissement de l'expression? Comme

il doit s'étonner, s'émerveiller, de leur immense grandeur et en même temps leur pardonner d'être aussi petits! Comme il doit être prêt et près! Que d'attention, que de précautions pour arriver au dire, à la chair de la parole, pour épeler rêves et ensorcellements. Le conteur, c'est celui qui sent et qui le dit, qui retrouve le poème au bout de ses racines, plus profond que le plus profond. L'écriture est une offrande, un cadeau. Le conte est une communication à l'état pur. Il nous nourrit comme une grande bouffée d'air. Il nous parle de celui qui fut, de celui qui est et de celui qui sera. Il nous fait, dans la vieux sens grec de *ᾠσεν*, qui veut dire faire et d'où vient le mot poésie. Ces contes qui nous ont d'abord écoutés, nous font des confidences, nous enseignent et nous renseignent au sujet des choses les plus profondes qui existent en nous et qui s'appellent souvent bonté et beauté. Il rejoignent en nous l'empereur à la statue, la jeune fille à la lumière, le réveil-matin qui exige des cadeaux pour se taire ou le dompteur qui mange son mangeur. La poésie de "Jolis deuils," c'est l'acceptation du monde que nous portons tous lorsque nous le permettons.

Ces quelques pages, comme des voiles blanches sur la mer de l'esthétique, ont tenté de saisir quelques reflets, d'apprivoiser certains aspects de l'art de "Jolis deuils" un peu comme l'on tend la main à un ami, un peu comme, au bord de la nuit, on sent l'aube claire et chaude monter au jour qui commence.

ST. ANNE'S CROSSING

Charles Lillard

Sweet as the year's first cutthroat
 May be anywhere
 Near this mountain rising like a pavilion
 They're always sweeter
 Cooked over a pine wood fire
 Early dusk
 The creek tumbling quicksilver
 Corn in the billy, bread frying
 And soon the highway behind the hills
 Will no longer race in my night
 As this evening wind comes down
 Rattling the birch and cottonwood
 To these beautiful fish
 Three lengths of silver on a flat boulder
 Bearing all the wilderness of cold, fast
 Water my body can endure

CARNIVALESQUE AND PARODY IN "LE JARDIN DES DÉLICES"

John Lennox

IN THEIR TREATMENT OF THE NOVELS of Roch Carrier, critics have discussed the presence in them of mordant satire that pokes fun at a church-bound culture and embodies in the joys of the flesh the rebellion of an oppressed community.¹ Carrier's delight in the senses is as obvious in *La guerre, yes sir!* (1968) and *Floralie, où es-tu?* (1969) as the countervailing darkness in each of these works; this delight is remarkable by its absence from *Il est par là, le soleil* (1970), the last work in the "trilogie de l'âge sombre." The novels contain many parodies — of Latin prayers, medieval morality plays, religious festivals — in which language, action, and characterization play their part. Encompassing the parody and the satire, both of which are often devastating, is a relentless preoccupation with liberation — from ignorance and innocence into knowledge and experience, however terrifying, however dark. This preoccupation — realized through a cast of representative *dramatis personae* — has been a recurring theme in Carrier's work which he has depicted more through broad social satire than by creating highly individualized characters. Carrier bears witness to the transformation of a community — in his case, Quebec — that he dramatizes by means of various techniques, two of which — carnivalesque and parody — are especially important in an attempt to come to terms with what may be Carrier's most challenging and complex work, *Le jardin des délices* (1975).

Carrier's frequent descriptions of village life, his use of exaggeration, his emphasis on bodily detail, and his evocation of communal celebrations are an intrinsic part of the Rabelaisian tradition to which he is linked by literary heritage, about which Antonine Maillet has written as part of the Acadian linguistic and cultural inheritance,² and on which Mikhail Bakhtin founded his concept of the carnivalesque.³ In addition, the echoes in *Le jardin des délices* of French Canada's first novel, *L'influence d'un livre* (1837) later reprinted in an expurgated version as *Le chercheur de trésors; ou, L'influence d'un livre* (1864, 1878, 1885, 1968),⁴ and the graphic use of and allusions to Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden*

of *Delights* (1510) exemplify Linda Hutcheon's definition of modern parody in which she argues that parody, as a technique of providing new contexts, "is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text."⁵ Parody is "extended repetition with critical difference" (Hutcheon, 7), and implicit in her treatment of parody is the notion of its liberating potential in the way that avant-garde and other modern texts come to terms with "cultural memories whose tyrannical weight they must overthrow by their incorporation and inversion of them" (Hutcheon, 5). These two factors, then, the Rabelaisian tradition embodied in Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque and the impact of modern parody as defined by Linda Hutcheon, will each be discussed in turn in this critical examination of *Le jardin des délices*.

Rabelais et son oeuvre by Bakhtin first appeared in French translation in 1970 and *Le jardin des délices* in 1975; whether Carrier had read Bakhtin's study before he began writing *Le jardin des délices* does not alter the fact that Rabelaisian characteristics were present in Carrier's work from the publication of *La guerre, yes sir!* Bakhtin's comments on Rabelais' use of the carnivalesque provide a very useful gloss in an attempt to better understand Carrier's work. In his study of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-52), Bakhtin placed great emphasis on the importance in them of the characteristic ambivalence of fifteenth-century popular culture. Death and life, the corporeal and the spiritual, tears and laughter were complementary aspects of a world view that stressed the comic and affirmative. For Bakhtin, the primary manifestations of humorous medieval folk culture were (i) ritual spectacles; (ii) comic verbal compositions; (iii) various kinds of foul language. In their democratic, irreverent, and high-spirited vitality, these interdependent categories formed an alternative to the official, serious, and rigidly hierarchical structures of church and state. These categories, moreover, had as their common source "the carnival, ritual, and spectacle" that were central to "the unity of folk culture" (Bakhtin, 17). Bakhtin encapsulated his notion of the carnivalesque in the following description: "As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (Bakhtin, 10).

As an extended tall tale full of extravagant episodes, *Le jardin des délices* contains many incidents in which ordinary rules and order are suspended, but Carrier is as much a product of his time as Rabelais was of the fifteenth century. The carnivalesque of ambivalence and duality, embedded in comic balance in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, becomes an entertaining but ultimately unresolved paradox in *Le jardin des délices*. Carrier's novel describes events outside usual norms and proscriptions — the carnal liaison of the curé and Miss Catéchime,

Constantine Génereux's exploitation of his daughters, the "zizis japonais," and the final saturnalia. In all these instances, taboos are swept aside by a carnival which shows the process of dissolution rather than becoming. Both Rabelais and Carrier, however, use the carnivalesque for similar ends — to replace, however temporarily, the official hierarchy with a popular, spontaneous, and unofficial order. Both authors also make use of parody, although Bakhtin cautions that "the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humour denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture" (11). Both are adept in the use of humour — be it farce, caricature, or burlesque — which is also part of their use of the grotesque.

Le jardin begins with the sombreness of autumn, "le temps des pacages gris, des branches nues, des feuilles pourchassées par le vent,"⁶ where "la nuit gruge le jour, une nuit épaisse comme de la terre noire" (5), and where, at the Auberge du Bon Boire, patrons "cherchent des signes de l'avenir" (6). There, an impressive stranger, J. J. Bourdage, announces that there is gold under the earth of the village and that efforts should be made to find it. From this follow the events of Part 1: the plundering of the notary's grave, the burning of the church, the lusty gratification of Mme Petit-Lecourt, the miraculous rescue of the holy objects performed by the crippled Démeryse, and the discovery of the priest in bed with Miss Catéchime. The carnivalesque invites the highly caricaturized portrayal of the characters whose names — Petit-Lecourt, Gros-Douillette, Miss Catéchime, le curé — are part of a collective portrait. Their physical appetites for beer, scotch, and sex are emphasized as are the robust high spirits of their adventures. The comic juxtaposition of the sacred and the vulgar occurs as Démeryse retrieves the holy objects from the burning church. Her "body" language mocks the narrow-minded strictures of her culture and recalls Bakhtin's discussion of the Rabelaisian play on "couillon" (Bakhtin, 417-20):

J' vous demande pardon, mon Dieu, de sauver votre pain et votre or. J' sais que mes mains sont pas dignes de toucher à des richesses aussi saintes. Si vous êtes pas content, mon Dieu, envoyez votre Curé les tenir. Mais avant de l'appeler, votre Curé, pensez ben que c'est un homme et qu'un homme est un couillon qui a peur de son ombre s'y a pas une créature à côté de lui. C'est vous qui les avez faits de cette manière-là. Et moé, j' les ai tellement aimés tels que vous les avez faits! Mon Dieu, donnez donc une créature à votre Curé; i' deviendrait un peu moins couillon . . . (39)

Each of the actions of Part 1 is an element in the ensuing general upheaval. One notes the abundance of humour and laughter, from the drunken blundering of the grave-robbers, to the blatant desire of Mme Petit-Lecourt, to the testy plain speech of Démeryse, to the burlesque of the priest found in his bed beside "les seins d'une femme échevelée qui dort les bras en croix" (47). These episodes,

all in some way representative of man's appetites and imperfections, create a carnival of disorder in which religion, sexuality, and self-interest play their part under the sign of gold, the dominant motif of the novel. The dissolution of the old order is satirically summarized in the description of the renovated waiting room of the manse:

Voici la salle d'attente. L'ancien Curé possédait de grosses chaises brunes qui ressemblaient à de vieilles religieuses en prière. Depuis, il y a eu des grandes réunions à Rome et l'Eglise a été révolutionnée. Pour rejoindre l'Eglise, le nouveau Curé a vendu ses vieilles chaises à des Américaines qui cherchaient des vieilleries. Il les a remplacées par de belles chaises en plastique aux couleurs gaies. Qu'elles sont belles ces lampes en forme d'oeuf en or qui pendent au plafond et ces autres qui se tiennent sur des pattes fines comme des pattes de poules, mais plus hautes! Il y a des tas de revues françaises et anglaises. Cela ressemble à la salle d'attente du dentiste de Saint-Georges-de-Beauce. Se faire pardonner un péché, n'est-ce pas semblable à se faire extraire une dent qui fait souffrir? (46)

Elements of the carnivalesque are present in the second part of the novel, notably in the episodes involving Constantin Généreux and the "zizis japonais." Highly subversive of the conventional moral norm, the episodes provide for good fun and highlight the communal obsession with the sinful flesh by distorting the social taboos associated with it. For Généreux, a parody of the solicitous father, his daughters' services are as calculated from his point of view as they are innocent from theirs; with the zizis, a farcical comedy is enacted involving what Bakhtin calls "the material bodily lower stratum" (368), the play on liturgical rites, and the exuberant and violent yoking of the sacred and the profane. Each episode is a variation on the theme of avarice; the gold that Bourdage has predicted in the village is coined for Généreux by the attractions of his daughters. In the story of his eldest girl whose husband is shot by the father, the *conteurs* of the story see no moral outrage, but the unhappy and inevitable destiny of the son-in-law. The "zizis japonais" are artful imitations of the penises of young boys who "offraient à l'Art leurs petits sexes chétifs et blonds afin de capter les messages de l'univers" (113). Fashioned in art class, these objects allow Carrier to make comic use of the students' confusion of the words "art" and "or," words which are pronounced identically in Québécois (111); the confusion also underlines how the theme of avarice is, here as elsewhere, central to the farce. What follows in this case is a rollicking send-up of religion, sexuality, and the liturgical feast of the eucharist. The broad lines with which the characters are drawn and the burlesque involved in the episode itself underline the extent to which Carrier is adept in his handling of surrealistic detail. The incongruities — the tavern which becomes a church, Miss Catéchime's religious and sexual ecstasy, her proper vocabulary and the phallic object she is describing, her embarrassment and the hilarity of the men who have carried her outside, the "zizi" resting where the host should be, the connection between demystifying sex and desexualizing

money — all combine to make the “zizi,” according the curé’s blundering analogy, an image of aberrant yet corrective punishment for the villagers’ sins, not unlike the biblical plague of grasshoppers, although in winter, “Dieu ne peut pas laisser s’abattre sur nous un déluge de sauterelles: elles auraient froid, elles prendraient la grippe, elles feraient de la fièvre, elles tousseraient et elles ne pourraient pas détruire en les dévorant nos moissons” (108). The account of how the “zizis” were made, their function as *monnaie courante*, the priest’s invective against this “commerce de la chair” (115), and against the profanation of “cette partie du corps de vos enfants que Dieu a faite à son image et à sa ressemblance et destinée à prolonger dans l’histoire la vie de notre valeureux petit peuple travailleur et pieux; cet instrument de notre survivance” (115), combines the rhetoric of the Catholic-nationalist past with the details of the bankrupt present. As important as the episodes themselves is the fact that they are told as a bulwark against the winter season which isolates the village by snow and storm. At this time of year, the villagers talk of the past, of “autre neiges, celles d’antan quand les tempêtes faisaient peur aux hommes, quand les tempêtes faisaient pleurer les femmes, quand les tempêtes engouffraient les villages dans leurs remous blancs” (62). The emphasis in this section falls on communal gathering and communal talk in defiance of the long, perilous night of winter — “Au milieu de l’hiver, les paroles entretiennent la chaleur de la vie” (101) — and in the hope of bringing about a transformation: “Avec les mêmes gestes et les mêmes rires, ils reprennent sans cesse la même histoire: comme si, à force d’être racontés, les faits allaient se transformer et ressembler à ce à quoi on souhaite qu’ils ressemblent” (101).

IN THE FIRST TWO PARTS OF THE NOVEL, Carrier presents the reader with a world in which the community rather than the individual is the focus. Into it he introduces an outsider, J. J. Bourdage, whose words, unlike the words of the villagers in their story-telling, are dynamic and transformative; the sleepy village is about to be shaken from its torpor. By means of techniques associated with the carnivalesque — among them, the comic use of the grotesque, the questioning of church authority, the humorous juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, the use of farce and exaggeration — *Le jardin des délices* sustains the impetus which Carrier inaugurated with *La guerre, yes sir!* In Part III of *Le jardin des délices*, the carnivalesque reaches its apogée in a way that both echoes and breaks with Bakhtin; it becomes an orgiastic feast of fools in which the jester Bourdage is proclaimed king — “il est sacré empereur. Il est Dieu” (181) — and the celebration suspends the normal order of things in an apocalyptic saturnalia.

Released from prison, Bourdage returns to the village in the spring where he

enlarges the fiction of himself as an important businessman employed by an American company whose job is to secure gold-mining rights from local farmers for the "Grande Affaire." As the action becomes increasingly frenzied, so do the characteristics associated with the Bakhtinian carnival: the close association between death and birth as the crowd shouts, "Le passé, i' faut l'enterrer" (187) and as "les villageois célèbrent leur propre naissance" (187); the sacrilege in the comparison of Bourdage to Christ, and in the mistaking of the helicopter for the Holy Spirit; the crowd's awareness of what Bakhtin calls "their sensual, material bodily unity and community" (255) as they feel that "un même sang circule dans les veines des villageois, ils ont un même cœur" (198); the earthy jokes accompanied by great gusts of laughter; the recurring Rabelaisian image of the mouth; the exuberant celebration of the body. All the elements of the carnivalesque are handled with skill by Carrier in this final part of the novel. Behind it, however, and undercutting it is a contemporary use of the grotesque which shows how the distortions and exaggerations of this final episode are rooted in the alienating and intimidating passion of avarice and in Bourdage's crass manipulation. The destruction of the property and livestock, the night which is mute "comme si un grand désastre avait tout démolé" (200), the overwhelming night which stretches "aux frontières de la terre" (204), and the cavernous earth which seems to open at Bourdage's feet are all aspects of the estranged world foreign to the fundamental affirmation of the Rabelaisian carnival and for which the dead Bourdage is "un crucifix des temps modernes" (208). Here enters the crucial difference between the Rabelaisian and modern grotesque as identified by Bakhtin. The Rabelaisian holds that "death is not a negation of life seen as the great body of all the people but part of life as a whole — its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation. Death is here always related to birth; the grave is related to the earth's life-giving womb" (Bakhtin, 50). The modern presents "an opposition of life to death" (Bakhtin, 50) and embodies alienation and separation which reject the unity of man and his world. This modern aspect of the grotesque is voiced at several points in Part III by characters whose invective or unruffled common sense is expressed clearly and unequivocally; it is also visible in Bourdage's own self-doubt. The sinister implications of the villagers' loss of inhibitions is captured in the image of "ce serpent rieur de villageois en fête" (199) that snakes its way to the bloody climax of the action. The denouement breaks with the Bakhtinian pattern in which descent and ascent are inseparable as part of the cycle of completion rooted in Rabelaisian duality and ambivalence. If, for Bakhtin, "carnival's hell represents the earth which swallows up and gives birth" (91) and is part of a ritual in which the grotesque "liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying" (47), in *Le jardin des délices*, the earth which swallows Bourdage yields him up to murder and then to crucifixion on the roof of his white Cadillac. The feast has

become a *danse macabre*, and the story concludes as it began, with a dead trophy on a car roof. Carrier uses the grotesque in the spirit of liberation, but the world he creates is marked by disintegration rather than integration as he combines the Bakhtinian carnivalesque with the twentieth-century grotesque.

However, although the conclusion of *Le jardin des délices* is dark, it is not totally despairing. Bourdage's death stems from his part in the destruction of an old-folk belief which has been part of the villagers' identity as a community, and which was revealed to Bourdage by the notary: "Mais nous avons ici une croyance populaire: un jour, quelqu'un fendra une pierre et l'or en sortira comme le sang coule d'un cochon" (147-48). Caillouette goes on to say that the villagers do not actively search for gold because they are afraid of shattering their dream. For his part, Bourdage is the cause of their broken dream; "crucifié sur son toit" (213), he is a travesty of selfless, Christ-like sacrifice. The unnamed voice that concludes "Son secret est notre secret" (213) is a voice that also recognizes, accepts, and takes the first steps toward re-establishing community solidarity after the catharsis of guilt and knowledge. Rabelaisian confidence and gusto have been replaced by twentieth-century tentativeness.

CARNIVALESQUE AND PARODY share a common emphasis on displacement, community, and play. In the first instance, carnival is an institution removed from the established order as parody involves texts which are lifted out of an original context; in the second, carnival is the unity of all people, as parody postulates the potential interdependence or intertextuality of all art; in the third, the rites of carnival are designed to entertain and delight, as parody also entertains in assigning new roles or contexts to existing texts or works of art. Linda Hutcheon's illuminating discussion of parody touches on all three areas of common emphasis, but there is one important divergent aspect of Carrier's use of parody in *Le jardin des délices* that should be mentioned here. Although his use of parody involves "imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (Hutcheon, 6), and by "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (Hutcheon, 6), Carrier is neither a metafictionist nor does he contest "the novelistic illusion of realist dogma" (Hutcheon, 72-73). He does, however, without subverting fictional norms, depict "feelings of insecurity in the face of both nature and social order" (Hutcheon, 73) through the carnivalesque and through parody.

Of the texts parodied in Carrier's novel, the two most important are Bosch's *The Garden of Delights* and Philippe Aubert de Gaspé's *L'influence d'un livre*, which is more widely known as *Le chercheur de trésors*. Also parodied, but of markedly less importance, is Molière's *L'avare* (1668). Bosch's painting pro-

vided the cover illustration and the title for *Le jardin des délices*, and one of the characters in the novel makes a confused but significant reference to the artist: “Un grand peintre moderne, Guillaume Boche, a peint des gens si riches qu’i mangent de l’or. Savey-vous qu’est-ce qu’i font ces riches? I’ chient de l’or. Oui Monsieur. Ça, c’est pas bon pour la santé” (194). This reference to “The Infernal Concert,” the third panel of Bosch’s triptych, conflates the modern and medieval, and reminds us, as Bakhtin did, that Bosch also portrayed, though not as vigorously as Rabelais, “the age of the body . . . an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout” (Bakhtin, 26-27).

Bosch’s triptych has intrigued viewers and critics for 450 years; its emphasis on the carnivalesque, on the grotesque, and on the material bodily lower stratum links it ostensibly with the Rabelaisian world as Carrier indicates. The three-part structure of Carrier’s novel echoes Bosch. In the first part of both, the seeds of discord are sown in a world whose tenuous innocence is only apparent. Bourdage awakens a deeply rooted avarice and Bosch’s Eden is darkened by stagnant pools, three-headed dragons, and animals preying upon each other. The second part is a celebration of sensual and erotic pleasure in Carrier’s description of the Généreux family and the “zizis japonais”; Bosch’s second panel — “The Garden of Delights” — highly charged with sexual energy and a sense of carnival, prompted one team of critics to remark that it is “the triumph of erotic excitement, contemplated in all its aspects and events, with an artist’s joy which seems very often to blur his moralistic intentions.”⁷ In the third part of both Carrier’s and Bosch’s texts, the action of disintegration and chaos is played under and against an appalling night sky lit by the destructive fires of a burning world. In this part of both artists’ work, reference is made to the defecation of gold; Carrier’s description of a black sea and the gaping earth are also details in Bosch’s painting as is the similarity between “la forme pointue d’une grande épinette” (208) and the knife blade in the painting. The title of Bosch’s third panel, “The Infernal Concert,” complements Carrier’s description of the tavern and of “l’orchestre [qui] crache du feu sonore” (187); the walls of the tavern are described as “les murs d’une cellule” (188) and recall Bosch’s tavern housed inside the jagged and broken eggshell body of the monstrous “*Alchemical Man*” (Oriente and de Solier, 95). Read in sequence, *The Garden of Delights* depicts an ambivalent world until the last panel when the action slides into chaos and hell from which there is no return. Known for his “constant effort to evade the dogmatic rigidity of the religious authorities and to uphold intellectual freedom” (Oriente and de Solier, 35), Bosch’s impulse is close to Carrier’s. The impact of Carrier’s parody of Bosch lies first in the transgression of art forms — literature and painting — and second in the way that the doctrinal conservatism of the triptych ironically

acquires, as parody, an iconoclastic and radical force in Carrier's novel. The chaos of Bosch's last panel, while terrifying, is an entrenched aspect of church dogma and, therefore, part of the divine order of things; Carrier's depiction of chaos, however, is cataclysmic and out of all proportion to its cause.

The second instance of parody in *Le jardin des délices* is the repeated allusions to French Canada's first "novel," *L'influence d'un livre*. Aubert de Gaspé's book is a crudely fashioned tale about the search for the philosopher's stone. On this thin thread are hung a love story, moralistic folk tales, episodes of blood and gore, and a claim by the author that he has offered his countrymen "le premier Roman de Moeurs canadien . . . m'en tenant toujours à la réalité."⁸ In both books, "or" is a repeated motif, especially in *Le jardin des délices* and throughout Carrier's novel, gold is referred to as "trésor" and those who look for it as "chercheurs de trésor" or "chercheurs d'or," an echo of the second title of Aubert de Gaspé's book. In fact, books play a crucial role in both novels. Initially, Charles Amand is obsessed with "un livre ouvert [qui absorbait] une partie de l'attention de l'Alchimiste modern; ce livre était: *les ouvrages d'Albert le Petit*" (Aubert de Gaspé, 6), and this obsession closes the story: "il lit, sans cesse, le petit Albert, ouvrage qui a décidé du sort de sa vie" (122). Aubert de Gaspé's "novel" is, in fact, the story of a book; its intertextuality, however embryonic, is itself a basic parody whose irony is not directed at the parodied text. In its turn, *Le jardin des délices* possesses an intertextual relationship to *L'influence d'un livre* and, like the earlier work, places some emphasis upon the influence of books, namely the many books on gold that Bourdage has read in his cell such as *Barnato, le roi de l'or*; *Klondike, the Last Great Gold Rush*; *L'Or dans le monde*; *What I Heard, Saw and Did at the Australian Gold Fields*; and the prophetic *L'Or, fléau des peuples*.

Significantly, Carrier's parody is neither patronizing nor is it dismissive. In fact, by going back to Aubert de Gaspé, Carrier revitalizes some of the features of *L'influence d'un livre*: the romance genre, the use of episodic units, the presence of folklore and representative folk types. Unlike Aubert de Gaspé, Carrier has no pretensions to any kind of literary realism in his work, but creates an unsettling romance in which the unexpected and extraordinary are the norm. The episodic composition of Part II, the representative description of characters like Petit-Lecourt, Gros-Douillette, the Curé, Démeryse, and Miss Catéchime are not unlike what one finds in *L'influence d'un livre*. Carrier's parodic achievement in relation to the earlier work is to have intensified and refined many of Aubert de Gaspé's techniques. This is not to say that Carrier views *L'influence d'un livre* unironically, but it is to say that he has adapted aspects of the earlier work to create a metaphor of man's temptation and fall, and so has invested the techniques and themes of Aubert de Gaspé's "novel" with a self-conscious and ironic symbolism which has been further broadened by Carrier's references to Bosch's triptych.

Many of the local and particular characteristics of *L'influence d'une livre* have been at once preserved and universalized in *Le jardin des délices* as Carrier's novel necessarily makes of its critical difference from Aubert de Gaspé's book the contrast between the naive, crudely fashioned romance of a fledgling writer of another age and the dark extravaganza of an accomplished, contemporary novelist.

In Bosch, Aubert de Gaspé, and Carrier, the pattern of temptation and fall is present; all of the works that have been discussed are moral at their core and focus on the consequences of human appetite. Behind them is also a didactic impulse which seeks to instruct the characters and/or readers on the consequences of self-interested action. Carrier makes this duality clear at different points in the novel. Caillouette, the notary, tells Bourdage that "l'or n'est pas éternel comme l'amour" (148) and later Bourdage himself says, "Y a dans le monde une chose plus riche que l'or. Ça j' peux vous l' dire parce que la Compagnie vous en parlera pas. C' qui est plus riche que l'or c'est l'amour" (179). The duality, however, is not without paradox if we remember both the equivocation of Bourdage's next statement — "De l'amour, j'en ai eu entre les mains plus que j'ai eu d'or" (179) — and Bosch's energetic celebration of carnal love in the second panel of his *Garden of Delights*.

The third instance of parody occurs in the last pages of the novel when the priest climbs the stairs of the pulpit in his devastated church and recites from Molière's *L'avare* Harpagon's speech which begins, "Au voleur! au voleur! à l'assassin! au meurtrier!" (199).⁹ The ensuing speech which is taken almost word for word from Molière's play (Carrier has changed the play's "argent" to "or") re-emphasizes the predominant role of avarice in both works. The theatricality of the source and of the conditions under which it is replayed — with the burned church as theatre, the pulpit stairs as stage, the car headlights as dramatic lighting, the village as audience, and the priest's own memories of "les applaudissements au théâtre de son Collège" (199) — exploits the comic qualities of the original and at the same time reveals the extent to which the highly ordered conventions of Molière's play form a contrast to the chaos in Carrier's novel. On the one hand, the priest repeats Harpagon's speech; on the other, the reader possesses a double-layered awareness of the original and of the incongruity of the play's highly mannered conventions in Carrier's uproarious context. Impotence is the burden of the speech and of its parody which is directed not at Molière, but at the distortions of *Le jardin des délices*. Harpagon's nightmare of losing his money comes true with comic results which are heightened by the hyperbole of his language and by the play's conventional comic resolution — marriage. In Carrier's story, the folk belief in the discovery of gold is broken and the resolution is tragic — the destruction of the village and the murder of Bourdage. The ironic inversion is visited on the parody and not on what is being parodied.

IN HER COMMENTS ON PARODY and the carnivalesque, Linda Hutcheon observes that "the presupposition of both a law and its transgression bifurcates the impulse of parody: it can be normative and conservative, or it can be provocative and revolutionary" (76). Parody can manifest respect or mockery, yet it can, "like the carnival, also challenge norms in order to renovate, to renew" (76). I argued earlier that the conclusion to *Le jardin des délices* breaks with the Bakhtinian pattern of ambivalence in its emphasis on the modern sense of the grotesque as the estranged and terrifying world. Seen in the light of Carrier's evolving *oeuvre*, however, *Le jardin des délices* suggests, in its forceful depiction of an apocalyptic *table rase*, that the final "secret" mentioned in the novel may imitate a new knowledge and, just possibly, the germ of a new beginning from that knowledge, which echoes, however tentatively, another Carrier text printed on the novel's cover: "J'aime la vie comme elle est, comme on veut la faire, comme on aurait dû la faire, comme on la raconte, comme on la fera, comme on la détruira et comme elle recommencera." If this is the case, then Carrier's use of parody may embody "the inscription of continuity and change" (Hutcheon, 36) by drawing upon past texts to create something new in *Le jardin des délices*.

NOTES

- ¹ See, among others, Nancy I. Bailey, "The Corriveau Wake: Carrier's Celebration of Life," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1, 3 (Summer 1972), 43-47; Renald Bérubé, "La guerre, yes sir! de Roch Carrier: humour noir et langage vert," *Voix et images du pays III. Littérature québécoise* (1970), 145-64; René Dionne, "Philibert, le fossoyeur," *Relations*, 35 (mars 1971), 86-89; Gilles Dorion, "Roch Carrier, *Le jardin des délices*," *Livres et auteurs québécois* (1975), 41-45; Gabrielle Poulin, "Vieux-Thomas le romancier," *Relations*, 37 (octobre 1977), 284-86.
- ² Antonine Maillet, *Rabelais et les traditions populaires en Acadie*, Les Archives de Folklore 13 (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1971).
- ³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press [1965], 1968).
- ⁴ David M. Hayne, "Les origines du roman canadien-français," in *Le roman canadien-français*, Archives des lettres canadiennes, 3 (Montréal: Fidès, 1964), 37-67; consult Philippe Aubert de Gaspé (fils), *Le chercheur de trésors; ou l'influence d'un livre*, présenté par Léopold Leblanc (Montréal: Réédition Québec, 1968), viii-ix.
- ⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (London: Methuen, 1985), 6.
- ⁶ Roch Carrier, *Le jardin des délices* (Montréal: Les Editions la Presse, 1975), 5.
- ⁷ Sandra Orienti and René de Solier, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Crescent Books [1976], 1979), 93.
- ⁸ Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, junr., *L'influence d'un livre* (Québec: William Cowan et fils, 1837), iii-iv.
- ⁹ I am grateful to my student Joan Knoll for having called this to my attention.

NOAH'S BIRDS

Frank Manley

The raven flew forth
Unsure in his flight:
"Oh where to find land
In this failing light?"

The dove soon departed
Leaving the ark:
"Oh to buy an olive branch
Before it gets dark!"

THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

Lorna Crozier

Never have I felt so unconnected
to everything. Light and its absence.
Rain. The cat on the windowsill catching flies.
Glenn Gould playing the Goldberg Variations,
his last time. The endless variations of you,
making coffee, weeding the garden, calling me
upstairs to love. In our room NASA's
photo of the astronaut, solitary figure
floating in the cold blue of space,
connected to nothing, touching
nothing. Gould's fingers on ivory keys.
It isn't Bach he's playing
from the grave, the stopped heart.
So free of gravity the mind lifts
like a feathered seed, only
a thin shell of bone holding it in.
Not Bach, but music before it became
the least bit human. Is this ecstasy,
this strange remoteness? Rain falling
from such a distance. Gould's Goldberg
Variations. Your hands. The cold
cold blue. My skin.

SALAMANDER PENDANT

Neile Graham

Night is a black beetle caught in my hair,
stars are its million eyes.

If I were a child I'd squeeze its body
like warmed wax. I'm a woman who knows

ordinary men, the kind you might glance at
in passing, for their regular

defined beauty. The kind who
care for precision. A child

outside calls a lost animal, her voice
earnest as a bird's decoying cats

from the nest. Maybe it's her beetle I've stolen
and begun to dismember into its irregular

parts. A deeper voice takes over in the street.
If I were an animal I'd follow.

On my chest salamanders sleep
until they come near fire.

Salamanders stiffened by the breathing darkness
ordinary men leave you in. Even inside

your own room, with the night glued
against your windows, seeping through despite

all the candles you can ever burn.
This beetle uses the moon

for a scarred and frozen heart.
Night's beacon luring me to darkness,

a hole torn through to
those fires that must lie beyond.

COMMENTS ON THEORY AND PRACTICE

Ralph Sarkonak & Alexandre Amprimoz

I. THEORY COMES OUT OF THE CLOSET

Ralph Sarkonak

LN *Critique et vérité* — a riposte to Raymond Picard's *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture?*, Roland Barthes wrote: "Il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce qu'un pays reprenne ainsi périodiquement les objets de son passé et les décrive de nouveau pour savoir *ce qu'il peut en faire*: ce sont là, ce devraient être des procédures régulières d'évaluation."¹ At a time when the tide of "high" or pure theory seems to be falling, there is still considerable interest in the application of theory to individual literary texts. In fact, if one were to isolate one common tenet of the various literary theories which have been proposed in the last two decades, it would no doubt be the emphasis on the reading act and in particular on the production and reception of meaning, in opposition to a single, self-evident referent about which all "men of good will" might agree. Today meaning is conceived of as a process and textual mimesis as a trope,² if not an outright pitfall which the reader must somehow get over if he is to have access to the real "significance" of the poem.³

Amprimoz's study of Alain Grandbois's *Les Iles de la nuit* posits the necessity of a semiotic reading, as opposed to the traditional exercise of the *explication de texte*. Based on Riffaterre's notion of *semiosis*, Amprimoz demonstrates how a poetic text functions, how the reader can and must play/work with the poem, including a signifier which, although unstated, is at the centre of the text. The presupposed given of such a reading is, simply put, as follows: "a poem says one thing and means another."⁴ For Riffaterre, that which blocks the reader in his first reading — that which is obscure or does not "make sense" or may even appear as utter nonsense — is also the key which can and must unlock the poem's semiotic structure, since it is precisely such ungrammatical hurdles which signal

that more than mere mimesis is at work. The structure which the reader must discover is "an abstract concept never actualized per se" since it becomes visible only in its variants, the so-called "ungrammaticalities" of the poetic text.⁵ Significance is shaped like a doughnut, and the semiotician must embark on a quest "à la recherche du trou perdu," so to speak. Such is the heady stuff of semiotics.⁶

Now if Saussure is seen as the godfather of modern semiotics, it is usually because he is remembered for his *Cours de linguistique générale*,⁷ whereas his seminal work on anagrams is at least as important if not more theoretically productive in the long run.⁸ However, whereas Saussure's *paragramme* takes the form of graphic embedding of key words in Saturnian verse, Riffaterre's *hypogram* "appears quite visibly in the shape of words embedded in sentences whose organization reflects the presuppositions of the matrix's nuclear word."⁹ This gap whose eerie absence/presence underli(n)es the significance of the literary text is what traditionally has led many a reader astray, as he seeks now to fill the hole with a piece of knowledge about the author's life, now to recycle some preconceived idea "imported" from the manifest of the appropriate school or group. Meanwhile, the text, including its hypogram, is staring the reader in the face. Its very self-evidence may blind even those with the best insight.

The essential point in question, what Amprimoz finds in Grandbois's closets, is not stated directly, referentially, but must be semiotically (re)discovered. That the discovery takes the form of *rien* is not, of course, to say that this application of theory is either a joke or a methodological impasse. — Although to pursue the Bachelardian concerns with thematics would lead to the latter. — The lesson, here, is that to play with signifiers is not an innocent game, for the poetic "I" is discovered to be what it always already was, i.e., a configuration of textual matter ("Le moi poétique n'est qu'un jeu de signifiants et c'est leur paradigme qui compose l'illusion du 'je' car l'identité, elle aussi, n'est faite que de mots"). What is more, when the poetic closet is opened up, it is discovered to contain a whole series of poisonous remedies ("le remède tardif peut-il être autre chose qu'un poison, la cruelle illusion du salut?"). Here one might refer to Derrida's eloquent analysis of the *pharmakon*.¹⁰ In fact, the "poison" is not just the stuff of thematics (of course, it never was); rather it is the hypogram of *rien*, the notion of the embedded signifier and the false clue of an apparently mimetic "I" of a lyrical text.

If theory allows periodic new readings of texts, the text contains (by definition) all theory. Grandbois is no exception and Amprimoz might have made the point that his reading, like this one, is already (pre)inscribed in the body of the literary artifact. For the not so hidden poison is also theory itself: that which gives "la cruelle illusion du salut." There can be no literary or theoretical salvation, for the reading must go on. Like the picture in the picture in the picture,

like an infinitely receding figure of *mise en abyme*, theory is both the remedy and the poison, both the answer and the problem. "Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself this resistance."¹¹

NOTES

- ¹ Roland Barthes, *Critique et vérité* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), p. 9.
- ² Cf. Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," *The Pedagogical Imperative. Teaching as a Literary Genre*, ed. Barbara Johnson (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 10-11.
- ³ Cf. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington & London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978), p. 6.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ⁶ Cf. "Everything related to this integration of signs from the mimesis level into the higher level of significance is a manifestation of *semiosis*." *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ⁷ Paris: Payot, 1972; first edition, 1916).
- ⁸ Cf. Jean Starobinski, *Les mots sous les mots. Les anagrammes de Ferdinand de Saussure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).
- ⁹ Riffaterre, *Semiotics*, p. 168n.
- ¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, "La pharmacie de Platon" in *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 69-197.
- ¹¹ Paul de Man, "Resistance to Theory," p. 20.



II. "LES ILES DE LA NUIT" D'ALAIN GRANDBOIS

Clôture du monde et ouverture du verbe

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

RARES SÉRAIENT LES SPÉCIALISTES qui oseraient nier qu'Alain Grandbois est l'un plus grands poètes que le Québec ait donné au monde. Sa réputation est loin d'être négligeable si l'on en juge par son entrée dans la collection des "Poètes d'aujourd'hui" chez Seghers (1968); par le colloque international qui lui a été entièrement dédié à l'Université de Toronto en mars 1985; par les nombreux articles et les quelques livres qui ont été consacrés à son oeuvre.¹

Les critiques ont surtout vu chez Grandbois le fabuleux voyageur: l'auteur de *Né à Québec* (1933) — un ouvrage consacré à son ancêtre, l'explorateur Jolliet — et l'écrivain merveilleux de *Les Voyages de Marco Polo* (1941). Mais c'est sa poésie en général et son premier recueil en particulier, c'est-à-dire *Les Iles de la nuit* (1944), qui ont peut-être fait couler le plus d'encre. Le dernier poème de ce recueil, "Fermons l'armoire," a été repris dans presque toutes les anthologies québécoises et a donc frappé l'imagination de l'architecteur — dans le sens riffaterrien du terme. Mais il me semble que toutes les lectures de ce texte sont tombées soit dans l'évocation facile de l'adieu au monde, soit dans la paraphrase non moins aisée de Nerval, Baudelaire et Rimbaud.

Une analyse sémiotique s'impose si l'on veut découvrir les lois de transformations sémiques qui produisent la poésie de Grandbois. Ces dernières constituent les variations sémantiques de *rien* et permettent de souligner le fait qu'Eluard et Grandbois empruntent des voies intertextuelles fort semblables pour résoudre le problème de l'engendrement poétique. L'on verra en particulier comment une structure thématique allant de la chambre à l'armoire permet d'ancrer l'idéologème — au sens de Bakhtine — de la production individuelle. Cette notion se réduit à son tour à un réseau d'images centré sur l'isotopie oppositionnelle interne/externe.

La poésie ne serait alors que la possibilité d'une énonciation capable non pas

de s'identifier, comme on l'a trop souvent répété, mais d'invertir l'espace. À l'intérieur de tels paradigmes culturels, la solution — du moins au niveau de l'analyse — réside dans la prise de conscience du fait que *rien* ne peut être résolu dans la poésie d'Alain Grandbois et que cette indétermination actualise toute valeur esthétique. L'interprétation n'est possible qu'à condition de la voir comme contradiction. La magie de l'armoire littéraire est d'ordre potentiel : c'est la possibilité d'actualiser un monument d'art verbal comme celui qui se laisse à peine entrevoir à l'horizon de *Les Iles de la nuit*.

Pour prouver que le signe poétique se manifeste comme un variant à l'intérieur d'un paradigme donné, Michael Riffaterre fait appel à deux vers de Paul Eluard :

De tout ce que j'ai dit de moi que reste-t-il
J'ai conservé de faux trésors dans des armoires vides²

Une partie de la démonstration de l'auteur de *Sémiotique de la poésie* repose sur une adroite exploration de la nébuleuse sémantique qui correspond à l'armoire littéraire :

... [L]'armoire est bien plus qu'un simple meuble de la chambre à coucher. La pression du sociolecte en fait la place par excellence de la thésaurisation domestique ; sujet de fierté secrète de la maîtresse de maison traditionnelle — linge aux senteurs de lavande, lingerie de dentelle dérobée aux regards —, ce mot fonctionne comme s'il était le métonyme des secrets du cœur. Dans l'étymologie populaire, le symbolisme est explicite : ainsi, le père Goriot, en prononçant, incorrectement *ormoire*, fait de l'armoire le lieu de l'*or*, du *trésor*.³

La négation d'un lieu abritant les sèmes et les présuppositions des secrets du cœur se retrouve dans la poésie d'Alain Grandbois. À rapprocher du distique de Paul Eluard seraient, par exemple, quelques vers du quatrième poème de *Les Iles de la nuit* (1944) :

Nous tous avec la faim ou la soif ou gorgés de trésors ridicules
Nous tous avec des coeurs nus comme des chambres vides
Dans un même élan fraternel⁴

Il est clair que l'armoire est l'hypogramme qui engendre ce texte. Le phénomène est ici entendu selon la plus simple des définitions de Michael Riffaterre : "La signifiante peut donc être assimilée à un pain couronne, le vide central pouvant être la matrice de l'hypogramme aussi bien que l'hypogramme faisant fonction de matrice."⁵ L'armoire est donc ici le signe poétique qui actualise une partie des sèmes et des présuppositions associés à l'hypogramme que l'on se contentera de nommer "armoire," tout en entendant par là lieu de la littérarité et non lieu référentiel. C'est pour cela qu'il a déjà été question d'armoire littéraire, c'est-à-dire d'objet fait de mots.

Dans *La Poétique de l'espace*, Gaston Bachelard, lui, définit l'armoire phénoménologique :

L'armoire et ses rayons, le secrétaire et ses tiroirs, le coffre et son double fond sont de véritables organes de la vie psychologique secrète. Sans ces "objets" et quelques autres aussi valorisés, notre vie intime manquerait de modèle d'intimité. Ce sont des objets mixtes, des objets-sujets. Ils ont, comme nous, par nous, pour nous, une intimité.⁶

Les difficultés de cette armoire phénoménologique sont de nature mimétique. L'abstraction poétique n'est alors nullement une possibilité et les signes positifs ne peuvent être guère convertis en signes négatifs. On tombe ainsi dans le piège de la référentialité, car la phénoménologie n'admet, malheureusement, pas de sémi-osis. D'une manière plus précise, du moins dans la présente perspective, notons un certain nombre de syntagmes parallèles. Chez Paul Eluard il est question de "faux trésors" et "d'armoires vides"; chez Alain Grandbois, de "faim," de "soif," de "trésors ridicules," de "coeurs nus" et de "chambres vides." On nous accordera facilement que, dans le domaine de la négativisation de l'intimité, le texte d'Alain Grandbois constitue l'hyperbole de celui de Paul Eluard. C'est ainsi que "faux trésors" n'est que le pôle négatif de "vrais trésors," alors que "trésors ridicules" fait définitivement pencher la balance du côté de la dégradation et le jugement qui retenait chez Paul Eluard une dimension intellectuelle devient chez Alain Grandbois "gorgé" d'émotions. Aussi, les "faux trésors" d'Eluard impliquent une connaissance au niveau professionnel: il faut être un expert pour reconnaître le vrai du faux. Pour Grandbois on passe à l'évidence du coeur universel, car tout le monde peut reconnaître un "trésor ridicule" pour ce qu'il est. L'hyperbolisation qui nous mène du faux au ridicule et du singulier au pluriel se retrouve au niveau de l'expansion spatiale: pour Eluard les armoires sont vides, pour Grandbois ce sont les chambres. On remarque d'autre part que l'emploi systématique du pluriel est déjà une forme de superlatif, une légère atténuation du modèle hébraïque jadis si savamment emprunté par Baudelaire dans sa célèbre ouverture de "La Balcon":

Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses,
O toi, tous mes plaisirs! ô toi, tous mes devoirs!
Tu te rappelleras la beauté des caresses,
La douceur du foyer et le charme des soirs,
Mère des souvenirs, maîtresse des maîtresses!⁷

Mais si le pluriel est plus abondant chez Grandbois que chez Eluard c'est parce que les structures hyperboliques ont des fonctions plus complexes chez ce dernier. En effet le texte d'Eluard, comme l'a si bien montré Michael Riffaterre, n'est constitué que de "variants de *rien*."⁸ Mais ce qui domine le texte de Grandbois ce n'est pas la simple négation; ce serait plutôt une ambivalence de type rimbaldien, c'est-à-dire une "alchimie définitive," fondée sur un "mariage des contraires."⁹

TOUT D'ABORD, comme je l'ai rappelé plus haut, Gaston Bachelard affirme que l'armoire fait partie de "ces objets mixtes," de ces "objets-sujets," qui, selon le philosophe, garantissent l'existence de l'intimité. On remarque que la distinction entre le sujet et l'objet est fortement marquée chez Eluard, tandis que la totalisation chez Alain Grandbois implique que l'hypogramme "armoire" est bel et bien un sujet-objet. Ainsi le "nous tous" du poète québécois est bien plus près de l'ambivalence rimbaldienne que le "tout" du poète français. Si "je est un autre," l'autre peut aussi être un autre; et, par récurrence, on retrouve le sujet de l'énonciation "dans un même élan fraternel." Pour le poète qui tient à distinguer le sujet de l'objet, c'est justement l'autre qui est déjà l'objet. Cette dichotomie ne peut s'appliquer à Grandbois qui ici, comme ailleurs, insiste sur cet "élan fraternel." Ce syntagme collectif illustre par sa syntaxe, beaucoup plus que par son contenu sémantique, le procédé fondamental de sémiotique illimitée.¹⁰ Le premier frère est un signe à qui l'élan d'interprétant pour atteindre le deuxième frère, mais l'interprétant est aussi un signe de l'objet second. La recherche de la signifiante devient ainsi une chaîne, un phénomène prouvé par récurrence. "L'élan fraternel" s'oppose à l'illusion d'un sens singulier, statique, privé et intime. Ce dernier étant symbolisé par l'armoire absente et hypogrammatique, la tension du discours poétique est de cette manière produite en système.

Bien d'autres exemples, fondés eux aussi sur des hypogrammes implicites, confirmeraient les relations entre le sujet pluriel et l'armoire. Mais le texte le plus connu d'Alain Grandbois, celui où l'hypogramme est actualisé, c'est le dernier poème de *Les Iles de la nuit*. Au-delà des louanges creuses, il est essentiel de proposer une nouvelle lecture de "Fermions l'armoire. . . ." La justification d'une telle analyse serait des plus aisées mais elle serait longue car elle équivaldrait au travail qu'Etiemble a fait pour Rimbaud, elle s'appellerait donc 'Le Mythe de Grandbois.' Un exemple suffira dans le cadre de la présente étude. L'un des plus sérieux ouvrages sur l'oeuvre de l'auteur de *Les Iles de la nuit*, celui de Jacques Blais, offre le commentaire suivant:

Accompli en droit, le destin du "veuf de la nuit" reste, de fait, inachevé. L'ultime poème, "Fermions l'armoire. . .," petite somme de l'expérience que traduit le recueil entier, n'offre pas de solution définitive. On peut y lire aussi bien la défaite que la victoire. Veuf inconsolé, lui qui porte le deuil de la fiancée perdue, le poète sait qu'une coupure temporelle sépare encore le présent ténébreux du passé illuminé. . . . On voit le poète voué à un épuisant destin de recommencement. . . . De retour des Enfers, à la veille d'y replonger, le poète trompe l'angoisse par l'exercice du seul pouvoir qu'il puisse revendiquer, celui de la parole.¹¹

Ainsi, toujours selon Jacques Blais, l'armoire n'est autre que "l'armoire aux sortilèges du verbe" et, nous dit-on, elle "reste ouverte."¹² Etrange lecture que

celle de l'auteur de *Présence d'Alain Grandbois* qui se permet d'ouvrir une armoire que le poète vient de fermer deux fois et qui attribue à un sème la présupposition de la parole. Voilà où peuvent parfois mener les acrobaties de l'explication de texte traditionnelle! Et encore, ne me suis-je contenté que de relever quelques unes des plus évidentes des nombreuses contradictions puisées à la source de la critique impressionniste. En effet, il ne suffit pas de paraphraser Nerval, Baudelaire et Rimbaud pour comprendre Grandbois. L'erreur de beaucoup de critiques c'est d'interpréter trop vite des textes qu'ils ne lisent pas rétro-activement ou qu'ils lisent mal. Ce qu'ils oublient c'est d'analyser les sèmes. Michael Riffaterre le rappelle clairement:

Tout lecteur est en mesure d'induire une présupposition à partir des sèmes d'un mot. La lecture littéraire n'est au fond qu'une sémanalyse, pratiquée d'instinct. L'érudition c'est retrouver des exemples écrits, historiques, de cette sémanalyse, mais l'intertextualité n'a besoin pour fonctionner que des sèmes. Si le spécialiste a une raison d'être, dans ces conditions, c'est qu'il reste à déterminer les règles abstraites de la transformation des structures sémiologiques. Il ne doit pas être érudit, mais sémioticien.¹³

C'est dans cette perspective qu'il faut se poser la question suivante: Comment peut-on élucider cette relation entre l'armoire et le sujet pluriel? Alain Grandbois écrit:

Fermons l'armoire aux sortilèges
Il est trop tard pour tous les jeux. (82)

Si étonnant que cela puisse paraître, le sémioticien doit ici commencer par la lecture du signifiant, car dans le cas de Grandbois cette dernière n'est pas sans surprise. Comme chez le grand prédécesseur du poète, Saint-Denys-Garneau, l'enfance sert ici de structure thématique.¹⁴ Mais avec Grandbois, l'on n'est plus absorbé par le jeu de l'enfant, car fermer l'armoire c'est cesser de rêver, c'est rejoindre la réalité adulte. D'une manière plus simple: on ferme le coffre à jouets pour adultes puisqu'il est trop tard. Mais d'une manière plus compliquée, il faut bien accepter les variations homonymiques du signifiant. Une transcription phonétique permettra de matérialiser ce dernier:

feRmōlaRmwa:R oscRtilɛ:ʒe
iletRota:R pu:Rtuleʒφ

Ma transcription en "français standardisé" (l'expression est de Pierre Léon) évoque déjà une base consonantique dont la richesse est loin d'être indispensable à la rime. De plus, si l'on voulait respecter la langue du poète, l'on reviendrait à l'exactitude dictée par une énergie métaphonique appliquée au système vocalique. On aurait donc: "tous les je" = "tous les jeux." Du singulier de l'armoire sont "sortis" tous les "je" et à l'épuisement de l'identité correspond l'épuisement ludique. Deux forces opposées s'annulent ici: l'action des jeux réagit au rêve du "je."

L'impossibilité, comme dans la logique enfantine, devient la loi. D'ailleurs, c'est bien l'enfant-poète qui pourrait formuler la surprise du néant ainsi :

Je sais qu'il est trop tard
Déjà la colline engloutit le jour. (83)

Lorsque la colline aura englouti le jour, que restera-t-il? On retrouve les variations de *rien* déjà signalées chez Paul Eluard. Pour contenir cette absence, une armoire est-elle nécessaire? Oui, puisque le contenu sémantique de "rien" a tout de même besoin du contenant, du signifiant [Rje]. C'est une subtile et angoissante exploration de langage et non une croisière du monde que propose ici Alain Grandbois. Le moi poétique n'est qu'un jeu de signifiants et c'est leur paradigme qui compose l'illusion du "je" car l'identité, elle aussi, n'est fait que de mots. Autre lecture, celle qui reprend le refrain :

Tout cela est trop tard
Fermions l'armoire aux poisons. (83)

Encore une fois on peut être quelque peu surpris par la critique qui n'a pas vu ici une périphrase à peine voilée. Comme l'enfant est le premier des sujets pluriels à parler au début du poème, c'est le moribond qui s'exprime dans ces deux vers car "l'armoire aux poisons" n'est que la pharmacie. En effet, le remède tardif peut-il être autre chose qu'un poison, la cruelle illusion du salut?¹⁵ Au fond, fermer l'armoire c'est renoncer aux sèmes de l'intimité, c'est l'ouvrir au lecteur. La structure thématique étudiée ne fonctionne donc que comme un variant de impossibilité, de l'inexprimable. A l'intérieur de ce paradigme la solution, du moins au niveau de l'analyse, réside dans la prise de conscience du fait que *rien* ne peut être résolu dans la poésie d'Alain Grandbois et que cette indétermination actualise toute valeur esthétique. L'interprétation n'est ici possible qu'à condition de la voir comme contradiction. La magie de l'armoire littéraire est d'ordre potentiel : c'est la possibilité d'actualiser un monument d'art verbal comme celui qui s'érige à l'horizon de *Les Iles de la nuit*.

NOTES

¹ C'est un professeur-poète québécois qui écrit le volume en question : Jacques Brault, *Alain Grandbois* (Paris : "Poètes d'aujourd'hui" 172, Seghers, 1968). Parmi les autres volumes consacrés à Alain Grandbois les suivants sont à signaler : Jacques Blais, *Présence d'Alain Grandbois avec quatorze poèmes de 1956 à 1969* (Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval, 1974) ; Sylvie Dallard, *L'Univers poétique d'Alain Grandbois* (Sherbrooke : "Profils" 9 Editions Cosmos, 1975) ; Madeleine Greffard, *Alain Grandbois* (Montréal "Écrivains Canadiens d'aujourd'hui" 12 Fides, 1975).

² Paul Eluard, *OEuvres complètes I*, eds. Marcelle Dumas et Lucien Scheler (Paris : "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade" Gallimard, 1968), p. 412.

- ³ Michael Riffaterre, *Sémiotique de la poésie*, Trans. Jean-Jacques Thomas (Paris: "Collection Poétique" Seuil, 1983), p. 14. La version anglaise, *Semiotics of Poetry*, fait du rôle culturel de l'armoire quelque chose de typiquement français: "The French sociolect makes it *the* place for hoarding within the privacy of the home" (Bloomington and London: "Advances in Semiotics," Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 3.
- ⁴ Alain Grandbois, *Poèmes: Les Iles de la nuit, Rivages de l'homme, L'Etoile pourpre, Poèmes épars* (Montréal: "Collection Rétrospectives" L'Hexagone, 1979), p. 27. Toute référence ultérieure à cet ouvrage ne fera pas l'objet d'une note et sera simplement suivie de sa pagination.
- ⁵ *Sémiotique de la poésie*, p. 25. Il est bon d'ajouter cette autre précision qui semble très bien s'appliquer à l'exemple considéré: "L'hypogramme est formé par les sèmes d'un mot et /ou ses présuppositions. Le signe poétique en actualise un certain nombre; le mot noyau de l'hypogramme peut ou non être actualisé" (p. 42).
- ⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: P.U.F., 1967), p. 83.
- ⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, ed. Antoine Adam (Paris: "Collection Classiques Garnier" Garnier, 1961), p. 40.
- ⁸ *Sémiotique de la poésie*, p. 14.
- ⁹ Louis Forestier, "Rimbaud et l'ambivalence," in *Etudes sur les "Poésies" de Rimbaud*, ed. Marc Eigeldinger (Neuchâtel: "Collection Langages," 1979), p. 60. Si Louis Forestier affirme: "Le bonheur est ici et maintenant dans la maîtrise éventuelle des contraires" (p. 57), il évoque aussi la tension entre le signifiant et le référent en termes concrets: "Pour exprimer trop sommairement les choses: je dirais qu'on passe d'un vécu impossible à dire à un exprimé impossible à vivre. De part et d'autre, la même impasse" (p. 58).
- ¹⁰ Pour plus de précisions au sujet de la notion de sémiosis illimitée voir *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1976) de Umberto Eco, en particulier pp. 68-72.
- ¹¹ Jacques Blais, *Présence d'Alain Grandbois* (Québec: "Vie des lettres québécoises" Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1974), pp. 132-33.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- ¹³ Michael Riffaterre, "Sémanalyse de l'intertexte: Réponse à Uri Eisenzweig" *Texte: Revue de Critique et de Théorie Littéraire* 2 (1983), p. 175.
- ¹⁴ Voir en particulier "Le Jeu," in Saint-Denys-Garneau, *Poèmes choisis*, ed. Roger Chamberland (Montréal: "Bibliothèque Québécoise" Fides, 1979), pp. 9-11.
- ¹⁵ Un texte inédit vient confirmer ce procédé de symbolisation chez Alain Grandbois. Le poète semble, en effet, associer l'espace intérieur à l'anticipation du tombeau. Dans "Musique me replongeant . . ." il écrit:
 Comme les murs de ma chambre qui est froide
 comme un linceul
 Et je l'aime ainsi et ainsi je m'habitue
 [*Poèmes Inédits* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1985), p. 57]. Ces vers contiennent ce que Gaston Bachelard appellerait des "images du dedans." Ces dernières permettent à Alain Grandbois d'appivoiser la mort au niveau des sentiments comme Montaigne, lui, l'avait fait au niveau de la perception intellectuelle.

POOR BASTARD

Remembering Alden

Michael Brian Oliver

Three years ago today you died,
I shovelled dirt down in your grave;
And Mother Earth was like a bride
Who has a secret she must save.

Beside your raging, boozing son,
Beside your stricken, grieving wife,
I could not think what we had done
But talk of poetry and life.

A man who had the gift of words,
You were, as well, the perfect host.
Now strangers gathered like the birds
To seek the comfort of your ghost.

To think we sinners had sufficed,
No priest transformed our certain loss.
But still you knew the life of Christ,
You rest beneath a Celtic cross.

Self-pitying, as if rehearsed,
We gazed in sorrow at the dust;
But though the day seemed all reversed,
Your verse will outlive all of us.

For time, a lifetime, is a part;
Eternity is *a* to *z*.
It takes a gentle, loving heart,
Like yours, to live though you are dead.

Each day is now like Nowlan's wake,
As if yourself stood in the door,
To hug us for our human sake,
To drink because mankind is poor.

June 27, 1986

THE DESCENT INTO HELL OF JACQUES LARUELLE

Chapter I of "Under the Volcano"

David Falk

IT IS HARDLY NEWS that Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* is a profoundly autobiographical work, but worth stressing is the extent to which the novel was prompted by a desire, not for self-discovery, but for self-mastery. The writing of the novel was meant to provide Lowry with the necessary psychic distance from what he called the "forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself"¹ so that he would not succumb to them. By projecting these forces from within the self into the novel, Lowry hoped to transform them permanently into fiction: to confine them between the covers of his work so that they could no longer function as a real force in his life.

The process is most obvious with Geoffrey Firmin, whom Lowry described as composed of "self + bad guilty imagination."² The Consul is the nexus for what was most self-despairing and self-destructive in Lowry. As the Consul's story, *Under the Volcano* tells of his capitulation before the terrifying forces within, and tells us in such a way that this defeat is a given. For Chapter I is set on the anniversary of the Consul's death so that what we witness in the eleven ensuing chapters is the unfolding of a fate we know already to be sealed.

The inescapability of the Consul's doom contributes heavily to its tragic weight and makes him the towering figure he is. But it is this very ineluctability that finally serves to separate Lowry from his persona. Lowry the man is not only still alive at the novel's completion with a future before him, he has turned the destructive energies of the self into the source of creative triumph.

The Consul becomes a warning, then, for Lowry, not a prophecy. But it is essential to see how much reliance Lowry places on being a successful author as the sign of his transcendence of what Jung would call the shadow. Until the publication of *Under the Volcano*, however, he had little cause for self-congratulation. He had published only one novel, *Ultramarine*, which embarrassed him³ and which he felt, wrongly, was derivative to the point of plagiarism. Two other novels, *In Ballast to the White Sea* and *Lunar Caustic*, were unfinished: and during the writing of *Under the Volcano*, *In Ballast* was destroyed by fire, survives only as thirteen crumbling bits of charred manuscript, on one of which can

be read, ironically, the words, "the goodness of fire." Finally, an earlier version of *Under the Volcano* had been rejected by numerous publishers.

Lowry's basic reaction to his writing career before *Under the Volcano*, then, was a sense of inadequacy that shaded into guilt.⁴ This reaction surfaces in a number of ways in *Under the Volcano*. All four major characters are failed artists. The Consul's failure derives from his own despair: he calls his work on mystic wisdom "Secret Knowledge" so that when he cannot complete it, he will have a rationalization handy. Yvonne's failure stems from a mischanneling of her womanly creativity and a consequent sense of inauthenticity. In Hugh we get enacted, not only Lowry's fear of being caught at plagiarism, but the concern behind that fear that his art may only be spawned by a desire for attention, may be just a self-dramatizing pose. It is through Jacques Laruelle, however, that Lowry explores most thoroughly the consequences for himself of artistic failure.

As the typescript of *Dark as the Grave* indicates, Laruelle is, like the Consul and Hugh, a persona for Lowry: comprised of "self plus imagination."⁵ The French filmmaker is called upon to do what Lowry himself is, to subsume the dark aspects of the self into a larger creative totality. The work opens, then, with an artist who has taken upon himself particularly the burden of making meaningful the human condition and confronts him, in Geoffrey Firmin's story, with the starkest vision of the shadow's triumph. It is the ultimate challenge, but Laruelle's response will be woefully inadequate.

On one level, a repeated note in Laruelle's interior monologue is his failure of comprehension. He cannot understand Yvonne's return;⁶ he cannot fathom the Consul's hints about occult matters (16), and finally, he can only throw up his hands before the mysteries of the previous year's events and mutter, "Quien sabe?" (31). More seriously, as Jung tells us, the unassimilated shadow acts through projections and transforms the world into our "unknown face."⁷ The first chapter is full of symbolic embodiments of the Consul — the arisen dead whose destructive energies now govern the Day of the Dead, the only time in the novel. These projections Laruelle (the perceiving consciousness) refuses to acknowledge are, at bottom, representations of his own negative drives. This refusal turns the Consul into the voice of Laruelle's own despair, and in the course of the chapter that voice will drown out all others so that it is, at last, both the only one Laruelle hears and the one with which he speaks to himself. Thus, Laruelle does not merely re-experience the downfall of Geoffrey Firmin in the chapter,⁸ its central action involves his own descent into the Inferno.

THE CHAPTER BEGINS with a descent from the stratosphere into a landscape of loss and decay, ending at the first of the ruined palaces around

which Laruelle's journey will be focused: the Hotel Casino de la Selva, whose "mournful" diving boards, empty swimming pool and overgrown jai alai courts are evocative of religious despair (3). All that remains functioning in this place are two tennis courts, the game in which love equals zero. Here on the Day of the Dead, 1939, have come Laruelle and Dr. Vigil to commemorate the "continuous tragedies" (5) in the life of their dead friend, Geoffrey Firmin.

The ironies of the situation are many and painful, for the novel opens with a portrait of survivors who are afflicted with the disease that killed the man they have come to mourn. As Vigil shares the alcoholism that is the most blatant symptom of Firmin's sickness of soul, Laruelle suffers from the Consul's inability to love. Though on his house is emblazoned the motto, "No se puede vivir sin amar," Laruelle can only react to this fundamental insight with annoyance, as something some "estupido" has written (6). His relations with women are short-lived, unsatisfactory, epitomized by his affair with a Mexican mistress with whom he always quarrels and whom he is planning to leave without regrets.

These emotional shortcomings have an even blacker side that is hinted at in his name, for "la ruelle" is the narrow space surrounding the bed of a monarch, and the suggestions of voyeurism here are more than borne out in the course of the novel. In fact, at three critical points Laruelle was a spectator at scenes of sexual disaster for the Consul. He stumbled upon and disrupted Firmin's sexual initiation in the "Hell Bunker" (21), where his presence obviously contributed to the feelings of guilt and inadequacy the Consul afterwards always associates with sex so that, at the end of the work, as the Consul has intercourse with the prostitute, he imagines Laruelle is again spying on him (351). Third, Laruelle came upon the Consul and Yvonne arguing and then embracing passionately in the ruins of Maximilian's Palace (14-15). In this last instance, the role of voyeur shades into that of interloper, and, indeed, Laruelle did cuckold Firmin.

This act of putting himself in the Consul's place has disastrous consequences for Laruelle. If he had thought by usurping his friend's place merely to enjoy the fruits of sensuality, what he finds is that, instead, Firmin has passed on to him, like a prophetic mantle, his own anguish.⁹ Thus, Laruelle has been drawn into the Consul's vice: "it was only during the last year that he had been drinking so heavily" (29). We first see him, slightly drunk, pouring himself some Mexican anis because it reminds him of French absinthe, trying through alcohol to overcome his sense of alienation and dispossession (9) as the Consul drank to dull the pain of his separation from God — and with as little success.

Moreover, like Firmin, who ceased work on his manuscript of "Secret Knowledge" (39) because he no longer believed in a vision of salvation, Laruelle has lost faith in his art. Once he imagined himself the Frère Jacques who, by means of a film version of the Faust legend based on Trotsky, would sound the alarm warning the world of the destruction it was brewing. Now, however, he finds

such dreams of saving man through art "absurd and presumptuous" (9). For the devastation has begun, making tragedy "unreal and meaningless" (5), and, in any case, in the Faustian drama of the Consul's fall, Laruelle has not experienced a catharsis, but only "grief and bewilderment at an unassimilable catastrophe" (8). He does not possess the strength of will or vision to turn these furies into mercies, in one of Lowry's favourite phrases. Rather, the main action of the chapter will involve his own shadow's victory.

Laruelle's journey begins under threatening skies at the Faustian hour when "dogs [begin] to shark" (7). It will take him from the ruined palace of the hotel in a downward (10), circular direction (23), describing "eccentric orbits" around his house (23) — "his useless tower against the coming of the second flood" (29). Finally, at seven p.m., the time of the Consul's death the year before, Laruelle will reach his destination, the Cervceria XX: "the place where you know" (7). The cantina's name also refers to the occult number for rebirth,¹⁰ but for Laruelle the name is as ironic as the Farolito, with its allusion to Christ, is for the Consul. Here he will discover neither the knowledge that can give him hope nor the means of regeneration.

The Frenchman imagines he is making a journey of a quite different sort. He plans to leave the next day on the first leg of a voyage away from Mexico to his own home, Paris. The imagery surrounding these plans suggests that they entail a successful completion of the pilgrimage in *The Divine Comedy*. For Laruelle came to Quauhnahuac — under the volcano — from Hollywood, his dark wood, the place where he had been "hurt in his art and destiny" (210). Now, having witnessed the Consul's damnation, he intends to depart from Vera Cruz, the True Cross.

Lowry carefully undercuts any optimism, however. Laruelle's desire to leave the Consul behind is enacted symbolically in his decision not to follow the last bus from Tomalin back to town — the return trip the Consul never made — but to head instead to the railroad station from which Hugh, the other survivor, departed. This attempt to turn away from the horrors of the past is futile, for the train station sounds the first notes of the bleak theme of "a corpse will be transported by express" (43) that will become an important motif for Firmin's death. Further, that the station seems dead, as if no trains ever arrive or leave (7), indicates that Laruelle will not escape so easily from the nightmare world of the Consul. Indeed, the home he longs for is threatened by the very political forces which murdered Firmin.

Laruelle is incapable of an adequate emotional or moral response to the war: "One side or the other would win. . . . And in either case one's own battle would go on" (9). As if in answer to this failure of brotherly love, the scenery of his favourite walk is transformed into a wasteland of barren fields and dead trees, and he becomes aware suddenly of an approaching storm (10). Laruelle ima-

gines for a moment that he would like nothing better than to be drenched, but this vague desire for purification is dissipated as, studying the clouds, he realizes that the storm is a symbol of "love which comes too late" and its unslakeable thirst, as well as an emblem of divine wrath (10). In addition, the storm is a repetition of the past: at the time of Firmin's murder just such a storm broke out of season.

The entire scene is a perfect synecdoche for Laruelle's quest. Trying to turn his back on the Consul's landscape, he only succeeds in revealing the "consul" within himself: his inability to love and his egoism. As the scene opened with his avoiding the bus route that reminds him the Consul is dead, it closes with him becoming aware that, inadvertently, he has been following the direction of the Consul's fateful bus ride in Chapter viii, and with this awareness hope is quashed.

AT THIS POINT OCCURS ONE of the most significant events on his journey. Laruelle has intended to go in the direction of the model farm, scene of Hugh's idyllic ride with Yvonne in Chapter iv. Instead, on a "sudden impulse" (12), following the subconscious promptings of despair, he takes the road past the prison to the second of the ruined palaces that mark the stages of his descent into hell.

Maximilian's Palace is one of the more complex symbols in the chapter, but its immediate relevance for Laruelle is as the home of a usurper and the place where "love had once brooded" (14), and so his approach to it is through a landscape that calls up his own usurpation of Firmin's place with Yvonne. The Frenchman tries to justify his affair by relating his passion for Yvonne to the emotions he experienced when first viewing Chartres cathedral (12). In his case, however, this equation of physical and spiritual love is unwarranted since he is a parasite. As he has borrowed the Consul's wife, so he could only remain in Chartres by going "scandalously in debt" (12). Thus his happy memories are replaced by the burden of past sorrows, which, it seems, emanate from the mountains surrounding him: an ironic image that turns one of the novel's key symbols of spiritual transcendence into a metaphor for remorse.

This foreshadowing of Laruelle's ultimate spiritual failure is answered by another projection of the Consul's: the wreck of a blue Ford under whose wheels bricks have been wedged to prevent its sliding irrevocably into a ditch as Firmin's life was one long descent into the barranca (13). Feeling a "sort of kinship, an empathy" (13) with the wreck, Laruelle becomes impatient for it to complete its descent. This is the closest Laruelle comes to recognizing his spiritual oneness with the Consul, and, painfully, there spring into his mind the words of the long misdirected postcard from Yvonne that is delivered to the Consul on the day of

his death: the postcard which, partly in revenge, Firmin leaves under the pillow on Laruelle's bed as if willing that the adulterer should read its words of love and reconciliation just as Hugh calls from Parian to tell him of the murders. With this first mention of Parian, its distinctive landmark, the prison with its watch-towers, looms up in stark contrast to the spires of Chartres, and as darkness begins to fall like the "House of Usher" (14), Laruelle is escorted into the ruins of the palace by an obscene concourse" (14) of hellish, insect-like birds which will reappear in Chapter IV as a symbol of adulterous love (98).

Like the Hotel Casino de la Selva, the ruins of Maximilian's Palace objectify the dark night of the soul, but the imagery here is bleaker and cuts deeper:

the pool, covered with green scum [waited] to close over his head. The shattered evil-smelling chapel . . . the crumbling walls, splashed with urine, on which scorpions lurked . . . slippery stones covered with excreta. . . (14)

Worse than the dark wood, this is the cloacal atmosphere of hell itself. At the same time, as the Poe allusion indicates, it is an emblem of the shattering of the mind under the weight of madness and suicidal depression: a further projection of the Consul's doom. What I want to stress, however, is the ruins' relevance to Laruelle. Though capable of making the connection between Maximilian and Geoffrey Firmin, Laruelle cannot see that in the Franco-Austrian puppet he is being confronted with a projection of his own shadow. Like the murdered usurper, Laruelle is a Frenchman in Germanic guise — having developed his artistic vision during an apprenticeship to the Ufa filmmakers (24) — and he, too, has come to Mexico pursuing dreams of greatness only to be undone by the fatal beauty of the place (10).

Laruelle's inability to recognize the manifestations of the shadow and its consequences are explored further. The Frenchman — who, we now are informed, is dressed like the Consul (15) — heads downhill over a terrible road, full of potholes, to the bridge across the barranca in another recapitulation of Firmin's last day. Laruelle remembers a conversation with the Consul on this same bridge in which Firmin compared the barranca to Atlantis, another Eden engulfed by flood, and suggested Laruelle make a film on the theme. The Consul then went on to tell Laruelle of the storm god *huracan* that "testified so suggestively to intercourse between opposite sides of the Atlantic" (16). Laruelle still cannot understand what Firmin meant, perhaps because he does not wish to acknowledge this reminder of his adultery with the American Yvonne. But in an oblique fashion, he was also being informed that he had yielded to his own "spirit of the abyss" and has ruined his own symbolic garden of Eden: informed by a man of similar fate who for once had drunk himself sober enough (16) to look into the abyss and see that its destructive energies could be turned to creative use if one could face them honestly. Laruelle, however, will never achieve this assimilation of the shadow — as he will never make the Atlantis film — so that thinking of

his meeting the Consul in Quauhnhuac after so many years, he is unable to see the enormous possibilities for growth in their coming together again and dismisses it as meaningless, a "favorite trick of the gods" (16). Instead, staring into the barranca what he is reminded of are the incidents, especially the Hell Bunker incident, that disrupted and ultimately severed their friendship.

Laruelle's failure even to recognize, never mind come to terms with, the dark aspects of his personality is, again, answered by a reincarnation of the Consul's losing struggle with his shadow in the figure of the drunken horseman riding wildly — "a maniacal vision of senseless frenzy, but controlled, not quite uncontrolled" (23) — whose perilously maintained equilibrium will soon be shattered, plunging him to death. This vision prepares the stage for the climactic phase of M. Laruelle's journey.

Mindful at last of the circular route he has been following, he heads down the Avenida de la Revolucion on the final round of his descent into hell (23). The last bus to Tomalin passes, in another reminder of Firmin's journey to doom, while across the road Laruelle spies Dr. Vigil's office and thinks how the doctor's publically proclaimed role as pediatrician and specialist in nervous disorders contrasts with the notices in men's rooms advertising his skill in treating sexual problems — notices the Consul will discover only when it is too late for Vigil to help him (352). It is not only Geoffrey Firmin who dies when a cure is available. The West seems determined to follow his example, and as Laruelle nears the cinema adjoining the Cerveceria XX, the passage of newsboys hawking a pro-Nazi paper makes him aware of a "kind of fever" (24) in the air.

Before he can reach the theatre, the rain begins to fall in torrents, and he races for cover toward the marquee, his earlier desire to get soaked to the skin gone. For the thunderstorm that has already been identified as a visitation of divine wrath now comes to represent the war as well: "people are taking refuge from the storm as in the world they are creeping into bomb shelters."¹¹ The cinema, however, proves no refuge from either manmade or divine devastation; rather, it is transformed into a symbolic theatre of operations in which the forces of darkness combat the forces of light. On the one hand, the electricity has failed, plunging the theatre into a "graveyard darkness" (28) at once evocative of the "lights going out all over Europe" and of hell: "Dark shapes of pariah dogs prowled in and out of the stalls. The lights . . . glimmered, a dim reddish orange, flickering" (26). Further, the German film being shown, *Las Manos de Orlac*, comes to represent the schizophrenic nature of Western civilization:

An artist with a murderer's hands; that was the ticket, the hieroglyphic of the times. For . . . it was Germany itself that, in the gruesome degradation of a bad cartoon, stood over him. (25)

Las Manos de Orlac will become a significant motif in *Under the Volcano* for

the refusal to acknowledge our collective guilt and the failure to conquer our destructive impulses.¹²

The scene at the theatre and the Cervceria XX has especially ominous significance for Laruelle. If he had hoped through this journey to find a way out of the Consul's destructive universe back to a world of his own, he is to be sorely disappointed. As the Cinema Quauhnahuac and the Cervceria XX are, in reality, one establishment, so Laruelle's life is inextricably bound up with Firmin's. That it should be *Las Manos de Orlac* playing gives us an additional clue that Laruelle's identity is being merged with the dead Consul's and governed by its terrible rhythms.¹³ As the film is a bad remake of an earlier work (24), so the Frenchman's fate is to be a pale carbon of the Consul's. Interestingly, when Laruelle enters the cantina, he orders the Consul's drink, tequila, before catching himself and switching to anis, and Sr. Bustamente, the manager, is particularly taken with Laruelle's English tweed jacket (26) and addresses him as "Companero" (26): the last word the dying Consul hears. Moreover, *Las Manos de Orlac* heightens our sense of Laruelle's impending personal disaster since its presence on his Day of the Dead sounds the theme of eternal recurrence and negates the possibility of achieving rebirth: "we have not revived it. It has only returned" (26).

In other ways, too, Lowry clearly indicates that this voyage of the filmmaker "home" to the cinema does not result in the discovery of a basis for hope and renewed creativity. What Laruelle finds at the Cinema Quauhnahuac is a cruel counterpoint to his earlier vision of changing the world through art. The plot of *Las Manos de Orlac* itself involves an artist's defeat before the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself. It deals with a scientist and a musician who both love a woman named Yvonne. When the artist's hands are crushed in an accident, the jealous scientist performs a transplant in which his rival is given the hands of a murderer. These seem to possess a will of their own and lead him to menace the woman he loves.

The blackout in the theatre needs to be viewed as the death of Laruelle's artistic aspirations, and it is an added irony that the film is suspended at seven o'clock, the moment of the Consul's death. Furthermore, there are images that relate the theatre to Bunyan's Vanity Fair — it is like "some gloomy bazaar or market" (24) — and connect its "endless procession of torchlit shadows" (26) — with Plato's Myth of the Cave, suggesting that Laruelle has devoted himself all along, out of a desire for self-aggrandizement, to what is illusory.

AS ALWAYS IN THE NOVEL, the loss of hope is coupled with the realization of personal guilt. As Laruelle studies the poster for *Las Manos de*

Orlac, he is made to confront at last the fact that his adultery with Yvonne has contributed to the Consul's death: that the artist with a murderer's hands is, in a painfully real sense, himself (25). The themes of the loss of creative power and the awareness of guilt are united by way of the volume of Elizabethan plays Sr. Bustamente now hands over to Laruelle. For the Frenchman had borrowed the book from the Consul to use in his Faust project, only to leave it — unread — in the cantina (28), and this testimony to his unfulfilled aspirations becomes a symbol of his betrayal of the Consul's friendship as well, "an emblem of what . . . it is impossible to return" (27).

The return of the book is the signal for Laruelle's final descent into hell. Appropriately, it is accompanied by the drawing near of a costumed figure, "a sombre pillar . . . bearing a tray of chocolate skulls" (27), and the suddenly loud sounds of the storm. Sitting rigidly with the book before him, Laruelle feels "like someone lying in a bath after all the water has run out, witless, almost dead" (29). This demonic parody of his former desire for purification leads him to view the storm as the coming of the second flood, against which he is unprotected, and his hopelessness deepens when he recalls that it is the "Night of the Culmination of the Pleiades" (29), for what was to the ancient Mexicans the beginning of the new year is to him the end of the world. Furthermore, through this allusion the full extent of his despair is revealed. The "Culmination of the Pleiades" is a central motif in the description of Yvonne's death, and Laruelle has been careful, up to this point, not to acknowledge her fate in any way.

Laruelle's attention returns to the volume of plays, and opening it at random in a game he has learned from the Consul, he comes upon a passage from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*:

Then will I headlong fly into the earth!
Earth, gape! it will not harbour me! (34)

He has misread the quotation, however, substituting "fly" for "run" in the first line and "Earth, gape!" for "O, no" in the second. In this way the voice of Faustus's despair becomes Geoffrey Firmin's, and the passage is turned into one more recapitulation of the Consul's death in which his corpse will be thrown into the abyss of the barranca. For Laruelle, too, the passage is ominous, and staring at it, he feels his own soul drawn "downward into a gulf, as if in fulfillment of his spirit" (34) of these words of doom. When he looks more closely and sees his mistake, he takes comfort in the original: "Under the circumstances to run was not so bad as to fly" (34). But this is false consolation since the passage echoes Firmin's last words to Yvonne and Hugh as he rejects their attempts to save him: "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running . . ." (314). Moreover, the original passage prefigures Laruelle's forthcoming descent into hell, which will be less dramatic than the Consul's but just as dire.

Closing the book, Laruelle discovers that the colophon is the Egyptian god Thoth, who as scribe records the eternal fates of the dead. Thus the anthology is transformed into a book of judgment, and opening it again, Laruelle reads the proclamation of the Consul's damnation:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man,
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall. . . . (34)

This judgment is also an admonition to Laruelle, something Lowry makes clear to us by echoing Marlowe's imagery in the warning that closes the novel: Do you like this garden which is yours? Make sure your sons do not destroy it!

Laruelle is deeply shaken by this epiphany, but there is still more for him to learn in this "place where you know," and what awaits him is a final, heart-rending meeting with the spirit of the Consul. As Laruelle shuts the anthology, two sheets of paper fall to the floor — an unsent letter from Firmin to Yvonne. When Laruelle reads it, it is as though he were listening to the voice of the damned, returned on the Day of the Dead to describe its torment. The Consul's letter is the most moving piece of writing in the novel, a graphic portrait of the pain of love that comes too late and visionary failure made even more terrible by Firmin's acute awareness of what is happening to himself and his utter inability to counter any longer the awful forces within the self.

As Laruelle finishes the letter, the storm ends, and in its aftermath, the *Cerveceria XX* returns to life and is imbued with a "beauty and a sort of piety" (41). However, Laruelle does not participate in the scene. He sits meditatively, hearing the Consul's cry at the end of the unsent letter — "come back . . . I am dying without you . . . come back . . . if only for a day" (41) — answered by the words of Yvonne's misdirected postcard: "*Darling, why did I leave? Why did you let me?*" (13). This is the "secret knowledge" that is Laruelle's final lesson, a bequest from the Consul that serves to seal the Frenchman's utter disillusionment. For in the light of the deaths of the year before, these cries from the grave seem to epitomize the sheer futility of love and to deny totally the saving wisdom of "No se puede vivir sin amar."

For the second time in the chapter, Laruelle yields to a "sudden definite impulse" (41). As earlier he had been drawn to the ruins of Maximilian's Palace away from the Edenic model farm, so now he gives in to despair and sets fire to the Consul's letter. The burning letter is the third and last of the ruined palaces that mark the stages of his voyage, but this time this emblem of the ruin of the house of the soul is not one he merely encounters, it is one he produces himself:

Laruelle set the writhing mass in an ashtray, where beautifully conforming, it folded upon itself, a burning castle, collapsed, subsided to a ticking hive through

which sparks like tiny red worms crawled . . . while above a few grey wisps of ashes floated . . . a dead husk now, faintly crepitant. . . (42)

This final rejection of the principle of love is the last step on Laruelle's descent into hell, and his doom is announced by the solemn music of a bell, "*dolente . . . dolore*" (42), calling up the inscription over the portals of Dante's *Inferno*. In this final divorce from what is creative and healing within the self the journey of M. Laruelle ends. Unwilling to face the negative forces within himself, unable to cope with the knowledge when it is thrust upon him, Laruelle becomes in the final analysis a demonic Frère Jacques who does not ring the bell to awaken the world to the dangers threatening it. Rather, the bell tolls for him.

A number of critics have suggested that Chapters II-XII be read as Laruelle's Faust movie¹⁴ — indeed, Ackerley and Clipper insist that it be read that way.¹⁵ These critics are prompted by a passage in Lowry's famous letter to Jonathan Cape:

The wheel [whose turning closes the chapter] superficially . . . can be seen simply in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards until we reach the year before and Chapter II and in this sense, if we like, we can look at the rest of the book through Laruelle's eyes, as if it were his creation.¹⁶

The tentative language here and the tone should indicate a need for caution in taking Lowry at face value, as should the context in which the passage emerges. Lowry had no intention of making major revisions in the novel after so many years of arduous rewriting, and the suggestion that the rest of the novel *might* be seen as Laruelle's film is simply the easiest way of suggesting to Cape's none-too-perceptive editor that the chapter has an organic relationship to the whole; it offers him a handle — no matter how factitious — with which to grasp the need to leave intact a chapter he has otherwise misread and severely criticized, but of which Lowry, rightly, is extremely protective.

There is, in fact, no basis for reading the rest of *Under the Volcano* as Laruelle's Faust movie.¹⁷ To do so is to misconstrue Laruelle's function within the novel and its underlying psychodynamics as drastically as does the John Huston film, which leaves him out totally. Laruelle's failure to transcend the worst in the self is the frame for the novel. As prologue, his descent into hell sets in motion the larger tragedy of Geoffrey Firmin. As epilogue it closes the infernal circle inside which that failure confines the self permanently. It is Lowry who achieves the spiritual and artistic triumph: he creates a modern Faust; Laruelle only becomes one.

NOTES

¹ Malcolm Lowry, *Selected Letters*, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1965), p. 66.

- ² Lowry, Typescript of *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid* (Univ. of British Columbia Collection: unpublished).
- ³ *Letters*, p. 269.
- ⁴ Matthew Corrigan has explored some of the ramifications of this issue in "Malcolm Lowry, New York Publishing, and the New Illiteracy," *Encounter* 35, July 1970.
- ⁵ Typescript of *Dark as the Grave*.
- ⁶ Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (New York: New American Library, 1971), p. 6. For convenience, all further quotations from the novel will be cited in parentheses in the body of the text.
- ⁷ C. G. Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, ed. V. S. de Laszlo (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), p. 8.
- ⁸ William H. New, *Malcolm Lowry* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 32.
- ⁹ This is suggested by Laruelle's being dressed in the sort of English tweeds worn by Geoffrey Firmin at his death.
- ¹⁰ Perle Epstein, *The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 68.
- ¹¹ *Letters*, p. 69.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- ¹³ In the earliest version of the novel, Lowry tried to make Laruelle literally become the Consul. The best account of the early draft is Sherrill E. Grace, *The Voyage That Never Ends* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1982), pp. 39ff.
- ¹⁴ See Tony Kilgallin, *Lowry* (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcépic, 1973), pp. 131-47, and Richard K. Cross, *Malcolm Lowry: A Preface to His Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 34.
- ¹⁵ Chris Ackerley and Lawrence J. Clipper, *A Companion to Under the Volcano* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1984), p. 15.
- ¹⁶ *Letters*, pp. 70-71.
- ¹⁷ That Lowry employs Expressionist techniques of the sort Laruelle would use in directing a film — a point Kilgallin and Ackerley and Clipper make much of — means only that Lowry is indebted to Expressionist cinema and that his persona Laruelle shares his tastes. It in no way indicates that the consciousness governing Chapters II-XII is Laruelle's.



THE PROPHET AS TRAVELLER

Neile Graham

The man who reads portents
knows everyone's name.

He knows direction: the angle
branches point in heavy wind.

When he comes to your door
offer food and a bed,

even if your daughter
goes hungry and sleepless.

If he dreams red dogs
under your roof, he warns

of fire. If he dreams long-legged
cranes stalking high grass, flood.

If he dreams your sheep
raining down from the hills, famine.

If he has dreamt nothing at all
he will read tracks a bird,

broken-winged, left below your window.
Miles down the road he'll call

your daughter's name
you'll find her bed empty.

When she returns she'll say nothing,
but the child in her arms will sing.



LOWRY'S MOUTHS

SHARON THESEN, *Confabulations: Poems for Malcolm Lowry*. Oolichan, \$6.95.

THIS SLENDER, HANDSOMELY-PRODUCED volume consists of a sequence of twenty-seven poems, none longer than a page, which uses Lowry's life and writings as a springboard from which to sketch images of a visionary artist at bay. Some are written from the point of view of Lowry's own troubled psyche, others take a more detached view and look at Lowry from the outside. Some imperceptibly merge scenes from *Under the Volcano* and *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* with episodes from the novelist's life recorded in Lowry's own correspondence and Douglas Day's biography.

This method proves surprisingly effective. The eleventh poem in the volume, for example, reads:

So why not a visit to our old friend
the bootlegger
on so fine an afternoon?

The dripping path grows
pitch black. Some dogs howl
at an absent moon, no drunk
tells time. A flashlight
beam from the dead
of night finds him sprawled
on the forest floor
gobbling ferns —

spitting spores
around the names
of constellations
crawling the sky.

Here, Sharon Thesen begins with a scene from Lowry's story "Gin and Goldenrod." The light conversational tone of the first stanza mimics the easygoing lyrical start to the story. But Lowry's story — as its title indicates — is about opposites. Hell and darkness, signified by gin and

alcoholism, lurk within Lowry's protagonist, constantly threatening to engulf the fragile paradise of Eridanus symbolized by the golden flower. Lowry's Canadian stories often seem to have written out of a desperate need to believe that hell was behind him, but Lowry was too shrewd a judge of himself, and the image of a Canadian paradise is always tempered by a residual irony. "Gin and Goldenrod," about a return visit to a bootlegger to pay off a debt, raises the spectre of the hero's alcoholism: "Where, actually, had he spent that night? Had he slept on the ground? drunk the bottle? where had he fallen?" The story, which ends on a note of hope and reconciliation, does not answer these questions. Sharon Thesen's second stanza gives us one possible answer in its picture of Lowry sprawled on the ground. Thesen gives us the dark underside of Lowry's Canada: the "dripping path" not only refers to "Gin and Goldenrod" but also evokes "The Forest Path to the Spring." The preponderance of monosyllabic words makes the stanza echo with the rhythms of a thumping sinister drum beat. This threatening world of mysterious howling dogs and unexplained flashlight beams has an oddly dislocated quality about it.

In part Thesen's poem owes something to an anecdote about Lowry's last days in Canada which his biographer has interpreted as a significant anticipation of the writer's subsequent semi-suicide:

Lowry, crying with shame, threw himself onto the floor of the forest beside the path, rolled over on to his back, and stretched out his arms above his head. He was lying in a bed of tall ferns and when he grasped some of their leaves, he stripped them of their bitter spores, which he thrust into his mouth with both hands, chewing and swallowing compulsively. A very paradigm of compulsive orality — and ominously prophetic of the manner in which, one evening three-and-a-half years later, he clapped handfuls of sodium amylal tablets into his mouth.

But if the second stanza alludes both to Lowry's real and imaginary Canada it also draws on his nightmarish vision of Mexico. Thesen's evocative dark forest brings to mind Chapter Eleven of *Under the Volcano*, and the path in the rain to Parián. The figure of Lowry the future suicide "spitting spores / around the names / of constellations / crawling the sky" merges with that of his fictional creation Yvonne, who as she lies dying on the forest floor also sees the constellations wheeling in the sky and dreams of the destruction of her imaginary Canadian paradise.

Thesen's technique of blending the biographical with the fictional works well and parallels the often opaque transaction's in Lowry's own writing between his fictional protagonists and his legend. As a short economical poem of fifteen lines "So why not a visit . . ." exists successfully in its own right as a dramatization of a brief episode in Lowry's life. At the same time it is enormously enriched by the complex of factual and creative material it both incorporates and subliminally echoes.

What most attracts Thesen in her representation of Lowry the visionary writer are the final years of his life. The first poem in the volume seems to describe Lowry on his last trip to New York and begins on "A dove-grey morning / soon to turn blue." It takes us inside Lowry's confused and tormented mind, his "mouth talking" but the sense missing. The volume ends with a mirror image of Lowry at the very end of his life (perhaps on his last night alive), "all things for the mouth / shattered." This emphasis on Lowry's mouth neatly draws together the anecdote about Lowry swallowing the spores of ferns, Lowry gulping down a lethal overdose of sodium amytal tablets, and the novelist's compulsive fascination with what comes out of the mouth —

words. The book ends on a moment of stasis and ironic lyricism:

earth & stars, sea & fire
still
a mockingbird pipes
the morning in.

Confabulations moves full circle from the "dove-grey morning" of the first verse to the morning which appears at the end of the twenty-seventh one. The wheel turns full circle, and this, too, seems appropriate given the cyclic structure of much of Lowry's writing. (*Confabulations* is incidentally enhanced by its cover, which shows a stark electrifying nightmarish big wheel photographed by Bob Sherrin, its lurid pink and emerald colours evoking the hallucinatory Ferris wheel of *Under the Volcano* and captured by Thesen in her image of "Lowry the lone rider / vomiting mescal sideways / across the contrary circle / of fiesta-coloured light-bulbs.")

In between these two mornings we encounter poems of Mexico, Canada, and England which take us into Lowry's prolonged dark night of the soul. Thesen's version of Lowry clearly owes much to Douglas Day's biography, but in acknowledging her sources she emphasizes that "Images and situations . . . have been lifted, spliced, and grafted where they were not just out-and-out invented. This, then, is not intended to be a factual account of Malcolm Lowry's life." This approach is a sensible one, given the labyrinthine complexity and manifold ambiguities of the Lowry myth. When Thesen lists the traumas of Lowry's childhood — "the nanny who tried to smother me / one day on the cliff, / the Syphilis Museum / on Paradise Road, / my diseased eyes" — they are, in strict biographical terms, probably untrue. The nanny anecdote is improbable, the "diseased eyes" consisted of a minor eye complaint hugely exaggerated by Lowry, and there never was a "Syphilis Museum"

(the building was actually the Liverpool Museum of Anatomy). The doubtfulness of these "facts" is of little consequence, however: the important thing is that they were real for Lowry as he constructed a romantic edifice around his relatively quiet and conventional childhood. It is however careless of Thesen to identify Paradise Street as *Paradise Road*, a mistake Lowry would never have made, and in her brief account of Lowry's death at the beginning of the book she wrongly describes him as being 46 when he died.

In taking us inside Lowry's mind and ironically describing his "immense / imagination" Thesen seems wryly to acknowledge the fabulist in Lowry. As her poem about Lowry's time in a London neuropsychiatric hospital wisely and wittily puts it:

I'm in a white bed
dictating memories
to the doctor. Some of them
are pretty good
even if untrue.

Thesen's title, "Confabulations," is beautifully appropriate, since it means both "to devise imaginary experiences after loss of memory" and to converse or chat. Many of these poems do have an elastic, conversational quality, without ever becoming prosaic and flat. Thesen's virtues as a poet are her spare, thoughtful use of words and her sense of rhythm. The words dance across and down the page, enlivened by striking metaphors such as "The clouds farting thunder" and "A cumulo-nimbus cloud of / empty bottles builds in the sky."

At its best Thesen's poetry is reminiscent of the later work of John Berryman, as in her superb evocation of Lowry at work in his shack at Dollarton, B.C.:

Bix Beiderbecke at noon.
Alternating sonoryl and straight gin,
five, ten, twenty
versions of a sentence
annealed to one broken one.

Could be anywhere — the same sea
surrounds. Triumphant lucidity
of mind, the hand steady.
Everything behind him now.
The Voyage That Never Ends
swells by a page or two,
drifts north-northwest.

In giving us an image of Lowry *the writer*, someone who takes "up to a whole afternoon / to find the word / I need." Thesen valuably reminds us that no matter how colourful and compelling the Lowry myth may be, it is the writing rather than the life that matters. *Confabulations* both enriches and is enriched by Lowry's work, and this is a striking achievement.

RONALD BINNS

DEMON OF ANALOGY

ELSA LINGUANTI, *L'itinerario del senso nella narrativa di Malcolm Lowry*. Adriatica, L.
15,000.

ITALIAN INTEREST IN Malcolm Lowry has progressed in two stages. During the 1960's the major works (except *Lunar Caustic*) were translated; in the 1970's several articles on Lowry's work were published, and *Lunar Caustic* was translated. The monograph of Professor Linguanti (who teaches English, Canadian and Commonwealth literatures at the University of Pisa) is the first full-length treatment of Lowry to appear in Italian, though it was preceded, in 1982, by Mario Domenichelli's *Il mito di Issione: Lowry, Joyce, e l'ironia modernista*.

Linguanti's approach to Lowry is formalist and rhetorical. Her point of departure is the tripartite division of Lowry's three major works (*Under the Volcano*, *Lunar Caustic*, *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*) suggested by their parallels with the *Commedia*. (She does not consider *Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*

and *October Ferry to Gabriola*, which she terms an “embarrassment to reader and critic.”) The three major texts are analyzed in terms of *dispositio*, *elocutio*, and *inventio*, and in accordance with the narrative methodologies of H. Weinrich, Genette, Teun Van Dijk, and Mieke Bal.

The analysis of *Volcano* is exhaustive. There is a long opening section on the verb tenses of the novel where the past tense predominates: “everything is *déjà vu*, *déjà lu*, *déjà fait*.” In these terms, the metaphor of the (dantesque) journey is related as well to the process of writing, and hence her title. Another analysis reveals that each chapter has the duration of approximately one hour, and that the chapters vary in length from 21 to 41 pages (though this observation is based on the 1963 Penguin edition). She notes that the figures of irony take all the classical rhetorical forms; of particular interest in this context is the ironic use of the adjective “little.” The novel’s irony is directed against institutions and ideologies, individuals and their illusions, and against language itself. Even the *Commedia* is ironized in the episode of the Hell Bunker, and thus the novel achieves a form of *autocritique*.

Over half the monograph is devoted to *Under the Volcano*. The following section, on “the Purgatory of *Lunar Caustic*,” gives ample attention to the intertexts of that work. Here, as well, Linguanti draws extensively on her consultation of the Lowry papers at the University of B.C., comparing the first version of the novel (“The Last Address”) with the second (“Swinging the Maelstrom”). Linguanti notes that in the passage from “LA” to “SM,” Lowry “freed himself from the vice of citation,” and moved from the autobiographical to the emblematic.

The last fifth of the book is devoted to *Hear Us O Lord*, and in particular to “Through the Panama,” “Elephant and

Colosseum,” and “The Forest Path to the Spring.” Linguanti concludes that the Lowrian voyage never ends largely because the demon of analogy never allows it to find an original place from which to begin. In the same way, Lowry’s characters are imprisoned by their memories, never inserting themselves into the world through the first person, but always through some form of meditation. The symbol of the wheel in *Volcano* thus suggests not completion but the instability of codes which remain suspended in a *coincidentia oppositorum*. *Lunar Caustic* can be seen as an attempt to open the narrative form such that an escape from the “vicious circle” of *Under the Volcano* might be found. *Hear Us O Lord* represents an exit from this purgatorial round in its quest to discover new languages and new forms.

RICHARD CAVELL

MAGPIE MIND

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks*. Irwin, \$24.95.

AS SAMUEL MARCHBANKS REMINDS US, it is “a bad thing to keep your temper at all times.” He himself is seldom guilty of this fault, and the result is a collection of splendidly irritable observations on some of the world’s most treasured cant and absurdity. “This is sheer cantankerousness,” Marchbanks admits after a particularly joyous bout of cynicism, “and I glory in it.” Robertson Davies, the “editor” of this volume, has selected the best of Marchbanks from three works published shortly after World War II — the *Diaries* and the *Table-Talk of Samuel Marchbanks*, plus *Marchbanks’ Almanack*. Marchbanks has aged well, and the selection is both nostalgic and biting relevant to our own times.

The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks retains the three formats of its source works, which gives its mixture of short entries structure as well as variety. The *Diaries* allow us to glimpse into the private world of "Marchbanks Towers," where its owner undergoes his seasonal struggles with a temperamental furnace, a spring cold and a weedy garden. The *Table-Talk* exhibits Marchbanks in his public role, declaiming over a seven-course meal in the style of Samuel Johnson. The final *Garland of Miscellanea* is drawn from the *Almanack*, and is comprised largely of Marchbanks' correspondence with, among others, a doltish bureaucrat, an obstreperous neighbour, and an Indian chief named Thunderbelly. Of the three sections, the *Table-Talk* shows Marchbanks at his best, for he is a public figure who excels when his audience and his targets are close at hand. Having long before given up the attempt to be charming in his dinner talk, Marchbanks enjoys "Being a Character," and seasons the various courses with talk of squashed flies, elephant indigestion and appendix operations. He often discovers that a guest has taken his ridicule personally, and makes every effort to sharpen the blow. Following an exposé of divorce, for example, he finds that this topic is relevant to the experiences of a nearby lady, "Tell me," he asks innocently, "are you a discard, or a discardee?"

The *Papers* are the record of life during "the early years of the Atomic Age," and Marchbanks' concerns are sometimes characterized by a certain quaintness for readers who do not remember organ recitals at cinemas or the bi-weekly ash collection. Nevertheless, since Marchbanks prefers to examine the foibles of daily life rather than his era's more cataclysmic absurdities, his wisdom "is for all time." There will always be "young fogies" who begin adulthood with "hand me down opinions" they never dare to

question. There will always be those who, like Hollywood, sugar life and history with the sentimental delusions and make-believe heroism which Marchbanks so mercilessly exposes. For Marchbanks, the "Atomic Age" is really "the Age of Drab," especially in a nation of "spiritual impotence" and "glum platitudes." It is this drabness which prompts such irreverence, such rudeness, such unabashed egotism in Marchbanks. As Davies apologises, Marchbanks can be thoroughly dislikeable — which is one way of shaking his readers from their lethargy and self-satisfaction.

Remarkably, Marchbanks' satire is cutting without ever hardening into the bitterness of "that wonderful man Dean Swift." As he demonstrates in a hilarious parody of undergraduate poetry, disillusionment can be as trite as delusion:

Life — the thirty-cent breakfast
Offered to vomiting Man
In this vast Hangover —
The World.

In contrast to this, the programme of the "Marchbanks Humanist Party" is strongly positive and traditional. Like Dunstable Ramsay of the *Deptford Trilogy*, Marchbanks has a "magpie mind" which finds the world an inexhaustible source of eclectic fascinations. He shares his creator's belief in the continuing richness of myth and magic in an age dominated by a glib faith in science and the rational. And Marchbanks expresses little sympathy for the supposed miseries of the "Common Man": he prefers to side with those who are normally the targets of modern satire — "Royalty and the Rich."

By posing as the humble and apologetic "editor" of the *Papers*, Davies leaves us wondering how closely Marchbanks' opinions resemble his own. Certainly Marchbanks is more than just Davies under a fictional name: he is, Davies assures us, "a little taller." But their rela-

tionship is sufficiently close that Marchbanks can describe them as opposite sides of a Canadian nickel. Davies is the beaver, "symbolic of the Canadian citizen — a dowdy rodent, most valuable to his country when skinned." Marchbanks is the royal head — imperious, uninhibited and perhaps most things that the Canadian citizen is not. But Marchbanks also represents, in exaggerated form, the potential for a more vibrant Canadian identity and a typically Canadian brand of satire which is lucid without dogmatism, sceptical without its own national delusions. Davies can truly "act as a gentle waiter to Marchbanks' splendid banquet," a spicy banquet in the best Canadian style.

NICHOLAS HUDSON

LOST INNOCENTS

JIM CURRY, *Nothing So Natural*. Pulp Press, \$5.95.

ALASTAIR MACDONALD, *Flavian's Fortune: A Psychological Thriller*. Harry Cuff Publications, \$9.95.

THESE BOOKS ARE BOTH EXAMPLES of genre fiction. *Nothing So Natural* tells the story of an innocent boy growing up to recognize that the adult world is a terrifying and mysterious place. *Flavian's Fortune* is a detective story that, despite its contemporary setting, draws upon the conventions that were popular in the 1930's and 40's. Neither novel is original, but both offer excellent entertainment. The authors have mastered their genres, and the energy of their story-telling sustains the reader's interest.

Nothing So Natural is the 1984 winner of Pulp Press's annual 3-Day Novel-Writing Contest. A successful 3-Day novel requires careful planning, and the strength of this book lies in its clearly defined scenes and characters. The characters are exaggerated types: loud-mouthed alco-

holic father, long-suffering mother, crazed sister, dotty grandparents; the action is melodramatic throughout, and consists of a series of social and sexual humiliations to which the twelve-year-old narrator is subjected, culminating in the family disaster of his sister's suicide. However, this florid material works remarkably well. Curry has restricted the action of his autobiographical novel to eight episodes covering six days. Each scene is sharply realized with almost theatrical clarity. (Curry, also a playwright, has written a dramatized version of this novel entitled *Puffballs*.)

The "nothing so natural" of the title is walking, and this functions as a consistent metaphor of the father's hopes and the boy-narrator's failures. "Walk like a man," his father tells him, but young Timmy would rather run in hopes of staying ahead of yet another misfortune. "Hunting your own food," Timmy's father tells him, is also "the most natural thing." The hunting scene leads to yet another humiliation, and serves as a macabre foreshadowing of the sister's suicide at the end of the novel. Walking and hunting are linked in the book's vocabulary by the father's comparisons: "There's nothing more natural than walking. It's the most satisfying state man can achieve. Except when he's on the can." "Hunting your own food is the most natural thing on this planet, next to crapping." Both lead to the book's final metaphor: "At twelve years old, my life seemed pretty well over. I lay back on the bed and felt like shit." The core of Timmy's depression is his realization that childhood is an inescapable prison, because the father on whom he would like to model himself is a perpetual child.

All of this makes Curry's novel sound grimmer than it is. Timmy learns some useful, though sentimental, lessons about enduring dreadful experiences, and there is a lot of exuberant humour. Despite

their exaggerations, the characters are believable. Even the occasional inconsistencies in the narrative are the kind that appear in most families' private mythologies. And Curry's verbal energy keeps the book barreling along.

Flavian's Fortune is an old-fashioned detective story, set mostly in Oxford and in a castle in the Scottish Highlands. In construction it is strongly reminiscent of Richard Hull's 1935 classic *The Murder of My Aunt*. As in Hull's novel the narrative consists of the would-be murderer's secret diary, with long interpolations by the amateur detective, who is second-guessing him every step of the way. The detective begins her own narrative before the half-way point, so we know that the murderer will not succeed. Yet Alastair Macdonald manages to sustain a high level of suspense. It took all my reviewer's conscience to keep from peeking ahead.

Books like this cannot avoid being heavily conventional, but the author has managed some nice touches. His villain is repulsively self-centred, yet comic at the same time. Flavian Fortescue constantly congratulates himself on his mastery of the situation at the very moment that his own ineptitude and other people's good sense are conspiring to defeat him. Without being coy the book is pleasantly self-reflexive: an Oxford-educated university professor has written a detective story whose heroine is an Oxford don who writes detective stories. ("What does this have to do with Canadian literature?" the reader may ask. Multi-culturalism is the answer; even Anglo-Canadians have it.)

The nicest touch is this book's humaneness. Flavian's wife and intended victim maintains a touching faith in his essential good nature; even the detective can sympathize a bit with the villain; the villain gets his come-uppance with appropriate irony, but the conventional

justice of the murder mystery is tempered with a degree of mercy.

PETER HINCHCLIFFE

RED CRAYON

GERTRUDE STORY, *The Need of Wanting Always*. Thistledown, \$12.95.

GERTRUDE STORY'S THIRD BOOK, completing the trilogy of Alvena Schroeder's life, is a kind of genealogical ghost story laced with some of the Freudian overtones implicit in *The Way to Always Dance* (1983) and *It Never Pays to Laugh Too Much* (1984). But to try to sum the book up neatly obscures both the talent of its author and the novel's break-dance/waltz into jubilant singularity. The nesting themes of the first two books — Anglo/Ontario colonization and Alvena's retreat into magic eye communion with the ancient/close dead — break open and sometimes fragment idiosyncratically as Alvena's life draws to a close.

Perhaps it is easiest to assert what Story's work is and is not within the dialectic of assimilation and retreat. As in some of Alice Munro's families, here the gene pools circle in on themselves like a dog with its teeth clamped tight to its tail. But in Story's German Saskatchewan community, especially as it is revealed in *It Never Pays to Laugh Too Much*, tradition and modernization settle uneasily into a bluntly calculating or garish respectability in members of the Schroeder and Uhrich clan. Munro's connected Ontario families, the Chaddleys and Flemings, hive off, the Flemings' lunatic silence posed starkly against the jolly-minded modernity of the Chaddley aunts.

As in Audrey Thomas's *Intertidal Life* a man is central to the psyche of the female protagonist. But while Thomas details the slow-scream unravelling of

the protective whelping husband, in Story's work Alvena's half-brother, David Schroeder, is the male scrawled deep inside in red crayon. Love, hurt, obsession and the desire to be whole, stalk the characters of *The Need of Wanting Always*. Alvena's young David, dead thirty years (sometimes a vision but more often a voice inside her head that may be her own) argues with Alvena, cajoles, comments or offers both cryptic and nonsense advice on her life. Nevertheless, he remains the passionate ache beyond words situating those other significant lives that continue to become entangled in her own. The cruelty of life is that it goes on.

Because of her use of horses as a leitmotiv, Story's writing also invites comparison with that of Robert Kroetsch. However, unlike Kroetsch's racy stallion, the magical beauty of Story's horses seems to reside in a heavy-set continence reminiscent of Dresden China. Could Story's Joshua Wellington, who only sees horses in the morose half of a whiskey bottle, be a sombre parody of Kroetsch's frantic Hazard Lepage?

In *The Need of Wanting Always* the immense calm and freedom that can exist in modest order is sometimes revealed, and in a prose style that can breath-takingly establish a vivid still life even as it moves forward. In the aftermath of love-making, for example, the small clarities of pattern and contrast that Alvena produces in preparing breakfast seem to counterpoise "the chaos of the universe" that constantly threatens to engulf her tortured lover, Joshua. It would be deceptive, though, to suggest that this book is eloquently simple, satisfying or easy to read. Story is exploring the full range of her interests and her considerable talent in *The Need of Wanting Always* and with a tenacious individuality whose result is likely to inspire, perhaps influence.

The concluding book of the trilogy also makes her strong impulse toward the romantic clear. The romantic in Robert Kroetsch's work is pulled through muscle, or in a writer like Rudy Wiebe, embedded in cranial bone. But Story's Alvena is at the apex of a triangle whose "mystified" base points contain her father and half brother/lover. She often weaves, unprotected, in and out of an ideal centre that is deceptively free of emotional depth charges. The living alternative to the assimilative male in the trilogy is Alvena's mother, a force to be resisted herself as she burrows, Martha-like, within the minutiae of respectability to keep herself intact. Occasionally Alvena fights with a woman's voice, known as Ruth, trying to form inside her head. But is Ruth not the Biblical ancestress of David and the ideally conceived woman for Alvena's "Papa," "a beautiful man who loved the wrong woman"? Is illusion an escape, a vise grip, or both? This becomes a profoundly haunting question in *The Need of Wanting Always* and Gertrude Story is her own writer.

ANNE HICKS

MEMORY & WORDS

KATHERINE GOVIER, *Fables of Brunswick Avenue*. Penguin, \$7.95.

DARLENE MADOTT, *Bottled Roses*. Oberon, \$11.95.

THOUGH IN THEIR new collections Katherine Govier and Darlene Madott attempt indirectly to urge the reader towards an awareness that the narratives cannot (and, indeed, should not) make explicit, neither achieves the subtle complexities of first-rate fiction. The protagonists of these stories are most often young women who, in retrospective narratives, attempt but fail to regain or to communicate some aspect of their pasts.

A sense of isolation dominates both collections, and though the stories are aligned most closely with the tradition of the well-made realist narrative, the post-modernist emphasis on communicative (and narrative) subjectivity is also evident.

Part of the new Penguin Short Fiction series, Govier's *Fables of Brunswick Avenue* is an uneven first collection. In her two novels, *Random Descent* and *Going Through the Motions*, Govier skilfully delineated dramatic detail, particularly through imaginative and accurate similes. Her new fiction also includes poetic figures ("the cars darted off the arrivals ramp and into the traffic like drops of water down a window pane"), but in several of these stories Govier takes the very use of such figures as her topic. In "Responding to Pain," the narrative of a moderately successful writer who saves the life of her less successful and suicidal friend, the characters have different attitudes towards language and what it attempts to represent. Though the two characters "often played simile games" before the attempted suicide, when she awakens from her coma, Jackie says to the protagonist, Sarah, "The world's gone mad . . . Are you going to do a show about it?" The story ends with the ambitious Sarah, who once enjoyed having Jackie "as audience," envying the sympathy shown to her recovering friend and feeling isolated by her own relative success and clear-visioned eloquence.

Similarly, differences about the relation of image to reality separate the characters in "The Independent Woman," which ends with the cleverly ambiguous disappearance of the principal character. An even more direct examination of perceptual isolation is offered in "Tongues," told from the point of view of a Canadian woman speculating upon the conversations she hears at a diplomats' party

in Washington. The protagonist, Ellen, remembers that as a girl she had believed "only people from Western Canada spoke English without an accent. She had heard this said and had not understood it as a relative statement." The relativity of all communicative acts is now plainly evident to her, but nevertheless, she realizes that she will inevitably go on imposing subjective meanings on her perceptions.

The collection's best story, "Eternal Snow," suggestively interconnects images and events in the first-person narrative of a woman who returns to a ski resort she had visited as a child. She senses her inability to communicate to her husband the significance of this place from her past; she notes the absence of what had once been an "unspoken understanding" between them. An understated irony enforces this motif of difference, and as in other stories, the separation of linguistic figure and factual referent is examined. For example, a beautiful woman (who provides a vague threat to the marriage) is not, as the couple had first imagined, a prostitute, but "an aeronautical engineer" — a fact that lends retrospective significance to the narrator's observation that the skiers look like "spacemen in . . . padded jumpsuits" and to her moment of secluded crisis in a stalled gondola car. As the story ends she warms herself in a hot bath and feels the solitary and ineffable sadness that comes from recognizing that her past is irretrievable: "I remember I hurt more as the warmth invaded each cell than I had when the cold took over."

Characters in "Brunswick Avenue," "Going to Europe," and "The Best Dog" reach the same unhappy awareness that past and present cannot always be reconciled. As "Eternal Snow" demonstrates, Govier is capable of skilfully handling familiar themes, but too often her stories are made ineffective by mannered structuring and by her tendency to make ex-

PLICIT or too easily evident those narrative aspects that ought to be conveyed indirectly. For this reason, many of the stories do not stand up to successive readings. "The Best Dog" suffers from a connect-the-dots symbolism, and in "The Garden," "The Dragon," and "The Dancer" the reader is distanced from the narrative by an insistent third-person narrator who provides too much summary and not enough scene, as if Govier had missed the point of her epigraph—Henry David Thoreau's often quoted apology, "Not that the story need be long, but it will take a long while to make it short."

In *Bottled Roses*, Darlene Madott has lost at least some of the affected poeticism that crippled her novel *Song and Silence*. The title story offers passages of successful, even impressive description. Stylistically, however, Madott is still a weak writer, and though her premises are often intriguing, the collection never casts off the weight of poor dialogue, inconsistent voice, and unintentional ambiguity. Though quoted out of context, the following passages are typical of Madott's confused and confusing prose:

Julie had become aware of a curious smell in the room, a mineral smell, like iron. It was an animal smell, which the animal in her wanted to either circle or escape. . . .

they drove me down to Union Station and we got there too early. I wanted to walk to kill time, but my mother's shoes were too tight. I made her walk anyway. . . .

At times, the writer seems unable to hear her narrator: "There were the days when she did not see him, and then the days she did." When the narrative voice is not obscuring the stories' events, the events are too often obscuring themselves, as in this improbable love scene:

She did not want him to kiss her that way, because of the white sores on her throat . . . He crushed an aspirin and placed its powder on the tip of his little finger, and

touched the spots inside her throat. He kissed her again.

They made love quickly, both coming at the same instant.

Despite such passages, some stories have substance. The title story's narrator, Jean, is an actress who has resigned herself to her need to play out scenes in her life, even though she is made painfully aware that she does not know the scripts. The story takes the form of Jean's letter to her recently married niece; in it Jean recalls her fiancé (and eventual husband): "Paul troubled me the way a woman in the front row had once worried me by fixing her opera glasses on my face. I was flattered by the attention and frightened by it too." The distinction between Paul as the viewer and Jean as the object viewed is enforced elsewhere: Paul is employed by an aerospace company building an observatory telescope; after their engagement has temporarily broken, the two meet in a jewellery store and, during their confrontation, both avert their eyes and stare at "a pair of opera glasses." Madott lessens the irony and the effect of this motif by having Jean state her dilemma directly: "I must be in the play, not the audience." This story is strongest where it is most implicit, particularly in suggesting that Jean's need to "be in the play" is an expression of her independence from the Italian family traditions manifested in her grandmother's impositions and in Jean's fear that her own story, if told by another, could be misrepresented to her niece.

The collections' other stories are thin. Though in "Instructing the Young," Madott successfully handles the retrospective narrative, the story treads dangerously near the sentimentality that consumes "Waiting" and "When John Brown and I Were Young." As nuance gives way to pronouncement, so understated imagery becomes overstated symbol. Besides the title story, the collection's strongest

piece is "The Namesake." The narrator recalls the fantastic and invective-filled stories that her grandmother told about the narrator's aunt, and reconsiders the evil associations attributed to the aunt referred to as "Pina, the crow": "You never know if people become the name they are given, or are called after the thing their own nature's have found."

Though not as successfully as Govier, Madott also addresses the notion that the fluid boundaries of memory far exceed the limits of language. For both writers, the success of their stories is contingent on their placing the linguistic limits near the purely emotive regions of response. Though both collections have their strengths, neither can consistently impel the reader into those regions.

MICHAEL HELM

UNDERWING

GEORGE RYGA, *In the Shadow of the Vulture*. Talon, \$9.95.

MARIANNE BRANDIS, *The Quarter-Pie Window*. Porcupine's Quill, \$8.95.

BOTH GEORGE RYGA'S *In the Shadow of the Vulture* and Marianne Brandis' *The Quarter-Pie Window* develop from the style and concerns of social realism. Ryga's *In the Shadow of the Vulture* is a contemporary story of the incipient slave trade in the southern United States. The novel opens in Mexico aboard a battered truck (the twentieth-century equivalent of a slave ship) en route to the New Mexico border. The desert setting, with its heat and sterility, quickly establishes itself as a Dantesque inferno. The vulture of Ryga's title wheels overhead, waiting to consume the bodies from which the spirit has already departed.

Given the subject of slavery, Ryga could easily have turned the novel into

an anti-American tract, describing the Mexicans as helpless victims. On the contrary, he begins with a graphic account of the corruption of everyday rural life in Mexico. Young girls become whores or sell themselves to employers to escape their large families where drunkenness and hunger form the daily routine. Bandits roam the countryside, stealing and murdering as a way of life. Although each of the novel's characters comes for a time under the shadow of the vulture, most continue searching for ways to avoid ultimate despair. For many, the simplest response lies in the cultivation of sexual roles. Amid the colour and glamour of the fiesta, the man takes on the role of conquistador, establishing his identity and sense of power through his control over women. The woman, for her part, escapes the sense of nothingness by accepting the role of victim, her punishment serving to prove that she too has a place in the order of things.

Although Ryga's account possesses revolutionary implications, especially in his development of the character of Antonia as the radical woman who breaks free from the sado-masochism implicit in social roles, his perspective is by no means that of the Marxist. The spiritual landscape interests him as much as the economic, and the relation between the two moves beyond cause and effect. At times one feels the influence of Graham Greene, for some of the more interesting scenes centre on the character Anastasio, a Mexican from a poor family who becomes a priest. Almost from the beginning, Anastasio develops racial doubts about his role as priest: as a servant of the Roman Catholic religion does he not perpetuate his people's slavery to the "sacred alabaster whore" whom Cortes brought in "the bowels of his ship"? Yet Ryga shows that breaking with the Church does not free Anastasio. Instead,

it places him under the vulture's wing in a world of anarchic darkness. For Ryga, faith of some kind remains a necessity in a world where the vultures wait for all mankind.

For many Mexicans, America with its riches seems a world set apart, yet when Ryga introduces us to Stretch Henderson and his wife, essentially kind people who end by buying Mexican slaves to run their chicken farm, the shadow of the vulture falls over America as well. In the beginning, Stretch's nationalism and rugged individualism appear relatively benign; he is proud to be an American, believing his country to be the best in the world. Since Viet Nam, however, things have not gone well for America, and Stretch has secretly joined a Fascist organization. Caught up in the American dream to grow ever bigger, Stretch expands his chicken farm with the help of a large bank loan. When he finds he is unable to hire cheap American, or even Mexican, labour, Stretch first blames the situation on liberals and "pinkoes" in Washington, and then convinces himself that it is right and necessary in such "commie" times to buy "indentured labour." Ryga sets the novel during Reagan's campaign against Jimmy Carter, and the many references to Fascist support for the Republican party prove chilling.

In Ryga's vision, both the United States and Mexico suffer from the worship of false gods. The Mexicans live with a Church obsessed with the intercession of Mary, while the Americans worship the god of technological expansion. In a symbolic moment, the bandit Juan watches a gringo mount a wooden horse in a shopping centre only to be thrown to the ground. The American, he notes, cannot master technology, and becomes vicious with the consequent loss of dignity. Throughout, Ryga shows that men and women first create false gods

— technology for the Americans, the female principle for the Mexicans — and then find themselves unable to live with the results. As a result, they spend their lives in the attempt to dominate their gods and their surrogates when they should be developing an attitude of faithfulness to one another.

Although *Under the Shadow of the Vulture* offers a fascinating matrix of social and religious experience, with many of the characters sharply drawn and wholly convincing, the novel's structure remains flawed. The narrative line develops slowly, and it is not always easy to maintain interest. Even as the truck filled with Mexican slaves heads towards Stretch's farm, the narrative switches to a series of flashbacks in which Ryga details the biographies of each of the main Mexican characters. Only near the end does the pace quicken as the central conflict between Mexican and American comes to a head. A second problem lies with Ryga's prose style, which remains too circumstantial for some of the situations. At one point, for example, the young gypsy boy, Hosé, undertakes a journey outside the body. Leaving his abused body working in the corn fields, he descends to his mother's burial place in search of renewed vitality. For all its interest, the scene proves ineffective, the prose plodding along in the rhythms of candid realistic presentation. Ryga also succumbs at times to the temptation of telling his readers too much, leaving insufficient for the imagination. Yet even with these reservations about structure and style, *In the Shadow of the Vulture* remains a striking novel which wrestles with important and difficult problems. That it falls short of complete success does not detract from the largeness of its aim.

Marianne Brandis' *The Quarter-Pie Window* is the second volume of what appears to be a continuing series of

novels about the life and adventures of young Emma Anderson in Upper Canada in the 1830's. Brandis' first novel, *The Tinder Box*, portrays pioneer life for Emma and her family in their log cabin far back in the bush. *The Quarter-Pie Window* picks up the story of Emma's life after both her parents have died in a fire. Emma and her younger brother, John, move to York to live and work with their legal guardian, Mrs. McPhail, who owns a hotel. The novel shows considerable research into the customs of the early British settlers in Upper Canada, and Brandis has done a commendable job in writing a historical novel which recreates the conditions of those times.

For most readers, the immediate comparison will be with Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush*. Indeed, Brandis takes over Moodie's concerns about maintaining genteel standards in a pioneer setting. Emma and her brother come from respectable parents who give the children the manners and expectations of the gentry. The death of the parents means that the young children must work as servants in York with all the attendant class difficulties which arise. The drama increases when Emma makes friends with some new settlers, Major Heatherington and his wife, and discovers what looks like a plot on the part of Mrs. McPhail to take advantage of their lack of farming experience. Caught between two social levels, Emma must find her own individual place in a world determined to classify.

Brandis tells a good story, although in choosing a fourteen-year-old as her main set of eyes, she considerably narrows the novel's scope. At times, the child-like perspective reminds one forcibly of Lucy Maud Montgomery, and Brandis may well find her largest readership amongst girls of twelve to fourteen. Yet even here a problem arises, for Brandis remains so conscious of the need to establish an

authentic setting that bits and pieces of local colour sometimes intrude into the story-line. As well, Brandis' prose mimics the convention of nineteenth-century "high talk." Hardly ever does she allow Emma to employ colloquial speech. Consequently, Brandis succeeds in writing a historical novel about the nineteenth century, all the while employing a nineteenth-century style — an unnecessarily purist approach. Yet the novel's central image of the "quarter-pie window" — which Emma uses during the day to see out into the world and at night as a mirror to look inwards to the self — shows that Brandis can deal with larger subjects. Perhaps her next novel in the series, when Emma will be ready for courtship (the world's aristocratic associations leap to the fore), will allow Brandis to offer some twentieth-century insights into that most quintessential of nineteenth-century themes: the conflict between the individual and society.

RONALD B. HATCH

OTHER AMERICAS

ELIZABETH SPENCER, *The Light in the Piazza*. Penguin, \$7.95.

MARILÚ MALLET, *Voyage to the Other Extreme*. trans. Alan Brown. Véhicule Press, \$7.95.

LIKE EDITH WHARTON, Elizabeth Spencer revises Henry James's transatlantic themes and heightened sensibilities. "The Light in the Piazza," a lengthy short story or novella divided into fourteen sections, was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1960 and displays that magazine's preoccupation with tone and attitude. Margaret Johnson and her daughter Clara visit Florence where they admire the sights and are in turn admired by a young Italian, Fabrizio Naccarelli, who soon falls in love with Clara. The

major complication in their potential union involves an accident Clara experienced when years earlier her pony had kicked her in the head: only a scar is visible, but she has been left with the mental age of a ten-year-old. Neither Fabrizio nor any member of his family discovers her handicap as she learns the Italian language, and it is up to Margaret Johnson to face the moral dilemma whether to reveal the truth about her daughter's condition or to deceive the Naccarellis for Clara's matrimonial happiness and her own selfish desires to be free of the burden of perpetual motherhood.

When Fabrizio's father accidentally discovers that Clara is older than his son, he prepares to call the wedding off, but is prevented from doing so by Margaret's promise of a large dowry and by his own passion for her. The final scene of bride and groom driving off for their honeymoon (and Signor Naccarelli and Mrs. Johnson leaving the Florentine church) suggests the broader Jamesian themes of the distances between American and European cultures. The Johnsons are Presbyterians from Winston-Salem and Mr. Johnson, a successful businessman unable to join his wife and daughter in time, disapproves of his wife's actions; the Naccarellis are tied to Roman Catholic tradition, the Signora a middle-class Neapolitan, both peasant and goddess, the Signor leaving his Latin passion imprinted on Margaret's lips. Spencer sketches all of her characters deftly in a mixture of clarity and complexity.

These moral complexities of innocence and experience are played out against a backdrop of Italian art and architecture with Cellini's *Perseus* triumphantly opening and closing the story. The chiaroscuro of lights and shadows further heightens moral and aesthetic ambiguities. A room with a view of the Arno, and the enclosed space of piazzas and labyrinthine

streets reflect the subtleties of Margaret Johnson's centre of consciousness and Elizabeth Spencer's fascination with settings that intrigued Keats, Shelley, Ruskin, and the Brownings.

"Knights and Dragons" (1965), an even longer novella divided into four parts and sixteen sub-sections, focuses on the central consciousness of Martha Ingram, a divorcée who has escaped from New York to Rome where she works in the U.S. cultural office under George Hartwell. She guides two American families — the Cogginses and Wilbournes — through parts of Italy, through labyrinthine Venice with its heavy scirocco atmosphere, *trompe l'oeil* walls, and sculptured wells of St. George slaying the dragon. From her dream of her ex-husband injured in a hunting accident, from his remark that Europe is a wall that shadows dance on, and from the metaphor of a lance whistling past her ear, the reader may infer that knights and dragons of the psyche are interchangeable in quests for self-awareness. In Spencer's portrait of a woman, the protagonist's mind acts as battlefield for knights and dragons of old and new worlds. In her sexual quest Martha enters the lists against Gordon Ingram's giant mahogany bed, "lost on a limitless plateau with the same day's journey always in prospect" before being sequestered by Jim Wilbourne. The scene in which Wilbourne accidentally smashes a china image to the floor of Martha's apartment recalls a similar scene in James's *The Golden Bowl* and points to the significance of Spencer's icons and accidents that recur as mistakes or strokes of luck, part of the fabric of fate. As the men disappear from her life, Martha becomes the meeting point of shadow and sun, exchanging absence for freedom, a friend to any landscape, a companion to cloud and sky. (Anyone interested in pursuing the intricacies of both novellas should

consult Hilton Anderson, "Elizabeth Spencer's Two Italian Novellas," *Notes on Mississippi Writers*, 13, No. 1, 18-35.)

Written twenty years later, "The Cousins" recounts the journey of several young Southern cousins visiting Europe. The outer frame of the story centres on Ella Mason meeting her cousin Eric in Florence and recalling the events of that European summer thirty years earlier. Spencer weaves past and present, Europe and America into a rich texture. Invoking Florence of the Brownings' time, the narrator observes that if you build with stone not much changes — a remark that applies to Spencer's carefully crafted, lasting prose. She also caresses her fingers across the spines of Henry James's novels, for Spencer has learned much from the lesson of the Master in creating her own masterpieces. With finely wrought style, cinematic pacing, psychological intrigue, higher sensibility, and lyrical elegance, Elizabeth Spencer creates delight in her piazzas and voyages on both sides of the Atlantic.

Marilú Mallet's *Voyage to the Other Extreme*, a collection of five short stories, presents voyages at the opposite extreme of Elizabeth Spencer's. For the most part these stories focus on political repression and torture in Chile so that one extreme is life under South American dictatorships while the other is the freedom of Canadian democracy. Mallet's direct, cinematic style is well suited to the depiction of the painful life her characters endure.

The title of the first story, "The Loyal Order of the Time-Clock," is the translation of the French translation, "Les compagnons de l'horloge-pointeuse" (1981), although Alan Brown has translated from the original Spanish. The first-person male narrator works for the government in the time-keeper's office checking the cards of employees who punch in daily for their mechanical jobs.

Mallet evokes a Kafkaesque world of meaningless bureaucratic routine leading to torture. The boss of the fat and boring narrator makes telescopes in his office, but suddenly routine is broken when the narrator reads in the news about a flood in the interior and decides to organize an expedition to aid the victims. When he arrives at the village, he discovers that no disaster has occurred and returns to his timekeeping records, vowing to remain indifferent to political events. The irony of the title points to the impossibility of remaining loyal to humanity and political disorder when one is engaged in the mechanics of running a blind government.

The female narrator of "Blind Alley" is also a civil servant who works for the Cultural Ministry which is located in a cul-de-sac alongside brothels. The story begins with the narrator declaring that blind alleys are not sinister, but ends with her conviction, after being tortured, that blind alleys are sinister places of evil omen. Where the time-clock serves as a metaphor for temporal futility in the face of totalitarianism, the cul-de-sac acts as its spatial counterpart to symbolize the impossibility of escaping a blind fate. Grotesque minor characters, animals, and mutilation contribute to a picture of unreality amidst political absurdities in a country where half the work force belongs to the civil service. In "Voyage to the Other Extreme" the narrator seeks refuge in a foreign embassy and hopes to escape to another country, but is arrested just as his plane is about to depart.

"How Are You?" shifts to Montreal where a female Chilean refugee and male Polish refugee befriend each other in a language class where they learn superficial phrases in English. Daily repetition of "how are you?" underscores the irony of these two prisoners in a single trap with their touch of scepticism and vestige of bitterness. The smugness of Canadian

comfort contrasts sharply with the pain of Chilean terror. The final story, "The Vietnamese Hats," is the most painful in its detailed descriptions of torture, but in the closing paragraphs the reader is surprised by the revelation that the whole story has been a dream as the narrator awakens in his Montreal apartment. Where does dream end and reality begin in this nightmare of brutality? One extreme contains half of Chile in uncivilized servitude while in the other, "half of Canada was made up of types like me, people who had to leave their countries to get a lousy job in a factory." As Canada loses some talent to American brain-drain and European expatriation, we gain the voices and voyages of Elizabeth Spencer and Marilú Maillet in Montreal where so many extremes meet.

MICHAEL GREENSTEIN

THE TEXT AS CROSSROADS

REGINE ROBIN, *La Québécoite*. Québec/Amérique, n.p.

REGINE ROBIN'S *La Québécoite* is labelled a novel, that most flexible and loose of genres. It tells a story about the memories and impressions of a French-speaking Jewish woman of Slavic origin who grew up in the Paris of the 1950's and 1960's and who moved to Montréal in the 1970's. Paris and Montréal alternate in a series of flashbacks which overlap despite the fact that for the narrator each has such a distinctive urban texture, complete with unique friends and lovers, streets and Métro lines. Using the collage technique, Robin puts together a playful text which makes liberal use of lists of words, names, and signs, as well as literary and historical allusions, not to mention quotations of "other" texts, including her own poetry. English and French are

juxtaposed across typographical front lines, so to speak, as when pages of a television guide are reproduced. Two solitudes for idiots face each other across the wide white margins of the book and the snow (Voltaire and Vigneault) is now entirely electronic, in both languages. In fact, language is the key and the title fits the story to a *t*: *LA QUEBECOITE*. In a letter, the last unvoiced consonant tells the story of otherness, of difference and strangeness, but also of the silence (self-) imposed on the immigrant figure: *Québec* plus *coite* ("quiet"). Another and equally significant interpretation of the title is *Québec* plus *coit* ("coitus"), a reading which literally inscribes a making-out with the body — and the name — of Québec. The silent lover is a would-be Quebecker, doomed to being "put into parenthesis" by those who cannot believe that she, the Other, has anything to say about them: "Tu ne parleras pas. La voix muette, scellée."

The novel presents itself as an apparently chaotic conglomeration of words and texts, a patchwork of languages, genres, and even type (including some Hebrew characters), not to mention the intermingling, at the level of the fictive universe, of different voices, times, spaces, and characters who intermittently assume the first person, before passing it on to the next narrator, as in some textual relay race. The point of this exercise in writing is not so much what is told as how it is told, as in all good novels. Words here are not the sure, safe building blocks of meaning which they seem to be for the native Frenchmen of France and the native Québécois of Québec. Rather they are always already in a state of perpetual deconstruction:

les mots défaits
les mots oubliés
les mots déformés
les mots déplacés
les mots déportés.

The referential fallacy is here linked to geographic displacement, to the *Angst* of the displaced person struggling to come to terms with language (and symbols) in a new cultural context. Even the old *fleur de lys* has the capacity to open up old wounds: for the narrator, it was associated in France with the Right, royalists and anti-semitism, hardly the connotations it carries with it for her new Québécois friends. The feeling of difference is acute for this francophone torn between nostalgia for what was — the Paris of her youth, the cafés, the names of the Métro stations, memories of political slogans — and what is — Montréal in all its tawdry bilingualism of the 1970's. Why, she wonders, are all sales dirty ("*ventes sales*")? Neither here nor there, the narrator, a bilingual (French and Yiddish) newcomer to this crazy country, feels as though she were forever "in between" — between languages, cultures and cities:

Désormais le temps de l'ailleurs, de l'entre-trois langues, de l'entre-deux alphabets, de l'entre-deux mers, de l'entre-deux mondes, l'entre-deux logiques, l'entre-deux nostalgies.

The alienation is not just hers, however, for the inbetweenness is anchored in the fabric of the urban space of Montréal, as though it were some giant, concrete metaphor of *otherness*:

Désormais le temps de l'entre-deux. Entre deux villes, entre deux langues, entre deux villes, deux villes dans une.

All one can do is to "take note" — the characters are inveterate note-takers — of the words which surround one. In the text, the words become lists and the lists tend to become free verse, such as a wonderful "hymn" to the bilingual kitsch of Montréal, "ville schizophrène."

However, in the process of writing it all down, a story begins to emerge, not just the narrator's own personal trajec-

tory, but, like a mirror image, that of another woman immigrant to whom the narrator lends many of her own experiences as an expatriate intellectual. The mood changes, literally, for the tale within the tale is told in the conditional mode, thus giving it an inherently fictitious, hypothetical quality. It is as though this other story, the story of the Other, were that of a sometimes wished for, sometimes longed for adoption (*enracinement*) of the "imaginary" character by Québec: "she would have many friends."

The story of *elle*, that other alienated person, the narrator's double and *alter ego*, is also the story of a writer as the novel folds back in upon itself in another layer of self-reflexivity, for *elle* is writing a novel about an old professor, called Mortre, who has been asked to teach a course on phony messiahs, and in particular that historical odd ball, Sabbatai Zevi, a seventeenth-century would-be leader of the Jews of Europe who ended up by converting to Islam. The interior monologue of the old teacher is complete with diatribes against historically illiterate anglophone students as he attempts what is to be the unfinished syllabus of a course he will never teach. Mortre dies in the attempt and the novel of the narrator *en abyme* seems destined to a similar fate, an abrupt and unanticipated end. Note that the end comes before it ever really got started, both the course and the novel in the novel.

Now here is no doubt the crucial point, for the impossibility of telling a complete and finished story in a linear manner is shared by all three narrators: old Mortre, *elle*, as well as the authorial *je* of the framing story. Just as there was to be no true "Messiah" — no leader who would give direction and meaning to the Jews of seventeenth-century Russia — so too there can be no traditional narrative here, at any level. Balzacian chronology and Cartesian logic are rejected as part

and parcel of logocentrism, male-oriented (i.e., male-dominated) discourse. To opt for a dominant ideology, or to choose a single narrative thread, would mean privileging one system, setting it up as the icon and idol of Truth, the very erection of which would signify and inscribe the ultimate, limiting gesture of phallocentrism. Just as the narrators (*je, elle*, and the asthmatic Morte) are all outside the centres of political power and discourse, so too *La Québécoise* is a fundamentally *decentred* text, the story of eccentric displaced persons living on the edge or margins of society. Furthermore, linear progression, well-wrought "logical" transitions and the premeditated *plan* are shown, by the very production of this text, to be essentially foreign, alien and alienating. Now breaking out from the "story" to quote a list, a sign, or a menu, now leaving the constraints of prose for the liberties of poetry, the text blatantly opts for plurality. — Such a plurality of meaning, complete with Gidean echoes and overtones of the French New Novel, is also of course reminiscent of the new *écrivain(e)s* of Québec, such as Nicole Brossard:

Pas d'ordre ni chronologique, ni logique, ni
logis
les articulations sont foutues
Il n'y aura pas de messie
Il n'y aura pas de récit
tout juste une voix plurielle
une voix carrefour
la parole immigrante.

According to the authorial "I," this form of writing is in fact necessitated by the break, the insuperable barrier which has separated language and history since the Holocaust. For to write in a linear manner is to postulate a coherence, a continuity, and a direction which have been lost forever. Just like the Paris Métro line which remains partially lost in the narrator's memory, so too her mode of writing is fragmented, unfinished. This

score for mixed voices is the survivor's lesson which she gives to us. It is a lesson about reading and writing in an age when beginnings and endings must needs overlap:

Rien qui puisse dire l'horreur et l'impossibilité de vivre après [the Holocaust]. Le lien entre le langage et l'histoire s'est rompu. Les mots manquent. Le langage n'a plus d'origine ni de direction.

Despite the nostalgic looking back to France at the level of thematic content, this postmodernist novel is resolutely anchored in Québec, a Québec evolving toward a pluralistic society where the voice of woman is heard, "ce pays de parole féminine." In the final analysis, writing is the real country for which all three characters are searching in this Proustian enterprise. In Robin's case, the result is a very real "bonheur d'écriture" in which the reader participates, for it is a writing rooted (*enraciné*) not in the soil of one set of blood ancestors, nor in the imaginary adventures of a character or group of characters, but rather in the text itself, that ludic space where words meet at the crossroads.

RALPH SARKONAK

HOME RITUALS

GWENDOLYN MACEWEN, *Noman's Land*. Coach House, \$8.95.

MURIEL KITAGAWA, *This Is My Own: Letters to Wes & Other Writings on Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948*, ed. Roy Miki. Talonbooks, \$12.95.

"AH, WHAT A COUNTRY. No ghosts, no history, no past. No humour, no mystery, no magic. Just this cold, this emptiness . . ." (*Noman's Land*). These words spoken by Spiros Ikaris, a Greek immigrant restaurant owner in the Toronto of MacEwen's stories, serve me as a way of thinking about these two books together.

For all their differences, MacEwen's fiction and Kitagawa's facts both focus upon the paradoxical and problematic nature of "our home and native land," and of what it means to be Canadian. For MacEwen, the mysterious is always real, while for Kitagawa the real was all too terrifying, and yet both women bring us face to face with our ghosts, history, past, and with certain psychological, political, and social truths that we usually prefer to avoid.

Noman's Land is a sequence of fourteen stories that develop and expand the title story of MacEwen's first book of short stories, *Noman*, published in 1972. Here again the "hero" of the stories is "Noman" who discovers himself one night "lost . . . naked, wet and shivering" on a highway not far from Kingsmere where he has lost his memory. He is picked up by Kali — his past and future lover, wife, companion — and driven to Toronto where most of his subsequent adventures and his struggle for survival take place. Although I could stop to consider the bizarre happenings in any one of the stories — Noman's magic act at a children's party, his evening with the poetry of Grey Owl, his meeting with W.L.M.K. or his swim across Lake Ontario — I am finally most impressed by the threads that unite these stories and, in the process, reach out beyond this collection to the broader mythologies of our culture.

Certainly, these stories show MacEwen's imagination and prose at its (for me, at least) very best. Phrase after phrase, passage after passage stand out as just right — sharp, clear, yet rich in associations. Once you accept the incongruity and magic of her world, the stories reveal a logic of their own, a logic I suspect MacEwen would claim as quintessentially "Kanadian." Uniting these stories are the following patterns: first, and most important, the mythic search for identity, of self and country, that takes the naked,

shivering "Noman" from Kingsmere to various ethnic areas of Toronto to a stormy night's swim across Lake Ontario, from whose "black water" he will emerge in "Kanada" at last; the deftly woven urban world of Greeks, Arabs, and Indians, a rich mix of cultures that makes "this the most exotic country in the world"; and the peculiar omnipresence of a "northern madness" that permeates the stories in blizzards, freezing rains, cold, loneliness, and despair, and yet provides a paradoxical cheerfulness as the characters joke about their stubborn loyalty to the place and their ability to survive here. Noman's land, these stories persuade us, exists where we imagine it in what we dream it to be; a place in which we must all struggle to find ourselves, no matter how long we have been here or where we came from.

Muriel Kitagawa's letters to her younger brother, written during the months following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, provide a chillingly different perspective on life in this country. The Canada of Kitagawa's experience is one in which war fever and racism have infected the government policies and general behaviour of many Canadians, especially in British Columbia. Muriel Kitagawa, her husband Ed, and their four children (two of whom are infants), together with approximately 21,000 other Japanese Canadians were "evacuated" from the coastal areas of British Columbia as "enemy aliens"; many, like Muriel, were Canadian citizens by birth, but birth and citizenship were of no help to them against the authorities. The story of their treatment is an ugly and tragic one, and it comes alive in an especially moving way through the personal letters and the intelligent, angry and prophetic voice of this woman.

In editing this volume of Kitagawa's letters, addresses, and other writings, Roy Miki has provided us, above all, with the

chance to know this remarkable woman, but he also provides an informative introduction, useful editorial notes, photographs of the Kitagawas and of the evacuation and detention camps, and reproductions of the various government notices, official permits, letters and newspaper articles pertaining to this assault on the community. My only complaint about the volume is that the quality of reproduction of some of the documents is poor so that they are often difficult to read. But *This Is My Own* is rich in details and facts that are still insufficiently known: that "All Persons of Japanese Racial Origin" were considered to be "enemy aliens"; that they were arrested and detained without charges being laid; that there were no charges that could be laid because no crimes of espionage and so on were ever discovered amongst them; that they were pressured into "repatriating" to a foreign country — Japan — after the war; that their property was confiscated, with restitution still being debated forty years later; that they were denied the federal vote in their native land until June 15, 1948 and in British Columbia until March 7, 1949. (Canadians of Chinese and East Indian ancestry were given the vote in B.C. in April 1947.)

But for me, the lasting impression of this volume will remain the voice of Muriel Kitagawa, activist, feminist, journalist, civil libertarian, proud Canadian. In these impassioned letters, articles, and essays, she reminds her readers of what it should mean to be human, of what we destroy through prejudice, of just how fragile our democratic principles really are, and above all how precious our rights and freedoms as Canadians should be. Her writing — forceful, clear-sighted, and moving — presents as challenge as well as an admonition. Let one brief example suffice: "I have to have a deeper faith in Canada, a greater hope for Canada.

My daily life and my future must be an integral part of Canada. I have to be a better Canadian than most of the Celtic or Anglo-Saxon variety . . . which hasn't been too difficult lately . . . but which ought to be difficult if and when you, and I, succeed in our work."

There are many reasons for reading these books, but I believe that the most important one is for the timely reminder of our potential — for failure as for success. Just as *Noman's Land* requires a leap of the imagination into the realms of Canadian mythology, a leap necessary to our survival, so *This Is My Own* insists upon an equally difficult and necessary act of faith in a country that must acknowledge its ghosts, its past, and all its people. Both books remind me of Sheila Watson's comment about how a people without art, tradition, or "mediating rituals" are driven "towards violence or towards insensibility." Gwendolyn MacEwen and Muriel Kitagawa both believe in the power of words to provide those "mediating rituals."

SHERILL GRACE

A QUESTION OF TASTE

KEITH HARRISON, *After Six Days*. Fiddlehead, \$7.95.

CLAUDE JASMIN, *Mario*, David Lobdell trans. Oberon, \$14.95.

ONE OF THESE NOVELS is for adults only. The other is for some children and for adults interested in Claude Jasmin.

Mario is a translation of *La Sablière* (1979), a novel by Jasmin, one of Quebec's most popular writers who, like many others in French Canada, remains unread and unrecognized in English Canada. Perhaps *Mario* will bring Jasmin's troubling dark childhood world to English reading audiences for the first time. In *Mario*, as in other works by Jasmin (*Re-*

voir Ethel, Le Loup de Brunswick City), Quebec is often figured as a desperate cultural landscape, struggling to breathe in the claustrophobic climate of anglo-industrialization, family tensions, educational inadequacies, and general modern confusion. Lobdell's translation effectively conveys the alienating symptoms of the dreariness which characterize Jasmin's original story.

Such alienation is embodied in *Mario's* fifteen-year-old narrator, Clovis Jhie, an awakening boy-man trying both to make sense and to resist making sense of an imposing, dark adult world. Clovis's aim — and the generating circumstance of the narrative — is to prevent that world from institutionalizing his retarded, sensitive younger brother Mario. Clovis achieves a measure of success, but not without great costs. Although the title of the translation is *Mario*, the organizing and often unwittingly ironic subject of the novel is clearly Clovis. His uncritical, present-tense account of his life over the course of several traumatic months makes for an often disturbing, often exasperating novel.

The first line of *Mario* is promising — so promising that it appears twice before the opening page of the text: once on the cover and once on the title page. With "I live in a world of women," Clovis begins his story, but such a declaration belies what is to follow, for *Mario* is nothing if not a boy's story. Indeed, the first half of the novel is taken up with Clovis's detailed accounts — as if he were keeping a mental journal — of his play adventures with Mario in the gravel pit by the family's summer cottage. Inspired by the historical descriptions in his encyclopedias (ordered from the tops of cereal boxes), Clovis imaginatively enacts the battles between Charles Martel (Charlemagne's grandfather) and the Arabs. With Mario by his side, Clovis transforms the physical world into an

exotic encampment. This is, of course, child's play, and (Clovis's rich imagination notwithstanding) it does not necessarily make for rich, imaginative reading. One keeps wondering why Jasmin insisted on the interminable details of Clovis and Mario's war games, or why Clovis's self-involved escape into cereal box encyclopedias should interest anyone but the serious historian of the second dynasty of Frankish kings. Oddly enough, the novel flickers with interest for a moment when Clovis and Mario stumble upon a corpse in the middle of their romantic campaigns. Whether or not they really do see a body or are imagining one for the sake of the game is questionable. But the novel all too quickly resumes its plodding pace and apparently aimless plot.

Fortunately, both the tone of the work and the direction of the plot do change when Clovis overhears his parents planning to institutionalize Mario in the city. Appropriate to Clovis's adolescent mind, adults are perceived at a hazy, unreachable distance from the children, but they loom as malignant forces nonetheless. Enraged by his parent's decision, Clovis begins to scheme alternatives for his blissfully ignorant younger brother. At this point, nearly two thirds of the way through the novel, everything starts to change. In fact, the achievement of *Mario* largely rests in the last part of the work where Clovis's paranoia, involuntary isolation, and uncritical desperation fight against his emerging sexuality, sensitivity, and self-awareness. Much to the reader's astonishment, Clovis starts to emerge as considerably more disturbed than the harmlessly innocent Mario. At least Clovis becomes more interesting as the gap between his thoughts and the reader's interpretation of his actions grows wider. The effect of this on the reader is an uneasy sense of dislocation

that makes *Mario* more complex than a simple boy's adventure novel.

It is inviting to read the work partly as an allegory of a currently disturbed Quebec caught between an idealized romantic past and a hideously self-destructive future. But as *Mario* develops from an ordinary story into a complicated horror-adventure tale, Clovis becomes more human, more psychologically interesting than a symbolic adolescent. The serious weakness of the work lies in the unevenness of its structure. For the reader who survives the laboured first half of the novel, *Mario* becomes a more compelling, even a haunting story.

Keith Harrison's *After Six Days* is quite a different matter. This too is a Quebec story, but not one of Jasmin's province. *After Six Days* is a yuppie novel set in eighties Montreal — Anglo Montreal — a long cultural way from gravel pits, the Roman Catholic Church, and cereal box encyclopedias. Harrison's Montreal is incidental and irrelevant. His characters inhabit a wider cultural space, one shared by urban professionals anywhere that BMW's and *Harper's* are sold. The premise of the novel is what one working in television might call a "good idea": two couples — Annie and Warren, Dan and Sarah — confront the inadequacies and the benefits of their marriages over six tumultuous days which climax in — what else? — a dinner party. To further the cuteness of the idea, Harrison shifts the point of view from short section to short section so that the reader learns everything there is to know about the inner life of Annie (a fashion buyer/*femme fatale*), Warren (her nourishing, sensitive, quiche-eating husband), Dan (a bored husband and father who wears leather ties with grey pin-stripe suits), and Sarah (Dan's self-consciously frumpy, miserable, prone-to-hysteria wife). This flip-flopping narrative device was probably necessary because not one of

these characters could probably sustain a novel's worth of introspection. The reader should be thankful that Harrison spares her the pain of following the character's reflections for too long.

These four struggling-to-be authentic social characters are suffering the symptoms of post-'sixties affluence: boredom, self-importance, guilt, consumer greed, and unrealized potential. The problem is that not only do the characters not seem to know how shallow their lives are but Harrison gives no notice that he knows either. Without so much as a whisper of an authorial voice, the reader must wonder just how much distance Harrison has from his characters. Of course as educated contemporaries, Annie and Warren and Dan and Sarah are given to a degree of wit and a measure of enlightened sophistication. Thus Sarah, who is a film editor, reflects: "Film editing is about discontinuity. Hundreds of pieces taped together in two minutes of film. You assemble endless snippets of life for an illusion." This kind of inner ruminating is meant to resonate with philosophical significance, but it reads more like a freshman's introduction to a film essay. Or Warren, who is teaching English literature at a Montreal college, sees his life in literary terms that are meant to lend weight to his otherwise hackneyed life: "She must be waiting inside there. In the last few months she has spent more time talking to the cat than to me. It's like Pinter." But it's not Pinter. It's *After Six Days*, a novel written according to the demands of designer realism, in which infidelity is as predictable as de-veined shrimp and good taste means subscribing to both *People* and Amnesty International.

Harrison might have developed his "good idea" into a spicy piece of social satire or at least a witty bit of literary sociology. There are enough playful observations here to fill an article on popu-

lar culture. But without a trace of irony, *After Six Days* is as superficial as its characters. Perhaps the ultimate test for such a work is that one would not want to entertain any of these characters at one's dinner table.

NOREEN GOLFMAN

RARE/FEAR

MICHAEL RAWDON, *Green Eyes, Dukes & Kings*. Quarry Press, \$10.95.

SUSAN KERSLAKE, *The Book of Fears*. Ragweed Press, n.p.

THE TITLE of Michael Rawdon's first collection of short fiction is a Spanish expression: "*Green eyes, dukes and kings* one says (so wistfully) in Spanish: rarities." The book delivers most engagingly. Its thirteen stories range from autobiography-like pasts to possible futures, from the voices of maturity to childhood and from Spain to Australia, New Zealand to Alberta and Kentucky. Consistent throughout the collection are Rawdon's precisely apt prose and apodictic narrative control.

The predominant image of the opening story, "The Bright Imago," is Montgó, a mountain near the villa in Spain where the narrator and his brother spend three years following their parents' death. The uncle who adopts the teenaged orphans explains when they first catch sight of Montgó rising up "like the twisting back of a lizard," that "It was a mountain of illusion, never appearing twice the same." Later he says that "Like a human being wearing different masks, playing dissimilar roles, Montgó was impossible to fix: no single account would suffice, no definitions were available, and memory betrayed one's attempts to recall it." While both boys explore the mountain, the narrator's younger brother is increasingly associated with it and becomes, like the mountain, an enigma.

Because of their own preoccupations, the aunt, uncle, and older brother "did not read the signs as they appeared, did not observe him, did not interpret what was taking place, and missed the point irremediably. We were like witnesses, too tormented by itches and boils, who fail to perceive the opening of a chrysalis, from which springs the fresh bright form of an imago. The magnificent butterfly dragon has been missed."

In "The Bright Imago" and most of the other stories in *Green Eyes, Dukes & Kings*, Rawdon's metafictional concerns are delicately, unobtrusively present; the foregoing excerpts are typical. Occasionally, however, theory elbows in unnecessarily. In "But Who Should Weave The Nets?" the story of three young men's encounter with a crowd of Kentucky rednecks is powerful and suggestive on its own. This story is juxtaposed in alternating sections with a recounting of a tedious chicken-and-egg argument over the priority of concepts versus things. Like "The Man Who Practised Plain Talk" — the narrator's nickname for his antagonist at the museum — this theoretical chatter paradoxically advocates immediacy and intervenes.

The last two stories in the collection are future fantasies. "Gathering In" projects the ultimate solution to "one of the last 'insoluble' domestic problems": the officially unreliable people, the disaffected, who at one time had left the United States. The story successfully satirizes academics as well as Washington's irrational rationality.

Twenty years before, when he had played tennis for the last time and given up handball (with a private sense of relief) in order to devote himself wholeheartedly to a life of academic languor, he had never supposed that the day would come when he might want to run anywhere. Edmund Thomas had never experienced the slightest qualm about his lack of exercise and his paunch, though beery, had never betrayed

him by spreading beyond the limits of decency. He had led, all in all, a content enough life, teaching classes, going to the meetings of the various committees that he served upon, and trying (though never quite making it) to bring out his edition of Propertius.

He is running, we learn, to his dinner.

"From the Charred Places" succeeds in a different way. The story describes a gathering of the Swan Hills bunch, a group of survivors of what they call "the Red Ending," and shows how our present technologies have become myths after a nuclear war destroys them — for example, people are named "Walkman," "Trans-Am," and "Molson's," etc. Besides conveying the pitiful conditions to which human beings could well descend, Rawdon's story succeeds in suggesting the sad truth that nuclearism has already diminished our lives to aleatory survival.

Post-nuclear-war Alberta in "From the Charred Places" and the programmed "Professionals' Repatriation Camp" of "Gathering In" are settings at the opposite pole from the two major settings of the book: Spain and a circus in New Zealand. Rawdon's striking contrapositioning of the circumscribed with the richly expressive — not only in settings, but in characters and language as well — generates a sense of wholeness about *Green Eyes, Dukes & Kings* that marks it as an authentic work of imagination to which one could pleasurably return often.

Susan Kerslake's *The Book of Fears* is less a collection of stories than a compilation of forms of anguish, the Kerslake Variations on Pain. Each "Fear" is narrated from the point of view of its subject; the subjects are: a mentally handicapped child-murderer; a drug-stupefied hospital patient; a woman crushed in a car accident; a woman obsessed by her heartbeat; a narcissistic schizophrenic who uses a video camera and recorder to watch her selves; a rape/murder victim;

a terrified housewife being held hostage; a lonely, hungry, immobilized senior citizen; an exiled victim of military torture; and an Indian youth perishing of broken bones and internal bleeding in a deep hole where he has fallen. Fear is not common to every subject, so the book contains Kerslake's fears, a presumption supported by the fact that there are many other cultural stereotypes she might have chosen. I fear a sequel to this volume.

Besides the unrelenting morbidity, the plots of the "Fears" are basically the same: the subject meditates on his or her condition in the limited terms available under the appalling circumstances. The "Fears," then, are depictions of states rather than stories.

Like the person who defends pornographic material on the basis of its artistic photography, one might point out Kerslake's style of writing. The back cover of *The Book of Fears*, for instance, says Kerslake "writes with a strange, subterranean beauty" and with "stark precision." An example the cover gives to illustrate these qualities also demonstrates a problem with her style parallel to her choice of clichéd subjects:

Looking in the mirror above the sink, I thought I saw my soul fluttering on the surface of my eye. I was afraid it would escape . . .

Very often the narrators belabour the obvious.

Another more serious flaw in the style is that each narrator uses it in much the same way. From idiot child-killer to abducted housewife and from dying urban elderly woman to dying youth on his ritual Dream Fast, all are described with "a strange, subterranean beauty" and "stark precision." The overall effect is to blur the particulars of each "Fear" and to leave the reader unmoved.

THOMAS GERRY

ZARATHUSTRAN

IRVING LAYTON, *Waiting for the Messiah: A Memoir*. McClelland & Stewart, \$24.95.

ALEXANDER NEHAMAS, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Harvard UP, \$17.50.

WITH RESPECT TO PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE of poets' private lives, Yeats once said that he had "no sympathy with the mid-Victorian thought . . . that a poet's life concerns nobody but himself. A poet is by the very nature of things a man who lives with entire sincerity, or rather, the better his poetry the more sincere his life. His life is an experiment in living and those that come after have a right to know it. Above all it is necessary that the lyric poet's life should be known, that we should understand that his poetry is no rootless flower but the speech of a man."

Yeats' insistence on the close relation between an artist's life and his work is relevant to both volumes under review here: Layton's, because of the insight it provides into the sources of his themes and inspiration, and Nehamas', because of the philosophical foundation it provides for forging the link between life and literature.

Layton's "Memoir" should satisfy any reader's "right to know" about the first four decades of this great lyric poet's life. But unlike Elspeth Cameron's *Irving Layton: A Portrait* (Stoddart, 1985), it does so in a way as to help us understand how this life and this literature interact — why this poetry is the way it is rather than some other way. Wordsworth's principle of selection in his autobiographical *The Prelude* is the same, and all the scandal-mongering of some of his, or Layton's, biographers, however it might satisfy the prurient mentality of readers of *People* or *The National Enquirer*, adds not one whit to our love of his poetry.

Layton's title will remind readers of the title of Beckett's most famous play, and in fact the question of "what to do while waiting" is central to both works. The difference is that Layton — no Estragon or Vladimir — can suggest an answer, and as with Nietzsche's Zarathustra, this answer emerges as the model of the speaker's own passionate, committed, sensual life. In fact, far from being self-aggrandizing, as some of Layton's detractors have suggested it is, Layton's book almost serves as an ironical comment on messianism, beginning as it does with the funny anecdote about the fuss caused by his being born circumcised ("probably the result of a common birth defect" the dour Elspeth Cameron assures us), to Layton's erroneous conferral of divinity upon such false prophets as the spectre of death, as Karl Marx, as "the proletariat," as Louis Dudek and others — until he learns through his final "epiphanic" discovery that "the Messiah is life itself, whose sparkling and dithyrambic inflections ask us not to wait but to see and enjoy here and now."

As Nietzschean as this seems, *Waiting for the Messiah* omits significant reference to Nietzsche; nor does the book offer much formal insight into Layton's poetics, for which the reader should turn to Mayne's 1972 edition of Layton's prose, or to the forewords in any of Layton's collections from the 1970's.

As for the link between Layton and Nietzsche, there is the interview with Eli Mandel on "The Birth of Tragedy" in the October 1972 *Malahat Review*, Wynne Francis' "Layton and Nietzsche" in *Canadian Literature* for Winter 1976; or there is the new book by the American philosopher Alexander Nehamas which, although not mentioning Layton, certainly accounts for the interest of the creative artist generally in this "soaring genius," as Layton has called him.

Nehamas' idea in his *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* is that Nietzsche understood the world as a literary text, and saw its inhabitants somewhat as Proust saw M. Swann and Marcel — that is, as fictive characters in a great oeuvre whose ideal character, as exemplified in the "text" of life, is the writer himself. In other words, Nietzsche, says Nehamas, "created himself" through his work, an act which he frequently held to be the most important goal in anyone's life. Nietzsche became, as Nehamas puts it, "the Plato of his own Socrates," thereby transcending the "miserable little man" who actually wrote the text, to emerge as "the magnificent character these texts constitute and manifest."

In a very similar sense, Layton often insists throughout *Waiting for the Messiah* on the obligation of the artist to "create himself" out of the fabric of his life and work; he speaks, for example, of how, "with Faust-like arrogance" he strove "to be the sole author of [his] emotions and not wait for events and people to thrust them upon [him]." Later, he defines the ideal poet very much along the lines of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, i.e., as "a cold-eyed artist who refuses to let himself be deceived by the illusions of his time and finds enjoyment in contemplating the infinite theatrical shapes life so lavishly creates."

Many other similarities of Nietzsche to Layton emerge in the course of reading Nehamas' book: for example, Nietzsche's interpretation of life as literature accounts for his "stylistic pluralism," for his predilection for metaphor, hyperbole, aphorism, and fragment; for his inability (and unwillingness) to separate himself from his style; for his rebelliousness against the traditions he inherited; for his stridency and arrogance, his opposition to dogmatism and metaphysics, and his lifelong campaign against absolutism and "moralism," all of which also clearly

characterize Layton's work, as indeed his life.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Nehamas' interpretation of Nietzsche accounts for his dedication to the principle that truth is always created, never discovered. For, just as in literature, in life "our 'text' is being composed as we read it, and our readings are new parts of it that will give rise to further ones in the future." In other words, we must "fashion our lives in the way artists fashion their works"; we must become the "poets of our lives," thereby continually creating and recreating the Messiah for whom we wait out of the stuff of our own power and passion. Only thus can we resist the impulse to codify things, be they our Gods, our science, our credos, our morals, or our poetic styles — and only then can we come to realize, as Layton in his best Nietzschean vein puts it in the motto to *Waiting for the Messiah*, that

They dance best who dance with desire,
Who lifting feet of fire from fire
Weave before they lie down
A red carpet for the sun.

GRAHAM FORST

DRAMATIC TRILOGIES

GEORGE F. WALKER, *The Power Plays: Gossip, Filthy Rich, The Art of War*. Coach House, n.p.

ALTHOUGH THE THREE plays in this anthology have all been previously published, there are particular benefits (in addition to convenience) in bringing them together in this format. Given a unifying link by their central character, Tyrone M. Power, the plays form a natural trilogy, thereby inviting comparison with other major trilogies in contemporary Canadian drama — James Reaney's Donnelly plays and David French's Mercer trilogy. There are some significant

differences. In his introduction to *The Power Plays*, William Lane argues that the three Walker plays have a coherence that justifies describing them as a trilogy. For Lane the coherence arises from "moments of incongruity," about which, he says, Walker is "pretty particular." Apart from mentioning that the plays' humour depends on these moments of incongruity, Lane is rather vague about what he means. Even so, coherence of *style* is not the kind of coherence that we normally expect to hold a trilogy together. Or, at least, a firm coherence might be said to need more than style alone. There is a coherence of style in both the Donnelly and Mercer trilogies, but they also have a coherence of subject matter — in Reaney's case the clash between a family and its community, in French's case the internal tensions within a particular family. Part of the fascination of these plays lies in witnessing the extended development of situation and character that the length of each trilogy allows. There is, to be sure, a similar fascination in *The Power Plays*, but it has fewer dimensions. The subject matter of the third of the Power plays — *The Art of War* — is quite significantly removed from that of *Gossip* and *Filthy Rich*, and its level of seriousness is on an altogether higher plane. The two early plays amuse us with their convoluted murder plots, whereas *The Art of War*, while still amusing, poses troublesome questions about the nature of "liberalism" in the face of autocratic power. *Gossip* and *Filthy Rich* are clever plays; *The Art of War* is an intelligent play, and it doesn't sit easily with the other two.

William Lane is right, however, in seeing the character of T. M. Power as a commanding feature of *The Power Plays*. If the plays have a significant coherence, it comes from Power himself. Power is one of the most intriguing characters in recent Canadian drama. An unsuccessful

journalist, failed novelist, and (until *The Art of War*) reluctant private detective, Power bungles his way through life in traditional anti-hero fashion. He looks the part ("middle-aged and balding. Walrus mustache. Thick-rimmed glasses. A bit overweight"); he behaves the part ("Why can't we do anything properly. It's so goddamn depressing"). Cynical, frequently devious, he is yet a moralist, seeking out truth and justice with dedication and inefficiency. His ultimate triumphs in solving murder cases in *Gossip* and *Filthy Rich* are not matched in *The Art of War*, where political manipulation and corruption are shown as too strong for Power's good intentions. Walker creates a rich array of characters in *The Power Plays* — the portrait of John Hackman, militaristic adviser to the Minister of Culture in *The Art of War* is striking — but Power remains the principal focus.

Walker's imagination is eclectic; and it is unevenly realized in *The Power Plays*. As in his earlier work, the influence of Absurdism and second-rate movies is evident, though the influence brings mixed blessings. While it is amusing, for example, to recognize parodies of B-movie situations, this device too often seems to be an end in itself. Walker finds some easy targets and easy jokes (about actors, for example, in *Gossip*), and the humour is at times merely self-indulgent. He opts for comfortably familiar situation comedy, as in Power's entrance (in darkness) in scene four of *Gossip*: "Hello? Is anyone here? [*Lights a match. Keeps moving. Suddenly trips over something. Falls. Match goes out. Darkness.*] Ah, for Christ's sake." Maybe this is intentional parody; maybe it says something about life imitating bad art. Whatever the purpose, the effect is tiresome. Tiresome, too, are Power's drowsy aphorisms — "Do you know what life is? Life is a series of apparent coincidences contrived by mysterious forces to make sane men

like me crazy" — but these are happily relieved by extensive passages of sharp, literate dialogue, particularly in *The Art of War*.

William Lane would like to see the Power plays performed in repertory, "as a genuine trilogy." The Donnellys, through the good auspices of NDWT, have already been seen (on national tour) as a trilogy. The Mercer plays have not. My own order of priority would give precedence to the Mercers. Granted that they are very different kinds of plays, French's trilogy nonetheless has a greater coherence and more evenly sustained quality than Walker's. Walker's wit, dialogue, and idiosyncratic view of life sparkle especially brightly in *The Art of War*. But the failure of *Gossip* and *Filthy Rich* to reach the level of *The Art of War* denies the trilogy the stature of Reaney's and French's achievements.

L. W. CONOLLY

DESTINATIONS

SEYMOUR MAYNE, ed., *Essential Words: An Anthology of Jewish Canadian Poetry*. Oberon, \$27.95/14.95.

R. A. D. FORD, ed. and trans., *Russian Poetry: A Personal Anthology*. Mosaic, \$8.95.

ANTONIO D'ALFONSO, ed., *Voix-off: Dix poètes anglophones du Québec*. Le Castor Astral/Guernica, n.p.

EACH OF THESE THREE VOLUMES makes an interesting contrast to and commentary on the others. Seymour Mayne's *Anthology of Jewish Canadian Poetry*, and R. A. D. Ford's translation from the Russian draw the reader's attention to the impact of historical events on human fate and the power of tradition to nourish the imagination and revitalize language. These two volumes stand in sharp contradistinction to Antonio D'Alfonso's presentation, *Voix-off*, a selection of English poets writing in Quebec.

Voix-off, while not without a presence and promise of its own, presents work in which historical consciousness plays little part and the human condition is viewed from the oblique perspective of symbolism and/or surrealism.

If the voice of history is either absent or at a remove in *Voix-off*, it is conspicuously at the forefront of *Essential Words*. The thirty-four poets in the Mayne selection make compelling reading: they define both the Jewish dilemma and inevitably comment on the universal and the human in that dilemma.

Complaints have been levelled against the esoteric and inaccessible nature and content of the poems, about their specific and limiting Jewishness. I find no such difficulty, rather the reverse and I am not and never likely to be Jewish. Poem after poem speaks of human suffering, of the power of the human spirit to endure and to triumph over both suffering and the indignity of malevolent circumstances. They celebrate triumph and survival.

Surely any intelligent, interested reader is capable of resorting to a dictionary to ascertain the relevance of a few unfamiliar terms. The rest concerns events whose long shadows have touched darkly the times in which we live. The main impetus of the collection is an exploration of the traditional roots of Jewish experience. These are varied in tone and content. We move from Avi Boxer's hauntingly elegaic recollection of a childhood street in Montreal to the passionately savage indignation of Irving Layton on the Holocaust. En route we encounter the uniquely brilliant and surely at this point in time authoritatively ancestral voice of A. M. Klein. The accomplished lyricism of Leonard Cohen and the arresting slavic cast of Miriam Waddington's modulated melancholy take on richer resonances in the context of Mayne's anthology.

The distinguishing quality of *Essential Words* is the sense it conveys of a living tradition and of the power of tradition to enrich both language and life. These poems focus on the resonances of history and the relevance of community. They affirm as the editor writes in his compelling meditation, "The Arava: To the Sinai," the necessity to "put the essential words / on the tongues of men / on the lips / of those who despair."

A further valuable aspect to this anthology is the attention it directs to the contribution of Jewish poets to the main stream of Canadian writing as well as introducing a number of poets both living and dead not well known to the general public.

R. A. D. Ford's translation of Russian poetry is as he states a personal anthology. Himself a poet of distinction whose work has not received the acknowledgement it deserves, Ford distills here the essence of the originals and brilliantly recreates them. As Canadian ambassador to the U.S.S.R., from 1964 to 1980, Ford was in a position to meet, befriend, and study Russian poetry at first hand. It is this, no doubt, which gives his collection its flavour and authority.

A number of the more luminous Ikons of the Russian poetic pantheon are assembled in Ford's pages: the lyrical Akhmatova and the confessional, rebellious Akhmadulina, the brilliant, erratic Essenin, the delicate Tsvetayeva, the towering Mandelshtam and Mayakovsky, the contemporary controversial Evtushenko and Vonesensky.

"The Golden Grove" and "The Blue Mist," Essenin's two superlative poems, convey the characteristic lyric intensity of Russian poetry, its uniquely spiritual, emotional dimension. "That is the reason why I am almost weeping, / And smiling, I put out my soul — / As if for the last time. . . ." Essenin's peculiarly

Russian usage of soul gives us an insight into what is remarkable in the Russian poetic landscape. Soul in Russian has specific connotations not present in English. It encompasses much of what is meant by heart, sensibility, essence, and being.

Characteristics of Ford's personal poetic style, imaginative subtlety, and precise nuances of language do much to extract and convey the particular essence of each poet — especially so in the case of Pasternak, who is (like Pushkin) a difficult poet to capture in translation. Pasternak's clarity and his total unselfconscious response to nature are caught and held for us by Ford as if "echoes of an overheard conversation" which recreates the ambiance if not the literal quality of Pasternak's verse.

I regret the somewhat meagre selection from Mandelshtam. The range of this fine poet is not well represented by only two poems. I would have preferred less Voznesensky and more Mandelshtam; but this is after all a personal anthology and there is no disputing taste. Ford regards Voznesensky as "one of the best modern poets in any language" writing today. Certainly the range of poems chosen by Ford indicate the complexity and topical contemporaneity of Voznesensky. There is a refreshing immediacy, a pungent mix of the private and the public in his work. He writes of "the first ice of injury," acknowledging both the personal and the impersonally universal.

Ford's Russian poets forcibly remind us that while poetry of itself may not change social or political realities, it does reveal those realities, as the lesser known Bulat Okudzhava observes,

the poems remain
And their outrage at the world goes on,
asking no indulgence.

The remarkably powerful portrait paintings by Sharon Katz both illustrate and

capture the defiance of Okudzhara's lines.

The influence of French symbolism and to some degree surrealism is discernible in much of the poetry represented in *Voix-off*. Especially so in the case of Daniel Sloate, Marco Fraticelli, and Antonio D'Alfonso. Symbolism and surrealism are by nature private, abstract, and a-historical in orientation. This may result in an imaginative landscape divorced from nature and history: a literary landscape derived largely from an interior often alienating self-examination. At their best both styles strive to chart the recesses of the unconscious and explore the nature of reality. When less successfully integrated into the poem, the surreal image leaves an impression of either the claustrophobic or solipsistic, or of an interior life so separated from vital larger realities as to appear trivialized. A few of the poets in *Voix-off* fall into such a cul-de-sac. An exception is to be found in the work of Louis Dudek, Michael Harris, and Endre Farkas. Dudek writes with the impact of accumulated experience, literary and otherwise. His is a philosophical cast of mind, a mellow meditative probing after pattern and meaning. Michael Harris is vitalized by a vivid documentation of nature shaped by a lyrical celtic cadence. Farkas' work has the virtues of candour and directness. His emotional honesty and refusal to retreat into symbolic abstraction produces a poetry which intensifies rather than reduces the sense of felt life.

The three women represented in the anthology: Mary Melfi, Jane Dicks and Anne McLean, each explore the dilemmas of feminine realities in images which range from the lyrically bitter-sweet to the angry and/or unflinchingly brutal. However, some of these images are mere clichés of violence. I fear I am hopelessly disenchanted with both anatomy (McLean's God displaying "genitals rotting

with syphilis") and biology (Dick's "fallopian tubes," "molten lava sperm") as metaphor. They do not of themselves wither successful analogy or poetry make.

The prose poem is well represented in the *Voix-off* collection, notably by D'Alfonso, Norris, McLean, and Fraticelli. As a form, the prose poem is one which I find dilutes rather than distills poetic statement. In Fraticelli's use of it there is a certain aphoristic skill and in that of D'Alfonso an effective visual imagery.

Ken Norris writes of poems that "have come a long way, carry different passports / all kinds of suitcases. . . ." This poetic idea is elaborated in the introduction by Claude Beausoleil. Norris' poem, "The Poems that Gather Tonight," is certainly one of the stronger pieces of the collection. It may be said to sum up both the intention and the final impression the volume makes. Unfortunately some of the mixed baggage is packed for obscure destinations and because deprived of larger direction arrives at shallow ports of call.

MARYA FIAMENGO

VERSIONS OF ST. HOPE

PAUL QUARRINGTON, *The Life of Hope*. Doubleday, \$19.95.

The Life of Hope is Paul Quarrington's third novel. His earlier novels are *The Service* and *Home Game*. Using a double plot technique, the novel recounts the story of Paul who is trying to write his second novel. On his thirtieth birthday he leaves Toronto for Hope, Ontario in order to write his novel in the peace of a professor friend's lakeland haven. Instead of peace he discovers the Town of Hope itself, its strange inhabitants who are descended from a religious sect called the Perfectionists who left New England for Canada in the mid nineteenth cen-

tury. A statue of their leader, Joseph Berton Hope, stands in the town square.

The title, *The Life of Hope*, works on three levels and if we have been too slow to catch the allegory a character calls it to our attention. On one level the novel presents the life of the Town of Hope in the present: its tackle shop, its three bars and Paul's adventures there during the summer of 1983. Second, the double plot is woven in by including the biography of the nineteenth-century Perfectionist leader, Joseph Berton Hope and his free love community as they leave Boston for Lowell, Massachusetts and finally for Canada. There are mysteries too. Paul discovers that he is living at the house where Hope was murdered, and he learns of the existence of a legendary fish Ol' Mossback (a symbol of hope perhaps?) at the bottom of the local Look Out Lake.

The novel, however, fails to rise to its third level — to any felt sense of hope in the present. Scenes involving drink, drugs and sex appear monotonously throughout the book. While these may help to sell the book, are they really needed for the subject Quarrington offers to tackle? The birth of a child and the thought of Henry David Thoreau are offered as positives at the end of a novel which has otherwise failed to dramatize them. We come away from the book unconvinced that Paul has successfully transcended or rejected the drink, drugs, or attitudes to sex which pervade the book. The final gestures towards the continuity and fulfillment of life symbolized by the birth of a child, fatherhood, and the recommendation of Thoreau are simply not enough to balance what has gone before. The challenge for Quarrington is to convince us that he (or his character) truly feels the hope he aspires to in this novel. We need to see how the relationship with Elspeth, his wife, is put to rights and fatherhood assumed.

Unfortunately, and this is the predicament of contemporary fiction, many novelists appear more interested in depicting involvement with drink, drugs, and loveless sex than in dramatizing such fundamental and essential realities of human life as loving relationships and parenthood. For Paul Quarrington to make his fourth novel what his third novel ought to have been will require a radical transformation. Thus, Quarrington's novel ends before it has really begun:

... let me indulge in a small bit of didacticism. Thoreau (accented on the first syllable) wrote an essay *On Civil Disobedience*, which influenced Gandhi, who in turn influenced Martin Luther King, etc., etc., and if in your opinion these guys did nothing, so be it, but me, I say that thanks to such men we at least have a fighting chance, and H. D. Thoreau started the whole ball rolling.

And he was an asshole...

Furthermore, I suspect that St. Matthew edited and expurgated the Beatitudes. That is, Christ probably said, "Blessed are the Assholes, for they shall inherit the earth."

The child is awake.

Hope, Ontario, 1984.

I would rather trust St. Matthew than Paul Quarrington. Surely "assholes" is exactly what we do *not* want to be. The moral life, a fully human life, is exactly that struggle to create a fighting chance. My small bit of didacticism would be, let's teach our children to be kind, generous and decent human beings.

JOHN FERNS



ON RIEL

BOB BEAL & RUDY WIEBE, eds., *War in the West: Voices of the 1885 Rebellion*. McClelland & Stewart, \$19.95.

CHARLES A. BOULTON, *I Fought Riel: A Military Memoir*, ed. Heather Robertson. James Lorimer, \$24.95.

1985 WAS THE 100th anniversary of the North-West Rebellion whose causes and consequences persist even today in provoking heated controversy and acrimony.

Writers and publishers alike naturally exploited the centenary. Two of the books appearing in that year were Rudy Wiebe and Bob Beal's *War in the West: Voices of the 1885 Rebellion* and Charles Boulton's *I Fought Riel*, originally published in 1886 as *Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellions* but edited, mercifully, by Heather Robertson and re-named *I Fought Riel*.

Neither of these books can match the perspicacity of some other works dealing with the same subject but they, nonetheless, provide valuable and heretofore little-known details in helping to explain these troublesome riddles of our past.

One very good reason for this lack of depth is that none of the authors is a historian though Beal comes closest to being one as evidenced by *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion*, a favourably received book he co-wrote with Rod Macleod in 1984.

Wiebe, the Western novelist whose focus is frequently the minorities of that region (*The Blue Mountains of China*, *The Temptations of Big Bear*, *The Scorched-Wood People*), has the gift of breathing life into history. His is a talent which can elevate facts to the elusive but higher plain of truth, reminding us of the anecdote told of George Meredith who in 1859 was summoned into the presence of Thomas Carlyle to be congratulated on the publication of his first novel. The dour Scot advised Meredith to turn to

history and "facts" because, he insisted, "facts are truth, and truth is facts." The novelist demurred, contending that truth was "the broad heaven above the petty doings of mankind which we call Facts." Together, Wiebe and Beal provide us with a patch of Meredith's "broad heaven."

Boulton was a young serving militia officer when he was caught up in the events of 1870 (and very nearly executed). Fifteen years later he voluntarily retreaded himself into service against the rebels by leading Boulton's Scouts. His is a military memoir as its subtitle plainly states and, though it presents a blinkered view of the times, it is revelatory of the man himself and of those whose attitudes he shared.

The perspectives from which the events are seen differ vastly in the two books. Boulton's is one man's view, a personal account of his role in the disturbances. He does not have the advantage of hindsight over an extended period nor does he allow much time to elapse which, had he done so, might have diluted the intensity of his emotional involvement and enhanced his objectivity. His racism is low-keyed, sometimes tempered by a fair-play unfortunately steeped in condescension, a natural outgrowth of his garrison mentality. Nowhere does his bias approximate that of the rabidly anti-Catholic Thomas Scott who was ultimately to replace Boulton in front of a Métis firing squad. Nor does his disdain come close to Charles Mair's, the Ontario poet, who took pleasure in insulting the half-breed wives of Red River area businessmen in the newspapers of Eastern Canada.

As for Beal and Wiebe, neither should be faulted for not having edited a book comparable to Desmond Morton's *The Last War Drum*, George Stanley's *Birth of Western Canada*, the earlier mentioned *Prairie Fire* or even Thomas Flanagan's controversial and, to some, iconoclastic *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Re-*

considered. Theirs is simply not intended to probe causes and effects. It is rather an expository chronicle of the period as recorded in journals, diaries, interviews, sketches, photographs, cartoons, and other illustrations of the time with little comment (except for the captions) from the editors. What they have done is chosen the excerpts, placed them in chronological order and suspenseful juxtaposition from Poundmaker's plea to his band for unity on 1 January 1882 to Laurier's admonishment of the party in power on 16 March 1886, accusing the Macdonald government of contemptuous indifference towards the Métis and the Indians. The editors have allowed the participants from both sides of the struggle and from all levels to speak for themselves and it is here that the approximation to truth takes place. Through judicious selection, Wiebe and Beal adhere to one of the strict precepts of effective biographical (and historical) writing recently enunciated by Leon Edel in his *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica*. They have applied the novelist's sensibility to the task while avoiding the inventiveness of the fiction writer.

The major problem with *War in the West* is its plethora of characters whose recollections are sprinkled throughout in order of time so that the reader is forced to indulge in sometimes exhausting acrobatics trying to remember precisely who all these people are as events unfold. Compensating for this are the insights into human nature, as revealed in the words of characters ranging from the women prisoners taken after Frog Lake to the witnesses of the death of the intransigent Tom Quinn. (Quinn's contempt for the Indians and refusal to surrender government rations led to his demise at the hands of Wandering Spirit and the start of what was termed by Crees as the battle of Frog Lake.) Even the most dispassionate observer would

have to disagree with the term "battle" in this case and admit to "massacre" as the more accurate word.

Boulton rarely dwells on the difficulties experienced by some of the Indian chiefs in controlling their fractious braves and even when he does they must still answer for the actions of their men much as military superiors of another culture are answerable for the conduct of theirs.

On the other hand, Wiebe and Beal stress the efforts made by Big Bear, for example, to keep his men in check. They insist with documented support upon his constant search for peace. Comments such as the following from a letter dictated by Big Bear to a North West Mounted Police friend reveal both his good will and his eroding authority:

you have from time to time given me things, and that is the reason that I want to speak kindly to you, so please try and get off from Fort Pitt as soon as you can. And tell your captain that I remember him well, for since the Canadian government had left me to starve in this country, he sometimes gave me food, and I don't forget the blankets he gave me, and that is the reason I want you all to get off without bloodshed. . . . so try and get away before the afternoon, as the young men are wild and hard to keep in hand.

Boulton is loath to concede any shortcomings on the part of his colleagues or superiors. His account of Colonel Otter's attempt to "punish Poundmaker" at Cutknife Hill is inaccurate and one-sided. Neither Boulton nor Otter nor anyone else on the "Canadian" side was in a position to know that the Colonel's entire column would have been wiped out had Poundmaker not restrained Fine Day and his followers from pursuing the retreating soldiers. Robert Jefferson, under house arrest in Poundmaker's camp, recorded these comments:

There was no pursuit. A number of Indians had mounted and were about to start . . . but Poundmaker would not permit it. He

said that to defend themselves and their wives and children was good, but that he did not approve of taking the offensive. They had beaten their enemy off, let that content them. So there was no pursuit.

The punishment of Poundmaker had to be put off until it was all over (as did Big Bear's). Boulton always exaggerates the enemy's strength be they Indian or Métis. His very high opinion of "Old Fred" Middleton as Commander is seldom altered and certainly does not concur with the bitter comments of others such as James Peters, an artillery captain, who begins a letter following the victory at Batoche in this way:

We having at last got a big victory, more by good luck than good management for by some fluke the d——— old fool of a General could not stop old Straw (infantry commander, van Straubenzie) when he got the men going. . . .

In fact, Peters' comments become more vituperative as the campaign winds down.

Some of the comments made by the leading participants reflect the tragic inevitabilities of the time as well as a certain naiveté born of an essentially benevolent nature. Following the "incident" at Duck Lake, Riel sent word to the English that they could collect their dead but they mistrusted him. Meanwhile Gabriel Dumont seeing an opportunity to exploit this initial success had wanted to cut off retreating police. Riel was against the idea because a night attack would have been too savage. Dumont's realistic response was "If you give them an advantage like that, we will not succeed." He was right, of course.

The savagery was not limited to the "savages." Dumont in summing up the battle at Batoche listed the following deaths:

The troops advanced and our men came out of their trenches; it was then they were killed: José Ouellette, ninety-three years of age; José Vandal, who had both arms

broken first and was finished off with a bayonet, seventy-five years; Daniel Ross, first fatally wounded and speared with a bayonet, also very old; Isidore Boyer, also an old man; Michel Trottier, André Batoche, Calixte Tourond, Elzéar Tourond, John Swan and Damase Carrière, who first had his leg broken and whom the English then dragged with a rope around his neck tied to the tail of a horse. . . .

Such actions are never mentioned by Boulton, who is quick to give full credit to his enemy's fighting skills but whose implacable hatred of Riel blinded him to the real issues that caused the uprisings in the first place.

In fairness it must be said that Boulton, too, had the courage of his convictions but that his attitude of superiority and that of his fellow "Canadians" contributed to the breaking of the spirit of many who deserved better of white man's justice. Heather Robertson herself lays the blame squarely on Macdonald's government, "whose ruthless expansionist policies precipitated both rebellions."

It may be more than mere coincidence that *War in the West's* publication date was 16 November 1985. One hundred years earlier to the day Louis Riel was hanged, a moment in history too significant to escape the attention of a Rudy Wiebe.

GILBERT DROLET

FROM MIND TO MIND

CONSTANCE BERESFORD-HOWE, *Night Studies*. Macmillan, \$19.95.

CYNTHIA LONG, *Wishbones*. McClelland & Stewart, \$10.95.

ALTHOUGH THESE NOVELS share similar themes and points of view that shift rapidly between several characters, they reflect quite different approaches to writing fiction. Beresford-Howe has been writing novels for forty years. She long ago mastered her craft, and while *Night*

Studies is to some extent experimental in structure and technique, it shows her usual careful planning and deft execution. *Wishbones* is Long's first novel, and occasionally it seems overwritten and haphazard in structure, but notwithstanding a few weak sections, it shows that Long has great potential. What *Wishbones* lacks in control it more than makes up for in poetic power and in the depth and subtlety of its characterization.

While *Night Studies* contains enough humour and suspense to make it entertaining, it is aimed primarily at the more intellectual reader who will appreciate its complex ironies, literary allusions, and thoughtful treatment of contemporary social problems. Beresford-Howe's attention to detail is demonstrated by the appropriateness of her title: *Night Studies* consists mainly of character studies rather than action and the characters are seen directly only as they interact at the night classes of Simcoe College, an undistinguished, utilitarian institution located in a Toronto highrise. And night seems the natural time for studying these bleak lives. From the hypocritical, self-seeking, insecure Director of Night Studies, to the beleaguered teachers, students, and support staff, on down to the light-fingered drunk who uses the college library as a retreat from the cold, the characters have more than their shares of private unhappiness to deal with and, they take for granted, to hide from the others. Moreover, the darker sides of human nature are constantly seen lurking behind the restraints of institutional interaction, and one major character actually sees Simcoe College as a modern version of Dante's hell. Yet finally *Night Studies* is concerned more with human potential to resist the power of darkness than with darkness itself.

Resistance is achieved by breaking the facades that institutional roles tend to impose. And much of the novel's irony

stems from the way the characters misunderstand one another and even themselves. Unfortunately, Beresford-Howe often seems more concerned with the irony than with the characters. They are convincingly human as far as they develop, but there are far too many to develop at any length and most remain little more than caricatures, their believability too plainly dependent on their predictability. The most notable exceptions are the English teachers Imogen and Tyler, of whom the reader sees more than the other characters. In spite of their contrasting personalities — she rebellious, humorously cynical, and outspokenly resentful of the tricks life has played on her; he passive, withdrawn and guilt-ridden — they do manage to communicate to each other their common sensitivity to both pain and humour. And despite its deficiencies, the novel in which they are central is amusing, readable, and occasionally touching.

Cynthia Long's *Wishbones* is also concerned with breaking through barriers that inhibit human relationships. And it also resembles *Night Studies* structurally, with shifts from mind to mind being the most obvious determinant of form. However, *Wishbones* is less concerned with irony than with character, and more personal and subjective as it explores the different ways three female generations of a family deal with similar feelings and experiences. Cassie is central. She is a professional musician, independent yet romantic and temperamentally unsuited to solitariness. Her mother Brenna, largely because of social pressures on her generation, has dealt with similar conflicting needs less successfully. Granny Gwynne is a wise woman, seen mainly through the memories of the other two and through her personal fairy-tale of the Bird-Maiden. Seemingly original, though it incorporates elements from Greek and Norse myth, this tale takes up perhaps a

fifth of the novel. If the fragments were collected, it could well stand on its own — perhaps with a “PG” rating — since it is an engaging story and contains excellent descriptive passages:

And so the Bird-Maiden flew through wind and hail that cut into the feathers and tore at her skin until she saw a cave of black ice and knew she had found the Three Grey Sisters. These three were the oldest of all living things, with hair that shone clear like glass, skin of bloodless blue, and one eye and one tooth to share between them. They sat huddled together and muttered and dribbled in a kind of dream, and their frozen, foul breath hung in a steely cloud. The Bird-Maiden shivered and waited at the mouth of the cave, knowing what she must do.

In the novel, however, it functions as a family myth, both shaping and illuminating the lives of Brenna and Cassie. It is a daring experiment, but it works well.

Symbolic, impressionistic, never predictable, *Wishbones* will not likely appeal to the reader of fiction who does not like poetry, because Long's prose has all the difficulty as well as the richness of good poetry. Still, the reader who is not put off by occasional ambiguity and instances of striving for effect for the sake of effect will find the novel stylistically striking and often startlingly revealing. It has much to recommend it, but ultimately its success rests on the originality and power of Long's prose:

Her first experience with a boy on an autumn night had been like finding a stalk of celery in the dishwater while washing up the knives and forks. The experience itself seemed bizarre but Brenna suspected logic behind it somewhere. It had to be so. Yet sometimes, even now, she wondered if she hadn't simply become so used to the idea of soapy celery that her sense of confusion had faded with age, along with the thrill.

It is remarkable for a relatively inexperienced writer to take as many chances as Long does in the tricky game of com-

municating intimate human experience and win.

H. W. CONNOR

TRANSCULTURE

FILIPPO SALVATORE, *La Fresque de Mussolini*. Guernica, n.p.

FULVIO CACCIA, *Sous le signe du Phénix: Entretiens avec quinze créateurs italo-québécois*. Guernica, n.p.

FULVIO CACCIA, *Scirocco: poèmes*. Triptyque, n.p.

A RECURRING CONCERN in Italian-Canadian literature has been the social and political conflicts that have contributed to the formation of an immigrant identity. In *La Fresque de Mussolini*, set in the 1930's, Filippo Salvatore explores the repercussions of fascism on the Italian community and Québécois society at large. The title of the play refers to the fresco of Mussolini seated on his horse which covers the interior of the dome of the church of Notre-Dame de la Défense in Montreal. The fresco was painted at the height of the Duce's popularity in Quebec when the church became a centre of recruitment to the fascist cause. The play raises a number of important questions: Why was there such a strong alliance between the Italo-Québécois community and Mussolini's regime? Why did a large number of Italian immigrants from Quebec join the Italian-Canadian expeditionary force which fought in the fascist campaign against Ethiopia? What role did Italo-Québécois socialists play in these events? Salvatore seeks to answer these questions by recreating the circumstances leading to the completion of the fresco and the eventual death in Ethiopia of the fresco's painter Fabrizio Tincheri.

Wishing to pay tribute to the glorious Italian heritage of the church of Notre-Dame de la Défense, the mayor of Mont-

real and well-to-do members of the Italian community assist the parish in bringing Fabrizio to Montreal from Florence. In paying homage to Mussolini, the church is celebrating not only the community's pride in its native homeland, but also the recently signed concordat between the Vatican and Mussolini. The significance of the concordat is announced with bravado by the auxiliary bishop, who views the agreement as the fulfilment of a divine plan for the union of church and state for the benefit of western civilization. Ironically, among those who benefit most from the new alliance are the factory owners who insist on the workers' support of the fascist cause as a condition of employment, and who exploit the Italians' cheap labour with the sanction of the clergy.

Counterpointing the growing appeal of fascism is the socialist resistance, led by Michele Villani, publisher of the weekly newspaper *La Foglia d'Acero* (The Maple Leaf). Villani is arraigned for provoking and participating in a number of anti-fascist demonstrations throughout Quebec. While his sincerity in upholding justice and liberty is never an issue, and while his pronouncements on social responsibility are rhetorically appealing — "C'est ça la liberté: c'est l'exercice de la responsabilité personnelle, c'est savoir choisir entre son bonheur et ses principes" — his actions are portrayed as politically ineffectual.

Although Salvatore's analysis of the political, religious, and economic forces which shaped this turbulent moment in Italo-Québécois history is insightful, his exploration of the influence of fascism on the private lives of his characters is the play's major weakness. Against the broader historical background we view the personal struggles of the painter Fabrizio within the context of his romance with Cathy (Caterina) De Marinis, whose working-class parents silently op-

pose fascism. Fabrizio initially feels betrayed by the concordat, which has crushed artistic inspiration. However, his surrender to fascist ideology and personal opportunism is too hasty to be fully convincing. He persuades the flighty and indolent Cathy, who has been rebelling against her family's outmoded values, to live with him, but soon leaves her for the charms and favours of the rich and elegant Geneviève de Gaspé-Beaubien, wife of the former Canadian ambassador to Paris. When Fabrizio's death in Ethiopia is announced, the audience is sufficiently set against him to rejoice in the poetic justice. Cathy is predictably reconciled with her parents whose forgiveness teaches her that love of family transcends all other human bonds. The domestic plot, with its abrupt shifts and melodramatic conclusion, undermines the play's claim to historical drama, offering a comfortable moral maxim as a solution to the tragedy of human history.

Sous le signe du Phénix records Fulvio Caccia's interviews with fifteen Montreal artists of Italian descent. The interviews took place during a series of radio broadcasts between 1983 and 1984; included are writers, film-makers, painters, designers, and composers. The point of inquiry is the process of acculturation as it has influenced these artists and their work.

The interviews, which have been carefully prepared and researched, are divided chronologically into three sections covering the first, second, and third generations of immigrants respectively. Most of the interviews follow a similar pattern, beginning with a sketch of the artist's upbringing, education, and political orientation, and proceeding to trenchant discussions of craft and its relation to one's immigrant identity. Although the painter Francesco Iacurto is, regrettably, the sole representative of the pre-war generation, his preference for natural

landscapes and his extraordinary affinity with Italian, French-Canadian, and English-Canadian cultures provide a striking contrast to subsequent generations of artists. The second generation, disillusioned by the effects of war and fascism on both Italy and Quebec, share a lack of concern with the social and political issues facing English and French Canada, as well as a notable estrangement from their fellow artists. What varies considerably is their attitude toward their craft. For the song writer, poet, and journalist Tonino Caticchio, who prefers to write in his native Roman dialect, the role of the immigrant artist is to facilitate communication between the old and new worlds through the modes of popular culture, while for the painter Guido Molinari the chief obligation is to his craft. Molinari's quest is purely aesthetic: to expose the limits of modernism while maintaining a modernist sensibility.

Those of the post-war generation, educated for the most part in English, and in whom the process of acculturation is complete, share an acute awareness of their marginal status within Quebec. The detachment from both the Italian community and French-Canadian culture is most pronounced in Mary Melfi, who is critical of the insularity of the older generation of Italian immigrants and of Quebec's politicization of language. Melfi considers her poetry thematically similar to that of a number of English-Canadian women writers, and stylistically influenced by e.e. cummings, the French surrealists, Dylan Thomas, and Ezra Pound. For the playwright Marco Micone and the film-maker Paul Tana, on the other hand, the point of departure in their work is always the immigrant experience, in particular, the Italian immigrant's confrontation with a fragmented identity that is neither strictly Italian, Québécois, nor English-Canadian. In the

final interview, the novelist Lamberto Tassinari proposes that the marginal status of the Italo-Québécois immigrant/artist cannot be transcended through acculturation but through transcultural identity, an admittedly utopian concept of the obliteration of cultural differences, necessitating the recovery and surpassing of one's Italian identity, and the institution of political, economic, and linguistic egalitarianism — "nous sommes déjà engagés dans ce processus pour atteindre avec et au-delà du tumulte social cette vérité simple et indépassable: l'identité."

Although in his Introduction to the interviews Caccia favours a transcultural project, in *Scirocco* he reveals a profound ambivalence toward reclaiming one's Italian heritage. The poems trace a painful odyssey from Florence to Fiesola, Naples, and Venice, during which Italy assumes multiple levels of meaning: it is at once an exotic alien landscape, a lover whom the poet desires but knows he cannot possess, and a poem struggling to be born. The landscape, like the Italian language, is sensuous, alluring, oppressive, and always impenetrable; it is a force, deeply buried in memory, which teases and eludes:

Langue langue désirable
sans cesse tu t'échappes
de mes chasses solaires
Parmi les buissons où
tu guettes

Jamais je ne t'aurai
Envie de te mordre
désespérément

The voyage culminates in a series of short poems whose fragmented lines and erratic juxtapositions emphasize a profound sense of loss:

Saillie
 intensité
entêtement safran dans l'obscur
 Os
dont la dureté est nacre silence. . . .

Only at the very end of the journey does the poet discover relief and succour in the infinite dialogue ("l'infini dialogue") of the warm, sultry scirocco that has been a source of inspiration to Italian poets.

VIVIANA COMENSOLI

CLOCKMAKER

THOMAS CHANDLER HALIBURTON, *Recollections of Nova Scotia: The Clockmaker*. Borealis, \$9.95.

ANYONE WHO HAS tried to read *The Clockmaker* in its original form in the columns of *The Novascotian* newspaper will be grateful to Bruce Nesbitt for his edition of the first twenty-one episodes published in 1835-1836. Considering the difficulties of reproducing a "complex dialectical text of some 43,000 words," Nesbitt has produced a reliable edition, succeeding in his declared aim to reproduce Haliburton's text "faithfully and completely." I noticed only three small errors of transcription: "flatery," "bluenoses," and "Picton" (pp. 57, 87, 91). The microfilm copy I consulted read "flattery," "bluenoses," and "Pictou." Further collations of the Tecumseh text and the original revealed no other errors.

The cover proclaims "an Introduction and notes." The latter are 25 lines of "Editorial Emendations." The "Introduction" is equally modest. Readers can supplement it by referring to the excellent paper, "The First *Clockmakers*," delivered by Nesbitt at the Ottawa Symposium on Haliburton in April 1984, now published by Ottawa University Press. That paper describes in more detail the transmission of *The Clockmaker* as a text. In the Tecumseh edition Nesbitt has opted for an "Introduction" for first-time readers of Haliburton. His "Introduction" revives some old saws: that Haliburton did much to "codify the idea

of the prototypical American figure" in literature; that Haliburton's language is "a rich source of early nineteenth-century usage;" that Chittick's "indispensable biography" contains the facts of Haliburton's life; and that Haliburton came by his "jaundiced view of American politics honestly." One of his grandfathers "died fighting as a Loyalist officer with the New York Volunteers." His other grandfather moved to Nova Scotia "shortly before the American Revolution." "Shortly" here means fifteen years, because William Haliburton arrived in Nova Scotia in 1761. The Loyalist blood which coursed through Haliburton's veins is the only blood I know that comes with a set of political principles as well as red and white corpuscles.

The "Introduction" includes Nesbitt's inspired deduction that *The Clockmaker* ceased publication after the first twenty-one episodes because Haliburton had not written the remaining chapters. Chittick had conjectured that Howe needed the space in his newspaper for election news. Nesbitt cannot prove his hypothesis conclusively but circumstantial evidence suggests he is right. The gap in time between the twenty-first episode appearing in *The Novascotian* in February 1836, and the appearance of *The Clockmaker* under the imprint of Joseph Howe at the end of December 1836, is explained by the length of time Haliburton needed, not only to write the extra episodes, but to revise thoroughly the first twenty-one episodes as well. Nesbitt pursues these changes in the Ottawa Symposium Paper but not here.

I am sure that the availability of *The Novascotian* version of *The Clockmaker* will spur productive critical analysis of the considerable creative energy of the First Series. We can now read *The Clockmaker* as it was published in the columns of *The Novascotian* without damaging our eyesight on the peculiarly

antiquated microfilm readers that populate our libraries and archives. Nesbitt alerts us to the resounding finality of the last sentence of the twenty-first episode, in all its italicised glory: "*Give up politics . . . look to yourselves, and don't look to others.*" If the edition of *The Clockmaker* to be produced by the Centre for the Editing of Early Canadian Texts is the longed-for Messiah of Haliburton texts, Bruce Nesbitt's Tecumseh edition makes a convincing John the Baptist.

RICHARD A. DAVIES

BLACK LYRICIST

DONALD SMITH, *Gilbert La Rocque: l'écriture du rêve*. Québec/Amérique, \$12.95.

"J'AVOUE, QUANT A moi, avoir connu le coup de foudre à la lecture des *Masques*. Ouvrant le livre et lisant [its opening sentence] j'éprouvai la même émotion que celle qui m'étreint encore quand je lis: 'Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure. . .'" Who is this Québec writer spoken of with such warmth, one comparable to Marcel Proust himself, in André Vanasse's view, and compared by other Québec critics (though I think less exactly) to Faulkner? Gilbert La Rocque, author of *Les Masques* and five other novels, has had as yet no audible impact upon Anglophone Canada, although Leonard Sugden's forthcoming translation of *Les Masques* is likely to change that situation. Even in French there is virtually no criticism: perhaps half a dozen reviews for each of his novels (and only a couple of articles, in total), plus a number of "hommages" and "témoignages" after his sudden and early death (aged forty-one) in November 1984. So we have every reason to be grateful to Donald Smith, La Rocque's most active advocate, first for making available an interview with La Rocque (in *L'écrivain*

devant son oeuvre, Smith's volume of interviews with Québec and Acadian writers, translated into English by Larry Shouldice, as *Voices of Deliverance*), and now for putting together this new volume of criticism. Sixty pages of this text are by Smith himself; Vanasse, Gilles Dorion, and Réjean Robidoux, in three shorter essays, share the remaining fifty pages; in addition there are a brief biographical note, a secondary bibliography (mostly reviews and interviews), and bibliographic lists of La Rocque's published works, unpublished works (some twenty-five hundred pages) and manuscripts (ca. forty-five hundred pages). Clearly the stage of full scholarly inquiry will soon be upon us.

Smith's extended essay sorts out the obsessively dominant sets of image clusters in La Rocque's work, under the perhaps limitingly impressionistic rubrics of "rêve" and "l'inconscient," concepts which are less self-explanatory and less clinchingly analytical than Smith seems to think they are, although he is considerably abetted in this interpretation by La Rocque himself, in the interview cited above. The somewhat repetitive and inconclusive consideration of images of insects, filth, excrement, stagnation, stench, and decay on the urban, or negative side, punctuated rarely, but significantly for the strikingly limited thematic range of "l'univers typiquement larocquien," by the images of the brief harmonious vision of some childhood pastoral memory, while both useful and well done, gives little sense of either La Rocque's style or his narrative structure. Much of this thematic material is essentially repeated in the other three essays, in all of which La Rocque's varying re-arrangements of a very few counters of plot and tone are seen to constitute an "étrange unité."

Gilles Dorion's essay, "Une rhétorique efficace," lists some techniques and devices found in La Rocque's third novel,

Après la boue, through which La Rocque conveys the mental state and the "drame intérieur" of his (only female) protagonist; he comes to no general conclusions about La Rocque's style, however. Réjean Robidoux' essay on Gérard Bessette and La Rocque calls attention to the strong friendship and the personal as well as literary affinities between the two men, as well as suggesting something of the degree to which Bessette's novel, *Le Semestre*, both depends on and itself illuminates La Rocque's fourth novel, *Serge d'entre les morts*. Bessette's professorial protagonist teaches *Serge* in a course, in which certain elements of the book reach out into the lives of professor and students alike, as they judge and respond to it; a possibly unique case of a novel (Bessette's) in which the inner novel (*Serge*) used as *mise en abyme* actually exists and can be read independently of the novel which has absorbed it. But Bessette's (or, more strictly, "Omer Marin's") critique, like Smith's, stresses psychological connections, with a quasi-Freudian interpretation of the role of childhood trauma in adult alienation and suffering, via the violent obsessions of a tortured memory. While Bessette's novel is distinctly wittier and more matter-of-fact than La Rocque's, Bessette has quite rightly chosen to see La Rocque's book in the way that will be most useful to him in constructing his own.

Not surprisingly, the whiff of reverence, of "hommages" and "témoignages," of preaching to the converted, still hovers over this collection, although André Vanasse adumbrates the touchy question of La Rocque's reaction to what he felt to be the largely hostile or neglectful criticism of his work, and links this seemingly excessive response with La Rocque's own temperament, perhaps as difficult at times as those of his own self-destructing heroes. Yet Vanasse's essay, even more than the others, conveys something

of its author's sense of personal connection and personal loss. And he comes much closer to capturing what I see as the essence of La Rocque's literary achievement. As his title, "La fête, la haine, la mort," suggests, he too has a largely thematic perspective: the hatred is that of most of La Rocque's protagonists for their filthy world, but also La Rocque's for his critics and even at times his readers, against whom he performs almost Aquinian "acte[s] d'aggression." "La fête" is the carnivalesque celebration, a set piece in each of La Rocque's books, in which the "masks" of hypocrisy and pretense slip long enough to reveal the skull beneath the skin, "la mort," La Rocque's central obsession among so many. And Vanasse too connects, though more subtly, "le fantasmatique incestueuse et oedipienne" of larocquian family relationships and his "constat d'échec" in sexual matters, with the recurring pattern of guilt over the death (often by drowning) of a young child. But only Vanasse puts it to us in so many words that La Rocque's books matter above all because of his splendid style. He notes its special "signature," its rhythm, its recognizability, which he (again) daringly compares in its effect to the effect of Bergotte's prose upon Proust's young Marcel, although he suggests, more discriminatingly than his colleagues, that only in *Serge* and *Les Masques* did La Rocque fully achieve this style. His richly intelligent appreciation of both the style and the patterning of La Rocque's writing makes his essay, although all too brief, the subtlest and most sensitive of those presently available; I hope we will be hearing from him soon again on La Rocque, and at greater length.

Perhaps Michel Tournier has inadvertently supplied some clues to the sort of writer La Rocque is, when he speaks of "Marcel Proust et Louis-Ferdinand Céline [qui] se rejoignent pourtant dans

leur commun dégoût de la vie, dans leur commun haine de l'existence. [Asthme et anti-sémitisme] ne faisaient que cristalliser sous deux formes différentes une attitude de rejet universel." He is evidently Proustian in the architectonics of his reflections upon Time, Mutability and Death in his great "foul-weather pastoral," *Les Masques*; yet many particular features of La Rocque's style, and above all the black lyricism of his intensely excremental vision, are in the Célinean mode. At their best (as often in *Les Masques*) his images have an almost Metaphysical condensation, making them, so uniform in their squalor, Baudelairean in their compressed intelligence. And his books *are* structured (though perhaps not as well as many of his sentences); these essays give the reader very little of the help he needs in seeing what the formal (as opposed to the psychological) structures are. The notion, often expressed by La Rocque himself, of his oeuvre as one large book, is fostered by several of these essays. However it seems to me, not so much that the six novels add up to a whole, but that *Les Masques* is the quintessential form of the *one* novel that La Rocque wrote six times — and the fifth time he got it triumphantly right.

P. MERIVALE

LE LIVRE D'ABEL

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU, *Steven le Hérault*.
Stanké, n.p.

CHACQUE ROMAN de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu s'intègre dans la double saga de la famille Beauchemin et d'une oeuvre romanesque qui se cherche et se crée d'un livre à l'autre. *Steven le Hérault* manifeste ces deux volets et montre à quel point l'histoire d'un écrivain (Abel Beauchemin) et de son oeuvre dépend, pour pouvoir vivre et se faire, de l'état de la tribu et

surtout du père. Père, rêvé partenaire dans la rédaction du Grand Livre, et dont la non-collaboration fera s'effondrer et Abel et son écriture, sans pourtant empêcher Abel de trouver un moyen assez insolite de passer le flambeau à son frère Steven.

Steven et Gabriella Beauchemin reviennent au Québec après quinze années heureuses en France. Dans l'avion le presentiment de Steven, la nausée croissante de Gabriella nous en avertissent: les retrouvailles avec la terre natale ne seront pas réjouissantes. Pa sombre dans la folie, s'étant livré à l'empaillage obsessionnel de lugubres oiseaux noirs, pour maintenant en être à décorer un palmier de plastique en arbre de Noël afin d'accueillir le Christ-Jésus. Mort et folie: leitmotivs de l'oeuvre de VLB. D'autres sont aussi au rendez-vous — l'oncle Phil patauge dans l'alcoolisme, la danseuse Olga dépend corps et âme de la cocaïne, tandis qu'un érotisme souvent malheureux, un inceste souvent valorisé, et une scatologie corsée envahissent maintes pages — mais leur présence, loin d'être gratuite, revêt d'importantes fonctions symboliques et signifiantes.

Abel n'habite plus la maison familiale. Lorsque Steven découvre que la déchéance de Pa résulte du choc que lui fit le feuilleton écrit par Abel pour la télévision, qui étale, selon Pa, la famille et ses imperfections aux yeux de tout le monde et qui — surtout — fait mourir Mam, il décide qu'il faut retrouver Abel. Celui-ci aussi est sur la voie de la déchéance. La hantise de la folie qui parcourt l'oeuvre de VLB se manifeste sans doute dans l'excentricité d'Abel qui — répétition obsessionnelle rappelant les oiseaux noirs du père — arrange chaque pièce de son appartement de façon identique. Mais plus inquiétant est la tendance d'Abel à se déguiser en différents personnages — Confucius, Christ-Jésus, Dracula, Hitler, juif d'Auschwitz — car

là où un romancier doit se déguiser, habiter divers personnages, c'est dans son oeuvre. Or: le grand Abel Beauchemin n'écrit plus! Et même — voilà longtemps qu'Abel tape sans écrire, s'étant contenté de... recopier *l'Avalée des avalés* de Réjean Ducharme! pour ensuite... le recopier à nouveau, mais... à l'envers! Bel hommage à *l'Avalée des avalés* promu ainsi réussite incontournable — et indépassable? — du roman québécois.

La véritable portée des autres formes de déchéance dans *Steven le Hérault* se révèle ainsi: leur horreur, dans la perspective d'Abel/VLB, est de figurer la déchéance d'une écriture, l'échec du projet d'écrire le Grand Livre québécois. Cet échec était prévisible, car le véritable rival du Grand Livre d'Abel, contre lequel il doit se mesurer et s'ériger, c'est le grand livre même de l'Occident, la Bible (comme l'indique des charges virulentes contre l'Ancien Testament et le peuple qui l'a produit). L'objet du Grand Livre d'Abel — la tribu des Beauchemin-Québécois — a donc pour rival le peuple d'Israël; le concurrent d'Abel n'est nul autre que Dieu le Père. D'où la nécessité, pour que le Grand Livre se fasse, que Pa, "la plus haute autorité" selon Abel, aide celui-ci à le rédiger. Mais Pa s'est dérobé et a lâché le fils.

De cet échec, Abel mesure la portée et tire les conséquences: d'abord il régresse, couchant avec une fille que se muera en sa mère (p. 274), retrouvant l'état du bébé — "il se mit à uriner, et il se mit à déféquer, et aucune honte ne l'habitait" (p. 273), puis l'état informe d'avant la naissance — "plus que tripes ouvertes, viscères et sang chaud" (p. 273) — pour ensuite préparer un piège par lequel Steven, accompagné de Pa, en entrant dans la chambre de motel qu'occupe Abel, actionnera une arbalète qu'a achetée celui-ci au pays des ancêtres (France-lamère-patrie) et tuera Abel. Abel s'est d'abord déguise en Christ (couronne d'é-

pines, robe blanche et fouet) mais, à la fin, décide de mourir nu plutôt: Christ nouveau, désormais dépouillé de l'ancien et chargé de faire surgir, non pas l'ancienne histoire divine, mais une parole neuve, humaine, québécoise. Et malgré le désespoir final d'Abel qui croit que "la flèche au bout doré mettrait fin à tout" (p. 342), on pressent que Steven finira par écrire le Grand Livre car, nouveau Caïn, il n'aura d'autre choix que de prendre le flambeau des mains de ce frère qu'il aura malgré lui assassiné, pour revêtir le rôle du *hérault* que lui assigne et le titre et le geste d'Abel. Steven se trompe peut-être en croyant que les rôles seraient renversés par rapport à leur distribution dans le livre *Steven le Hérault* qu'Abel a commencé il y a quinze ans (p. 151): il a trop limité le sens de "hérault." Steven écrira le Grand Livre certes (si les projets d'Abel se réalisent), mais il transmettra ainsi au monde le message d'Abel (v. le *Petit Robert*.) Le testament d'Abel est donc un livre nouveau, fait par une autre main, un Nouveau Testament qui — puisque rédigé par celui qui sera promu à la fois fratricide et apôtre écrivant (Caïn et Paul?) — saura peut-être enfin tout dire.

Ce roman richement symbolique comporte une focalisation variable (qui privilégie d'abord Steven, puis le pathétique oncle Phil, touchant dans sa faiblesse éminemment humaine, puis la non moins pathétique Olga, pour enfin se fixer sur Abel) s'accompagnant de changements de ton permettant aux lecteurs de se sentir toujours près personnages et de leurs drames intérieurs. Y contribuent aussi d'habiles glissements entre les troisième et première personnes.

L'érotisme malade et malheureux, l'alloolisme, la scatologie rappellent trop d'autres romans de l'auteur (et on aurait compris à doses moins fortes.) Les personnages féminins se sont guère vus que de l'extérieur, objets de l'homme plutôt

que sujets romanesques. Dans la mesure où l'on se plaît d'habitude à voir dans la famille Beauchemin un symbole des Québécois, le misérabilisme de Beaulieu correspond peut-être plus à un Québec du passé qu'à celui des nouveaux gratte-ciel francophones. Mais les Beauchemin-Québécois du Beaulieu ont été et restent vrais; et le double témoignage que porte leur auteur sur eux et sur ce qu'est écrire est d'une vérité humaine qui transcende le temps. *Steven le Hérault*: du bon Beaulieu.

NEIL B. BISHOP

PUTREFYING SORE

HAZEL D. CAMPBELL, *Woman's Tongue*. Savacou Publications, \$15.00.

JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT, *Lesbian Triptych*, trans. Yvonne M. Klein. The Women's Press, \$7.95.

JACQUI SMYTH, *No Fixed Admission*. Turnstone, n.p.

IN ONE OF THE EARLIEST PIECES of Canadian literature written by a woman, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838), Anna Jameson observed:

Strange, and passing strange, that the relation between the two sexes, the passion of love in short, should not be taken into deeper consideration by our teachers and our legislators. People educate and legislate as if there was no such thing in the world . . . it is the universal bruise, the putrifying sore, on which you must not lay a finger, or your patient (that is, society) cries out and resists, and, like a sick baby, scratches and kicks its physician.

It is this picture of love as a putrefying sore which aptly describes the themes of these three very different books. Divergent as they are in circumstantial outline, all three speak to the insight that love is the unacknowledged legislator of our morality.

Jacqui Smyth's *No Fixed Admission* is the easiest, that is to say, the most comforting, to approach. There, the narrative consists of a series of vignettes or prose poems, each with a title, some of which are cast in the autobiographical first-person voice of an articulate woman in her twenties and some of which are narrated in the third-person by the same woman writing about the marriages of her grandparents and parents. She has grown up in the Prairies and is presently adjusting herself to being separated from her lover and reunited with her father at the same time. The awkwardness of the Oedipal encounter leads this woman backwards into childhood despair:

My father's anger brings me back to my mother. The repetition of events. Like being locked into the credits, having to repeat the same fate over and over. And then I think it is only the breath of blood and the rest is choice.

By the end of the historical recapitulation of events in her family, of how the men and women have come together and parted through the generations, the narrator finally acknowledges to herself that her own lover will not be coming back. Her father says to her, "Alice, I know that you're lonely, but I'm going to tell you something that your grandmother told me. In this world we walk alone. In all my years of living I would say that it's true to the core. We walk alone." Alice meditates on the fact that both her parents divorced, only to attempt marriage again with other people. She cannot decide whether it is hope or fear that keeps this dismal cycle of mating in perpetual motion.

No Fixed Admission was in fact the second of the novels I read and represents some kind of middle ground among them. The reading of *Woman's Tongue* and *Lesbian Triptych* was much stranger. The first, by Hazel Campbell, seems exotic, not so much because of its geo-

graphical locale (Jamaica) as because the culture seems an odd mixture of archaic and modern idioms. The book consists of a series of short stories, fables of married life where the character of womanhood is consistently shaped by the fact that men are to be counted upon only to betray. The narration proceeds jerkily, with an alternation of graphic details, colloquialisms, and fundamentalist moralizing. The Jamaican cultural tradition as it is represented here seems very different from contemporary Canadian writing on the same themes. However, the strangeness of these tales of women-beware-men cannot be called innovative.

The strangeness of Jovette Marchessault's *Lesbian Triptych* is. This book is also the most angrily legislative of the three. The first section, "A Lesbian Chronicle," is the fabular account of Woman growing up in a heterosexual society:

They [her childhood girlfriends] were enclosed inside the panoramic vision of males who would launch them on a dead-end trip. They were catapulted into the world of one-way traffic, of the agonizing squeal of tires. Automatic transmission from father to son! Heir to the throne, to the ignition key which starts incest, rape, conjugal rights and beatings.

The second section, "Night Cows," is not narrative but lyric, an invocation of the mammalian: "MY MOTHER IS A COW! That makes two of us." What seems characteristic of Marchessault's art is that the lyricism gets much of its headiness from being politically satirical. In describing the convocation of "cows of night" she is describing rebellion against the violent, male appropriation of the world, and in its place, the projection of a world animated by female desire. Milk is the symbol of this: "The living world does not arrive from wrath! The living world springs from the mothers' mam-

malian brains." In the third section, "The Angel-Makers," a meditation upon the quintessentially female activity of knitting is turned into one upon abortion and men's control of conception.

Although Marchessault uses an inordinate number of exclamation marks, the speaker's self-intoxication seems to generate a genuinely prophetic voice. Campbell's language is naive; Smyth's is poetically talented only within the tired idiom of imagistic Atwood. Marchessault, even in translation, is remarkable. Her insights into the sexuality of society are satirical, but in the best Biblical fashion of prophetic language, her toughness is visionary:

The lesbian calendar has nothing to do with the solar-liturgical-Roman calendar. With us, it seems to me that everything is accomplished through desire. . . . With us, it is desire which prevents neutrality from taking over. Each of us knows that when she feels desire, she is summoning up the words of all the others like herself, the words of the women who sow, the uninterrupted words which shoot across the beds of time in phosphorescent arrows.

Mrs. Jameson might recognize the sentiment. That Marchessault's book is a politically legislative statement is confirmed by the anxious apparatus that encloses this translation of it, which includes an introduction by Barbara Godard, a pretentious postface by Gloria Feman Orenstein, and a bibliography. It may be that English Canadian women writers are still perceived to be languishing in the shadows of Atwoodian despair over relations between the sexes — Smyth's book certainly suggests this — and critics of French-Canadian literature feel it necessary to explain the ecstatic vision of more Presbyterian readers. Or perhaps it is that artists no longer have their habitual confidence that ecstasy alone can change the world.

KATHRYN CHITTICK

TWICE-TOLD TALES

J. R. (TIM) STRUTHERS, ed., *The Montreal Story Tellers: Memoirs, Photographs, Critical Essays*. Véhicule, \$14.00.

IF YOU TRUST THE TALE of the sub-title this book will be a short, sad disappointment. Because it is an interesting and critically sound idea to juxtapose memoirs by members of an important literary group — Hugh Hood, John Metcalf, Clark Blaise, Ray Smith, and Raymond Fraser — complement these with some innocuous photographs by Sam Tata, and conclude the whole with “critical essays” by various hands. Ideally the potpourri would locate the group *as group* in one convenient volume, offering a shared discourse amongst writers, images, and critics. But the idea here crumples for a number of practical reasons. What we get is not so much a nexus of imaginative and intellectual ferment, as (1) five superb reflections counterpointed with second-rate criticism; and (2) a supreme testament to the ideal of academic recy-
cling.

Consider. The book comprises five individual memoirs, a harmless enough anecdote by Tata, nine essays of varying lengths, and a checklist by the “editor” of works by The Montreal Story Tellers. Three of the memoirs have appeared unabridged within the last four years: Metcalf’s *Kicking Against the Pricks* (1982), Hood’s *Trusting the Tale* (1983), and Blaise’s “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Pup” (1984). Five of the essays (or parts thereof) are “revised” reprints: two from 1977, one from 1979, part of one from 1983, one and a half from 1985. These first appeared in such still flourishing sources as *Canadian Literature*, *Fiddlehead*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, and *Canadian Writers and Their Works*. Struthers’ checklist reproduces much of his own ECW bibliography on Hood; his

listing of the others adds nothing new or surprising. What is the point, then, of reprinting such recent, easily consultable materials? What is the motive underlying this kind of repetitive publication?

There are other irritations. “Edited by” seems a curious euphemism for a collection with no introduction, a book rife with exasperating overlaps, marred by clumsy thought and writing, littered by irrelevant “academes.” We are told no less than eight times how the group was formed; three times that it was not a movement; twice that Metcalf was born in 1938. To be told in a footnote, furthermore, that the essay you read a moment ago is reprinted in the book you are now holding is precisely the kind of nonce information you can do without. Small points to be sure, but ones which cumulatively erode the worth of the collection.

It is the memoirs, ultimately, which form the heart of the book. Read consecutively, they offer a fascinating, critically valuable insight into the dynamics of the group, as well as the idiosyncrasies of its individual members. In much the same manner as their audiences of the 1970’s, we are here encouraged, in Metcalf’s words, “to experience the ‘how’ of a work instead of grubbing about for an undefinable ‘what.’” In each case these finely honed reminiscences are vintage Montreal Story Teller: demanding, witty, outrageous, funny, and strangely wry. They are also very important.

Behind the Molson’s haze, the menopausal nostalgia, the memoirs emerge as meditations on many things: a literary phenomenon, writing, composition, craft, sympathy, or the very basic problems of trying to survive as a writer in Canada. Taken together, they are an essential primer for any critic interested in one or all of the group, for in varying ways each writer addresses the recurrent question: how do I write what I do write? Hood and Metcalf are the most self-consciously

intellectual, teasing out the problematics of writing a work to exist in differing media. Blaise tackles the uncomfortable topic of cultural protectionism, arguing throughout with a knife-edged clarity and concision. Most touching are the two new memoirs, Smith's "Ontological Arseholes: Life with Montreal Story Teller" and Fraser's "The Guy in the Wings with his Pint." Both take a cold, hard clear-eyed approach to their own status: writers commemorating a time since which they have published relatively little. What is most inspiring is that both display an invigorated writerly expertise which bodes well for future production. Smith especially, one of the "most unjustly neglected writers in Canada," provides incontrovertible proof that he deserves more (and better) criticism than he has received here and elsewhere.

Unfortunately this is also true of the others if one goes by the "critical essays" which form the bulk of this collection. In general they operate anecdotally, relying on such sophomoric topics of the "artist versus society" calibre. With the exception of Michael Darling's shrewd analysis of one story by Blaise, most sludge along well-worn thematic pathways, gasping within the shroud of Leavis and the school of organic imagery. Lawrence Garber does attempt to explore the "how" of Smith's fiction; he argues with great pains that *Cape Breton is the Thought-Control Center of Canada* is an anti-traditional work, but does so by placing Smith within the tradition of absurdist writing. Louis MacKendrick paraphrases Smith and Fraser; Dennis Duffy tells what he did on his summer holidays (while mentioning his fondness for Hood); Barry Cameron reveals that Metcalf's stories (unlike others?) should be read like poems because they are "elliptical"; and Keith Garebian proffers a long-winded retrospective which, because of the editorial policy of non-interference, repeats

much of the preceding memoirs. One of the problems is that Struthers includes "critical essays" which make no pretence to be "critical." Barry Cameron's biographical summary of Blaise is ripped from its larger context in *Canadian Writers and Their Works*; Kent Thompson's profile of Metcalf is exactly that: a good profile — but not, by any stretch of his or my imagination, a piece of critical analysis.

As a whole, then, *The Montreal Story Tellers* is a haphazard achievement; the abridged memoirs when juxtaposed reenact the brilliant symbiosis of the group in performance. But the "critical essays" disappoint.

GARY BOIRE

INDIAN HISTORY

OLIVE PATRICIA DICKASON, *The Myth of the Savage: and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas*. University of Alberta Press, \$30.00.

JON WHYTE, *Indians in the Rockies*. Altitude, \$18.95.

THE MYTH OF THE SAVAGE does a great deal to explain the still-obvious conflicts between the so-called "whites" and "reds" in America. Olive Patricia Dickason, in this detailed and well-documented work, shows how (and to a large extent *why*) the first Europeans to arrive formed certain attitudes about the native, attitudes that invariably sprang from misinformation, fallacious analogy, and preconceived notions rather than from the experience of actual contact. The large subject of the book is the forming of a myth about the peoples of the New World, the continuance of which was advantageous to Europeans. Dickason explores the two-edged (positive-negative) aspects of the myth: the native as natural and innocent, the native as uncivilized and barbaric, emphasizing that

the duality simply extended the main opinion, already firmly rooted by the early sixteenth century: "the characterization of Amerindians as savages." The eventual thrust of the book, as the subtitle indicates, is the importance of that characterization to France: specifically, the importance of the myth of the savage to the beginnings of French colonialism in the Americas. However, Dickason first carefully prepares the reader for that concern.

To make vivid the reactions of Europeans to the discovery of the New World and to give a true sense of early prevailing attitudes, Dickason relies on varied sources: on written accounts (beginning with letters of Columbus and Vespucci), on early (engagingly erroneous) maps, and on pictorial expressions such as paintings, drawings, woodcuts, engravings, etc., many of them by artists who had never been out of Europe. Although all these sources are interesting and informative, it is the pictures that really surprise and delight the reader in that they so suddenly and so dramatically communicate the early misconceptions, whether they be idealistic, perjorative, or just plain wrong. A sampling will make clear their general impact.

A dark-skinned couple, colourfully dressed and beaded, stride through paradisaical lushness of vegetation. The man carries a bow in his outstretched hand; there is a quiver of arrows at his shoulder. Behind them, a bare-breasted girl gathers fruit along the shore and a curly-headed man floats on the lake in a high-prowed canoe; beyond is an arched door, seemingly set into the hillside of the far shore. Caption: "Amerindians were sometimes shown looking more like Africans."

Nine stylized figures wearing headdresses, skirts, anklets, and elbow bracelets — all made of feathers — stand or sit near or under a structure of poles in front of the sea on which are two sailing ships. Caption: "In this woodcut, of the earliest and most widely published representations of

Amerindians, the subjects have the air of classical Romans." Something unclassical about the picture, however, is that portions of a human carcass hang from a rafter, and that one of the women is chewing on a human arm.

A calm-eyed figure with a bulging, bare stomach and a Mona Lisa expression sits beneath a tree, in Roman-style headdress and a battle skirt (both of feathers). He holds a bow in his right hand, and in his left is a human leg. Behind him are tall stakes topped with human heads, and several figures leaping around a blazing fire on which roasts a whole human carcass. The caption: "The replete cannibal."

As well as giving us clear indications of strange versions of the people, the pictures vividly present laughable (although seriously meant) projections of many other aspects of the New World — the beaver, for example. "A French view of a Canadian beaver" shows an animal with a lion-like body and a cow/monkey head. "Beaver hunting in Canada" shows figures aiming, some with rifles, some with bows and arrows, into a beaver lodge that is a perfectly arched structure cross-sectioned with perfectly square cubicles for the animals. One beaver, on the shore in the background, rests its forepaws on a man's knee. It is not clear if the man is fending off its attack or if he is trying to pet it. In "Beaver building a dam," several of the fifty or so beavers on the construction site walk upright carrying bundles of even-lengthed bundles over their shoulders.

By giving such close attention to the early misconceptions Dickason makes understandable the kind of thinking that gave rise to the myth of the savage. Then later, when she describes the differences between the Amerindian and European societies, it is credible that the same kind of thinking could prompt the Europeans to deny that the native society had any structure of value system: "By classifying the Amerindians as savages, Europeans were able to create the ideology that

helped to make it possible to launch one of the great movements in the history of western civilization: the colonization of overseas empires." Thus, by nurturing the myth, the newcomers were able to determine the outcome of their dealings with the peoples whose land and resources they wanted.

Jon Whyte does not stress the impact of European intrusion as Dickason does. Rather, his Indians in the Rockies before the fur traders, missionaries, treaty makers, railroad builders, and tourists intruded upon them. Without pretending to be either ethnographer or historian, Whyte begins at the time 11,500 years ago when "a band of toolmaking hunters entered the Rockies," and offers a plausible history of the people up to the coming of the white man. After that, he covers the topics standard in works on Amerindians: the introduction of the horse, the activities of hunting, fishing, crafts, sports and games, and the effects of the arrival of fur traders and missionaries — smallpox, liquor, religion, laws, and, eventually, reserves. Of this part, his chapter "The Art of Beadwork," in which he shows how the Stoney culture combined the floral design of the Woodland People and the geometric design of the Plains People, is most moving and lyrical.

Like Dickason, Whyte makes extensive use of pictures (about fifty pages of pictures to the seventy of text). There are watercolours and oils (many by members of the Whyte family, from 1845 on) and there are posters, but the bulk of the pictures are photographs. As well as black-and-white portraits and "snaps" of people and scenes (the earliest date is 1907), there are hand-coloured portraits and photos, and hand-coloured lantern slides — all of which add realistic touches to the latter part of the book, which is a recording of the more recent history of the Banff area. Whyte tells of the

naming of local rivers and mountains, of the Stoney Indian who first allowed a white man to see Lake Louise, of the building of the Banff Springs Hotel in 1887, of the beginning Banff Indian Days in 1899 and of their annual occurrence until they ceased in 1978, eighty-nine years later. And it is the last few chapters that are most vividly written — perhaps because the events are within the memory of Whyte and his family, but certainly because he is writing of his two great loves: the mountains where he has always lived and the people he has always been close to (his father, at the age of seven, was adopted by a Stoney family).

Despite any imbalance between generalized and specific treatments, Jon Whyte, Curator of the Heritage Collection of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, willingly shares the knowledge and the materials that are in his keeping. What he gives us is a remarkably rich time-portrait of the Stoney People.

PEGEEEN BRENNAN

A NEW BRUNSWICK ROBERTS

The Collected Poems of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts: A Critical Edition. Ed. Desmond Pacey. Asst. Ed. Graham Adams. Wombat Press, \$49.50.

ANYONE MAKING HIS WAY into this long-awaited volume by that most reliable of scholarly routes — the Bibliography — would not proceed further with complete confidence in the accuracy and comprehensiveness of its editors. Although edited by Carrie MacMillan and Glenn Clever respectively, the proceedings of the Symposium on Roberts at Mount Allison and the University of Ottawa are both attributed here to Fred Cogswell, whose *Charles G. D. Roberts and His Works* is

listed in a manner which obscures the fact that it is not only a monograph but also a contribution to a volume in the *Canadian Writers and Their Works* series edited by Robert Lecker, Jack David, and Ellen Quigley (none of whom is mentioned in the citation). And despite the fact that under Cogswell's name items are included in the Bibliography from as recently as 1984, this courtesy is not extended to any other materials on Roberts published after 1975, with the exception of Malcolm Ross's "A Strange Aesthetic Ferment" (*Canadian Literature*, 1976). The impression of New Brunswickers staking a claim to a New Brunswick poet is not dispelled by the further fact that the only two M.A. theses listed in the Bibliography of *The Collected Poems of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts* were both written at the University of New Brunswick. (Other errors in the Bibliography include the omission of dates of publication, chapter titles, and the like.) How, one wonders, would the late Desmond Pacey, under whose aegis this volume had its inception, react to the apparent placement of regional possessiveness and insecurity over scholarly accuracy and inclusiveness?

Whereas Pacey would probably have been dismayed by the Bibliography appended to his "brain-child" (p. xix), he would very likely have found Cogswell's Introduction to the volume satisfactory, if only because it skirts the recent developments in criticism and biography that are giving us a contradictory, unstable, and licentious Roberts in favour of once again squeezing his poems and personality into the mould of the Victorian sage. "As a poet, Roberts was shaped by his New Brunswick background, by his classical and literary upbringing, and by an innate mystical acceptance and belief in life which he early adopted and which was always to be part of his nature" (p. xix) writes Cogswell near the

beginning of his Introduction, and near the end: "... nineteenth-century Canada did not need, and could not possibly have appreciated, a Whitman or a Rimbaud. The country needed a Roberts to give respectability, a wider reputation, and a reading public to its poets" (p. xxxii). This is all right as far as it goes, but of course what Canada had in Roberts was something of a Swinburne whose "respectability" was more than anything else a creation of those who lionized him as a poet-prophet after his return to Canada in the 1920's. Despite its framing arguments, however, Cogswell's Introduction does touch charily on Roberts' love poetry and its sources in "the bohemian wanderings of his last fifty years" (p. xxvi) and it does concede that "It is difficult for any man, however much a mystic, to keep to all times the totality of his transcendental vision" (p. xxx). Nevertheless, Cogswell's major preoccupation is with a conventional and mystical Roberts — a Roberts who "best expressed" (p. xxviii) his true self in "traditional set verse forms" (p. xxiv) and in "his transcendental poems" (p. xxviii). This thesis is arguable and provocative, but the rather general discussions of Roberts' poems by form and theme that it engenders in Cogswell's Introduction do not provide a particularly useful and illuminating point of entry to *The Collected Poems*. Cogswell's best work on Roberts lies elsewhere, most notably in his essays in the Mount Allison Symposium volume and in *Canadian Writers and Their Works*.

Nowhere in *The Collected Poems of Charles G. D. Roberts*, not even in the all-too-brief "Note on Bibliographical Procedures" that divides the poems from the Notes, can the reader discover a rationale for the most important and contentious editorial decision in the background of the volume: the decision, in Cogswell's words, to arrange "the *corpus* of Roberts'

poems . . . chronologically" (p. xix) by date of composition or publication. This decision is contentious and, in my view, wrong because the one advantage that it might create — that of allowing the reader easily to study the development of Roberts' art — does not compensate for the difficulties and distortions that the chronological ordering in this instance involves. Firstly, only a small proportion of Roberts' poems can be precisely dated in terms of their composition, so the editors are forced, willy-nilly, into arbitrary decisions: when neither a poem's date of composition nor its date of first periodical publication is known, it is placed "alphabetically by title . . . "[in] the year of publication" (p. 358). Not only does all this assume a brief and uniform period of time between composition (when unknown) and periodical publication, but it also means that in certain years (such as 1896 when no dates of composition are known but several poems were published for the first time in periodicals and about half as many in *The Book of the Native*) one arbitrary sequence (periodical chronology) is followed by another (alphabetical listing). A second set of difficulties and distortions inherent in the Roberts' *Collected Poems* devolves from the editors' decision to print in chronological order by composition or first publication poems based on copy-texts that have been "chosen on the established principle that the last publication . . . during an author's lifetime should represent his final intention" (p. 357). As a result of the uneasy marriage between chronology and copy-text, "final" masquerades as "first" in the actual sequence of texts printed by Pacey and Adams. The matter of copy-text is further, and, in effect, more seriously complicated by the apparent assumption of Pacey and Adams that Roberts' "final intention" for a given poem did not include his placement of it within a larger

unit of significance such as "Songs of the Common Day" or "New York Nocturnes," sequences which in my view can and should be accorded an integrity that overrides the chronology of the composition and publication of their component parts. In this regard, it is instructive to note that in his edition of *The Poems of Tennyson* (1969) Christopher Ricks prints the bulk of the poems in chronological order but properly decides to print *In Memoriam* under the year of its publication (with a note to this effect under the year of its inception) and, more important, to print the lyrics in Tennyson's sequence, not in their order of composition, but in the order established by the poet and, simply put, essential to their meaning both singly and collectively. In *The Collected Poems of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts*, the Canadian poets lyric sequences are dismembered, with the result that an important feature of his *oeuvre* disappears, taking with it some of his nature as an artist and as a thinker.

The extensive Notes that occupy (with A Note on Bibliographical Procedures and a very useful Chronology of the poet's life) nearly half of the Roberts' *Collected Poems* record (1) the publishing history and (2) the textual variants of individual poems, as well as providing (3) a glossary of unfamiliar words, mythological names, and the like. In recording the publishing history of the poems, Pacey and Adams frequently and valuably draw on the comments of Roberts, his family, his friends, and his early critics to provide a chronology and context for a given work. Also of value for the scholar-critic in the Notes are the lists of variants, where Pacey and Adams have rightly assumed that the "conventional distinctions between substantives and accidentals, between variants which affect the meaning of a poem or merely the presentation of a poem, are inapplicable to Roberts" and have elected to re-

cord "All variants except differences between Canadian, British and American spellings" (p. 358). Applying these principles to versions of poems that exist in a variety of sources from manuscripts and newspapers to anthologies and individual volumes, Pacey and Adams do an excellent job of presenting the reader with the information that he needs to trace the development of Roberts' individual poems. It is somewhat puzzling, however, that in the glossaries of a "Critical Edition" the editors make no attempt to point out literary allusions and echoes in Roberts' poetry. To give one instance, the glossary to "Tantramar Revisited" is silent on the relation between the Canadian work and Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," the Romantic return poem that is its principal ancestor and the probable source of its "Now at this season . . ." (p. 79); instead, the reader is merely given geographical referents for the poem's proper names — Tantramar, Cumberland Point, and Minudie.

As far as the texts themselves are concerned, there seems to be a commendable lack of error in *The Collected Poems of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts*. A spot-check of several hundred lines has confirmed the impression given by the lists of variants (rather than the Bibliography) that in the crucial matters relating to the production of accurate texts of Roberts' poems his editors have worked to the highest standards. This means that, despite the shortcomings of some of its apparatus and assumptions, Pacey's and Adams's *Collected Roberts* will prove a reliable text for critics and scholars of Confederation poetry who, differ as they may regarding the ideal order in which to print the poems, will be grateful for the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the central and crucial portions of this volume.

Physically, *The Collected Poems of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts* is a handsome

book and a fine tribute to both Roberts and Pacey. It has generous margins, large type, and sturdy printing. Unhappily, it has two faults which render it difficult to use, particularly when a reader is working with more than one poem and its variants: it has no running titles and its "Notes" are placed not at the foot of each page but at the end of the volume. The difficulties for such a reader are alleviated but not obliterated by the tables of Contents, First Lines, and Titles near the beginning and end of the volume. Nevertheless the small Wombat Press in Wolfville is to be congratulated for doing a durable and creditable job on a project that would have intimidated larger operations.

D. M. R. BENTLEY

CYCLES

MICHEL DALLAIRE, *L'oeil interrompu*. Prise de Parole, \$11.95.

DORIC GERMAIN, *Poison*. Prise de Parole, \$14.95.

PLUTÔT UNE LONGUE NOUVELLE qu'un roman, *L'oeil interrompu* raconte la banalité et la futilité de la vie. L'auteur y revient avec une insistance tenace pour souligner ce qui est pour lui la caractéristique principale de la condition humaine: la solitude, l'abîme qui sépare l'être des autres et, par conséquent, le vide d'une existence dépourvue de sens. Michel Dallaire crée un univers fictionnel qui se situe à mi-chemin entre le monde concret et un monde fantaisiste, et plus on avance dans le récit, plus ce dernier s'impose, plus la ligne de démarcation entre rêve et réalité s'obscurcit. Ceci est dû en partie à la forme narrative que choisit l'auteur. Il divise son récit en deux parties, écrites respectivement à la première personne sous forme de journal intime par le héros, et à la troisième personne.

Antoine Lachance, journaliste montréalais, renonce à sa vie routinière parce qu'il veut se réorienter. Il part donc pour le Sud sous prétexte de rédiger un article sur le nouveau roi d'un pays non nommé mais qui serait de toute évidence un gabarit des "Républiques de bananes" de l'Amérique latine. Le roi de ce pays agit en dictateur absolu, tenant à tout posséder et à tout dominer. Il veut en même temps multiplier ses richesses en faisant de son pays une sorte de Disneyland du Sud, en y créant des sites touristiques et en profanant les ruines anciennes des Mayans à des fins commerciales. Mais la modernité n'est jamais loin du passé, et la cruauté humaine atavique renaît chez un roi qui complot le massacre des journalistes pour écarter les opinions divergeantes. De plus, il garde son peuple dans l'obéissance passive en ayant recours à la drogue: il est obligatoire dans ce pays de mâcher les feuilles de coca, ce qui a pour effet de garder les habitants dans un état de torpeur et de passivité qui décourage toute révolte. On peut voir dans ces "feuilles sacrées" et dans les actions du roi un réquisitoire contre notre société et ses stupéfiants: l'alcool, la télévision, l'artificialité de la vie et aussi contre l'impérialisme américain, car en voulant recréer chez lui "l'American Way of Life," le roi ouvre la voie à sa propre chute. Il finit par perdre son pouvoir et tombe, dépossédé et déchu. Une leçon pour les dictateurs de tout acabit.

Et notre journaliste? Lachance, à qui le roi a confié le soin d'écrire sa biographie, s'identifie de plus en plus au monarque. Il commence à perdre son sens de la réalité: "Je deviens lui... ma résistance fond" (p. 52). Et quand le roi tombe, à la fin de la première partie, l'oeil, pour ainsi dire, est interrompu. Il y a cataclysme, les pays du Nord solidifient leur invasion culturelle pare une invasion réelle, l'ordre est inversé et, dans la deuxième partie, le journaliste est de-

venu roi. La confusion et le chaos qui résultent des bouleversements sont suggérés par la succession rapide et désordonnée des événements, par l'association libre des idées et, stylistiquement, par de nombreuses ellipses, demi-phrases et points de suspension. Ce style sobre, incisif et elliptique précipite certes l'action, mais il marque en même temps une absence d'émotivité, peut-être pour souligner l'isolement de l'être humain dans le monde moderne. Le lecteur n'arrive pas à s'y impliquer totalement; au contraire, il s'en distance, éprouvant lui-même l'angoisse et la solitude d'un monde profondément inhumain où la violence mène au pouvoir dominateur qui, pour se maintenir, doit avoir recours à la violence. Le cycle ne semble pas prêt à s'interrompre.

La notion de cycle se retrouve, mais traitée d'une autre façon, dans *Poison*, de Doric Germain. Beaucoup terre à terre, ce roman décrit les étapes principales dans la vie d'une fille qui se trouve engagée dans une quête, non seulement du bonheur, mais aussi une quête de l'indépendance de soi, qui l'amène à vouloir s'arracher de l'influence héréditaire qui menace de se perpétuer et de la réclamer comme victime.

Née d'un père alcoolique, violent et souvent absent et d'une mère patiente et résignée (tous deux portraits on ne peut plus typiques du père et de la mère dans la littérature canadienne-française), Andréanne grandit dans une ambiance de violence accrue. Battue par son père, trahie par sa mère, esseulée, elle espère trouver l'affection, l'attention et l'amour qu'elle n'a jamais connus en ayant recours à la boisson et, plus tard, à d'autres échappatoires, les une plus éphémères que les autres: le travail, l'amour, les somnifères. Toujours est-il que c'est l'alcool qui reste son allié principal dans sa quête d'oublier, ne serait-ce que momentanément, sa misère. L'auteur s'ef-

force de démontrer ainsi le cycle vicieux qui se perpétue de génération en génération: non seulement l'alcoolisme du père se manifeste-t-il chez la fille, mais aussi le besoin irrépressible de dominer autrui.

Cependant, Andréanne, seule avec sa fille, rendue au bord de l'abîme, alcoolique, mère négligeante, rencontre une espèce "d'ange gardien," ancien alcoolique, qui la prend sous son aile et l'aide à surmonter sa maladie. Et puis elle à son tour sauvera Oiseau, prostituée qui tente de se suicider, ce qui laisse intacte la notion de cycle, mais qui la transforme en quelquechose de positif. Cette fois-ci, le cycle vicieux de l'alcoolisme héréditaire sera remplacé par un cycle de charité humaine. Il y a de l'espoir.

Toutefois, on sent derrière les paroles de "l'ange," le ton un tant soit peu moralisateur de quelqu'un qui nous fait la leçon. De plus, on a affaire à un narrateur omniscient qui très souvent entre dans l'histoire pour faire sentir sa présence. Ces interventions, par trop nombreuses, finissent par agacer le lecteur, car elles ont le malheur de faire du roman une sorte de traité moral en prenant souvent l'allure de maximes qui viennent heurter le déroulement du récit. Celles-ci se réduisent le plus souvent à des clichés banals comme: "elle oubliait qu'aujourd'hui n'est somme toute que le demain dont elle avait peur hier" (p. 89) ou à des commentaires ampoulés tels que celui-ci: "s'agissait-il d'un homme qui vient de se rendre compte que la vie est le rétrécissement graduel de l'éventail des possibles et la mort sa disparition totale" (p. 46). L'écrivain s'efforce trop de nous expliquer le comportement de ses personnages au lieu de les laisser parler et de laisser travailler l'imagination du lecteur. En particulier, un commentaire sur la mort mystérieuse des enfants au Toronto Hospital for Sick Children, en plus d'être d'un goût fort douteux, n'ajoute absolument rien à la trame du récit. Ce pen-

chant à tout expliquer sur un ton sentencieux et moralisateur allonge inutilement ce qui est autrement un récit très lisible.

MARK BENSON

MANIAQUES DEPRESSIFS

ANNE-MARIE ALONZO, *Bleus de mine*. Editions du Noroît, n. p.

LOUISE DESJARDINS, *Les Verbes seuls*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

MICHEL SAVARD, *Cahiers d'anatomie (complétés)*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

PATRICE DESBIENS, *Dans l'après-midi cardiaque*. Prise de Parole, \$9.95.

HEUREUSEMENT qu'il faisait un soleil radieux quand j'ai lu ces quatre recueils; s'il avait plu, j'aurais été tenté sans aucun doute de me suicider, tant les poèmes qui y figurent sont mornes, tristes et déprimants. N'y a-t-il autre chose dans la vie que solitude, cynisme, amertume et laid?

Anne-Marie Alonzo, par exemple, commence ainsi son recueil *Bleus de mine*: "clos mon univers." A quoi bon continuer, pense le lecteur, puisque tout est perdu dès le début. Elle pleure la perte de son amante (oui, le mot est au féminin) et, comme la photographie décomposée qui accompagne ici et là le texte, elle nous présente un amalgame des événements majeurs de leur vie ensemble et les sentiments qui en découlent. Pour essayer de reconstituer les instances d'un amour sublime et pour se consoler, elle écrit sa peine. Cependant, elle n'arrive pas à se défaire de la présence de son ancienne amante, laquelle présence nous est découverte par une suite d'images qui se dissolvent les unes dans les autres. Ce mouvement est secondé par un style saccadé et entrecoupé qui omet souvent les articles et les sujets, qui joue avec le syn-

taxe, déplaçant le verbe et qui met parfois des espaces entre les mots et des parenthèses autour des lettres. Elle crée ainsi un effet décousu qui souligne l'association libre des pensées qui surgissent au hasard en elle au souvenir de son amante.

Louise Desjardins, dans *Les Verbes seuls*, raconte elle aussi la perte d'un amour — cette fois-ci d'un homme — en choisissant de le faire dans un style qui ressemble à la poésie en prose. Chaque page présente un court paragraphe de cinq à six lignes environ où l'auteure décrit les différentes étapes d'une liaison qui est maintenant finie. Pour ce faire, elle s' imagine héroïne d'un roman qu'elle est en train de lire. Elle repasse dans son esprit les événements qui ont marqué le drame et les sentiments qui la torturent après le départ de son amant. On assiste à une prise de conscience graduelle chez la femme, qui, dans cinq sections distinctes, nous fait voir ses différents états d'esprit. Dans la première partie, elle se rend compte que son amant ignorait ses désirs, ses angoisses et ses besoins. La peine et la douleur l'accablent et elle décide de ne plus souffrir l'amour. La matière qu'elle lit suscite chez elle de divers sentiments; elle s'identifie à l'héroïne du roman, trouvant de la consolation dans sa détresse. La lecture lui sert d'échappatoire, lui rappelle que, quoique vide et seule, "sur la banquette arrière de la vie," elle doit néanmoins tout reprendre à zéro: "il faut tout recommencer, au premier mot de la première ligne de la première page d'amour." Elle part donc dans la deuxième partie pour la Floride où elle trouve à sa grande déception l'artificialité de sa vie d'autrefois. Elle tente toutes sortes d'évasions mais n'arrive pas à se délivrer de ses souvenirs. C'est alors dans la troisième partie, "L'Air de sortir d'un mauvais roman," qu'elle se rend compte de l'illusion que fut l'amour. Les caresses de son amant revêtent pour elle maintenant une allure de mort et son désir

sexuel n'avait été que mensonge. Elle commence à se justifier la fin de la liaison, se disant que, étant restée avec lui, elle aurait perdu son identité, serait morte en tant qu'individu. Elle commence ensuite la ronde inévitable d'amours d'une nuit, entretenant des notions parfois meurtrières, parfois suicidaires, se fortifiant contre la sentimentalité, se jurant de ne plus tomber dans le piège. Résolution éphémère, car dans la quatrième partie, "La Superposition" (allusion à l'acte sexuel), elle commence à chercher un partenaire dans les petites annonces. Elle devient la maîtresse d'un homme marié qu'elle ne voit que deux fois par semaine. Déception encore. La dernière partie nous montre qu'en fin de compte, l'affection et la stabilité d'une relation sincère et permanente ne seront pas pour elle. Amère et déçue, elle ne connaîtra que le fac-similé de l'amour.

Le troisième recueil, *Cahiers d'anatomie*, nous offre, comme les deux premiers, les instances d'une relation affective, cette fois racontée de la perspective masculine. Cependant, les vers de Michel Savard nous semblent plus évocateurs que ceux d'Alonzo et de Desjardins. Ils renferment une certaine musicalité qu'on cherche en vain chez ces dernières. Son style, plus classique, rappelle celui de Verlaine, surtout dans le poème qui débute "que chasse-t-il nocturne / ce fou qui fouille trois fois l'an / son quart de rêve en tes sous-bois. . . ." L'art de la métaphore n'est pas perdu pour lui.

Comme l'indique le titre, l'auteur étale ses souvenirs comme quelqu'un qui sort des photos et nous montre, sans ordre particulier, ses impressions de son ancienne amante. Il reprend "le compte des extases," se rappelant ses habitudes et ses traits particuliers à l'occasion d'un dîner, d'un film, d'une promenade ou des ébats sexuels. D'où le retour au début de plusieurs poèmes du vers "un jour c'était" et "que dire que dire." Toute-

fois, c'est en ayant recours à des images corporelles presque radiographiques qu'il nous la représente le plus souvent. Tout y passe: molaires, cheveux, épaules, yeux, prunelles, oreille (un poème prend même la forme d'une oreille), nuque, sexe, joue, lèvres, doigts, coeur. C'est surtout les sens qui rappellent le mieux pour lui son ancienne amante dont la sensualité évidente ne saurait cependant cacher sa vraie nature de femme dévoratrice. A un moment donné, elle montre ses crocs (ce qui pourrait être assez révélateur pour la psychocritique, vu les descriptions fréquentes du sexe oral), et lorsqu'il regarde de plus près, il découvre sous l'iris une étrangère. La fin ne tardera pas à se produire et, en hiver, ils se quittent. Il a beau se la remémorer, cela ne sert à rien; la veilleuse allumée l'attendra en vain. L'a-t-il vécu, cet amour? Est-ce réel ou imaginaire? L'alternance entre "je/il" et "tu/elle" semble justifier notre doute et semble indiquer en outre les sentiments de distanciation et d'aliénation de l'auteur. Écoutons les derniers vers du recueil: "... mais tu n'existes pas hormis ces souvenirs, ces fragments / petites ruptures du réel."

Chez nos trois premiers auteurs, nous nous sommes trouvés sur un plan qui admettait facilement les sentiments abstraits, pour ne pas dire métaphysiques. Chacun se débat à sa manière contre les émotions profondes qui le déchirent. C'est tout à fait le contraire chez Patrice Desbiens dans son recueil *Dans l'après-midi cardiaque*. Différent des autres par son adhésion et ses traditions (il est franco-ontarien), il l'est aussi par son écriture. Alors que les trois premiers semblent sortir de la même école introspective québécoise, Desbiens, lui, sort de l'école de la vie. L'envers de l'intellectuel, il est beaucoup plus terre à terre, plus concret que ses confrères québécois. Néanmoins, il traite comme eux de la solitude, de la détresse et la cruauté humains et du man-

que de rapports affectifs. Mais il le fait d'une manière qui rappelle pour nous tous le quotidien morne et lugubre. Observateur implacable de la vie qui l'entoure, il décrit ce qu'il connaît: la laideur d'une taverne, la solitude d'une chambre d'hôtel, l'amour absent, les villes de l'Ontario du Nord. Son but est le même que celui des autres: mettre à nu l'intérieur de l'âme. Mais alors que ceux-ci préconisent un regard introspectif dès le début, il y parvient de l'extérieur, de la réalité de tous les jours. Son pessimisme et son cynisme sont heureusement obviés par une pointe d'ironie, par un peu d'humour qui enlève la patine d'amertume qui menace à tout instant de saborder toute l'entreprise.

Il diffère des autres également par son style; beaucoup plus directs, moins abstraits, ses vers se lisent presque comme de la prose. Son écriture reflète la vie concrète qu'il observe. Pas pour lui l'association libre d'une Anne-Marie Alonzo ou les métaphores d'un Michel Savard. Ses seules figures se limitent à des comparaisons lourdes et banales ("seins comme des oranges Sunkists," "elle m'a laissé sur le bord du chemin... comme une vieille batterie de char"). Cependant, cette poésie "apoétique" lui sert d'outil dans son désir de démythifier l'art d'écrire. Plus d'une fois il fait des commentaires acerbes sur le lot du poète, surtout dans le poème "L'Écriture c'est une discipline":

O que je suis beau quand
j'écris un poème mais
le barman n'est pas du même avis.
Il attend que je lui redonne son stylo
pour écrire ma facture.

Et, comme pour mettre fin à toute illusion, le dernier poème du recueil raconte la vie et la mort par suicide de son ami Paillasse, musicien manqué qui n'arrivait pas à s'intégrer à la vie. Pour chaque réussite dans le monde artistique, il y a des centaines d'échecs, parfois avec

des conséquences funestes. La vie n'est pas gaie et les poèmes de Patrice Desbiens, tout comme ceux des trois autres auteurs, quoique de façon différente, le montrent impitoyablement. On a beau y chercher des roses, on ne trouve que des épines.

MARK BENSON

SF FOR SURVIVAL

JUDITH MERRIL, ed., *Tesseract*. Porcépic, \$9.95.

PRESENTING ITSELF as an anthology of specifically Canadian science fiction (not fantasy), Judith Merrill's *Tesseract* sets out to make some points about the Canadian psyche as well as about the literary power of science fiction at its best. Like some of the writers in this book, Merrill is Canadian by adoption, but she has done her homework, and has thought long and hard about what might differentiate Canadian writing from American, and on the whole, her anthology respects the differences she feels are there. This is interesting in itself; but what's even more intriguing is that she has produced a collection of stories and poems which deserves to be read far beyond the narrow boundaries of the genre, although it will likely have its salutary effects upon the traditional SF readership as well.

As she points out in her Afterword, when she came to Canada, Merrill discovered a number of writers here who shared what she calls "science fiction head space." As she put it,

sometimes it was overt SF imagery, or a certain way of thinking about environment, a casual mixture of magic-and-realism, or an oddly familiar structural tension in the work. Then, one by one, leading Canadian authors began telling me about the impact of science fiction on their development: Berton, Laurence, MacEwen, Acorn, Purdy, Engel. Finally, I began to catch up on

Canadian criticism. CanLit, I was told, is about *survival* and, characteristically, the environment may become almost a character in the story!

Of course! Just like SF. (Is this why Canadian mainstream authors, when they turn to SF, usually do a good job of it? U.S. and U.K. mainstreamers generally muck it up.)

Without wishing to point out the limitations of this view (the most problematical having to do with its apparently uncritical acceptance of Atwood's Survival theory and its possibly too easy assumption of the SF insider's point of view), Merrill is on to something here. And her early recognition that such writers as Dave Godfrey, Ray Smith, Gwen MacEwen, and others sometimes wrote pieces that could only be called "speculative fiction," if not quite "science fiction," is dead on target. But science fiction as it has come to be known throughout the world in this century is deeply tied to the technological thrust to the future which George Grant defined as archetypically American about the same time Merrill made her way from there to here. Still, even in the centre of that technological vision, even in the U.S., there have always been those writers, often the most interesting, who interrogated the unthinking acceptance of that vision in their work (I note that it's a Canadian, Philip Borsos, who wants to film that great interrogation of blind technological vision cut off from spirituality, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*).

Canada, of course, has always been well placed to question that vision from a position simultaneously within and without its ground. To a great extent, such a visionary and literary interrogation animates the best pieces in *Tesseract*. But it's also very Canadian in having stories from a number of ethnic backgrounds and from both languages. Indeed, the lead story, and one of the best, is Québec writer Elizabeth Vonarburg's "Home by the Sea," which is told from the point of

view of a human "artifact," who has finally decided to return to visit her "mother." Elliptical, imagistic, and powerfully affective, it sets the stage for the whole book: this is not going to be standard, conventional science fiction. Or, at least, much of it won't be. Vonarburg allows us only passing glimpses of her future world, yet the glimpses are so intense we can infer the whole from them: it is ecologically scarred, but it goes on. The human world of her protagonist isn't all that different from ours, yet its alterations are all tied to the good and bad effects of technological "progress." All of which information is context: the actual confrontations of the fiction are as old as motherhood and daughterhood, and the author captures feelings in a charged metaphorical language. She's not the only one to write in such a non-conventionally charged fashion.

Actually, quite a few of these stories explore parent-child relationships, or at least the changing question of what "relationship" or "family" might mean under altered conditions of society or environment. Rhea Rose's "Chronos' Christmas," Michael G. Coney's "The Byrds," Candas Jane Dorsey's "Johnny Appleseed on the New World," Daniel Sernine's "Stardust Boulevard," Terrance M. Green's "The Woman Who is the Midnight Wind," Phyllis Gotlieb's "Tauf Aleph," Gary Eikenberry's "Anthropology 101," Marian Engel's "Sophie, 1990," Susan Swan's "The Man Doll," Lesley Choyce's "The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Writer," Spider Robinson's "God is an Iron," and David Kirkpatrick's "The Effect of Terminal Cancer on Potential Astronauts" all deal with those themes in one way or another; and those are almost all the stories in the book.

Another way of stating such a theme would be to call it the theme of alienation, which SF can always manifest directly in story and plot. And many of the

stories named above deal with other themes as well. Not to mention that some are far more intriguing in terms of style, power, and invention than are others. Indeed, on the whole it is those writers who have not made a name for themselves in traditional SF markets who give us the most innovative writing here. Coney and Robinson pay something of a price for knowing and adhering to the conventions of the genre so faithfully. Phyllis Gotlieb knows the genre, but has always written her own way in it, and her always loving use of Hebrew myth and history gives her work an individual colour. William Gibson, whose "Hinterlands" definitely engages the theme of alienation if not that of relationships, has learned a newly polished hightech style which provides a fresh gloss to his narratives: his fictions are hard and fascinating, and he has become very popular in the field partly because he does seem to be offering something new (actually it owes a lot to Bester, Delany, and Zelazny, but those are good mentors).

Even the stories with conventional attitudes and tropes, however, are not overburdened by them, and some of them either play delightful games with them — Swan and Choyce, for example — or simply explode them in a bravura assault of style — as does David Kirkpatrick, whose McLuhanesque picaresque narrator moves with Joycean ease through linguistic/cultural hives in an utterly altered Toronto. I look forward to the novel of which this will be part, for it is full of a punning inventiveness that creates the world of which it speaks.

Tesseracts has a number of poems and short prose pieces, as well as regular short stories. These range from the strangely brilliant linguistic explorations of Christopher Dewdney and the witty inventions of Robert Priest and Robert Zend to much less evocative and more traditional SF-oriented pieces. Both Priest

and Zend understand, as some of the other contributors do not, the subversive potential of conventional SF tropes when they are treated in an ironically naive manner. The problem for writers who want to write an SF poem is that often all they manage to do is to write a rather banal poem set on another planet or in the future; and that isn't good enough. Still, the overall quality of *Tesseract* is high, both in terms of its science fictional vision and its literary power. This is not just a book in which Canadian SF fans can finally read some work from their own country; it is a book anyone interested in one important aspect of the new writing in Canada will find both entertaining and provocative.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

OURS AS DAUGHTERS

JOAN BARFOOT, *Duet for Three*. Macmillan, \$23.95.

VICTORIA BRANDEN, *Flitterin' Judas*. McClelland & Stewart, \$12.95.

THESE TWO NOVELS by women about women are profoundly different. Branden's comically illustrates and confirms patriarchal assumptions that have polarized male and female experience and identity. Barfoot's sensitivity explores what Adrienne Rich in *Of Women Born* calls "the great unwritten story . . . and the essential female tragedy" — the cathexis between mother and daughter in which the mother is lost to the daughter and the daughter to the mother.

This tragedy is averted in Barfoot's novel by the appearance of the third female — the grand-daughter Frances, now a woman in her thirties, whose weekend visit to her mother and grandmother threatens both of them, since the eighty-year-old Aggie's developing night-time incontinence has given her sixty-six-year-

old daughter (and only child) June the courage to contemplate freeing herself of her mother by placing her in a nursing home. Such a move would separate Aggie from the house which as a bride she transformed with yellow paint in defiance of the orders of her mean-spirited, neurotic husband, and as a widow she turned into a successful bakery business, and which now she regards as her fortress, though to June it remains a prison.

The novel is structured around the alternating first-person narratives of Aggie and June. Aggie, like Laurence's Hagar Shipley, is old, fat, quick of tongue and mind, and ripe with memory. There the echo of Hagar stops. Aggie recognizes early in the novel that her three wishes as a girl have come true: "to marry, to be a mother, and to be free in her own grown-up life." Yet she recognizes that the fairy tale success is "something else in life . . . as Frances would say . . . a fuck-

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up." Aggie's exploration of the succession of Aggies that she knows to be leading to the next one — the dead Aggie, reveals her to us as a woman we might all have liked to have had as a mother — a mother who succeeds, in Rich's words, in "expanding the limits of her life," who "refuses to be a victim," who "wants her own freedom and ours as daughters." Frances is the affectionate inheritor of her grandmother's success, the daughter Aggie talked to in her womb. But June is her father's daughter and associates only distrust, shame, and hatred with her mother. Increasingly, Aggie's monologues reflect her awareness of an "unpaid debt of love" to this daughter who is so unlike her.

June is almost as neurotic as Edna in Barfoot's last novel, *Dancing in the Dark*, but gradually the author wins us over to sympathy for her fears and to an understanding of a hidden potential that makes the tentative reunion of mother and daughter at the novel's conclusion both moving and convincing. Frances is the least convincing of the three women because of the novel's duet structure which deprives her of a voice. But the three male characters (the two husbands and Aggie's platonic friend, Barney, the milkman are well — though indirectly — characterized. The duplicated pattern of June as her father's daughter, and Frances as *her* father's daughter, and the enigma of June's marriage to a man who would have suited Aggie perfectly, seem a little too pat. Nor are the voices as different in rhythm and language as they need to be. Nevertheless, the novel is satisfying aesthetically and emotionally. Its ground is so clearly situated in our growing understanding of female personhood that one looks forward to another Barfoot novel.

Flitterin' Judas, in contrast, suggests an old manuscript dusted off for publication as a consequence of Branden's

successful *Understanding Ghosts* and *Mrs. Job*. A prefatory note warns us that the novel is set in the "high and far-off time of 1947" and reminds us that then "a buck was still very nearly a buck, and two hundred of them a month well worth fighting for" — a suggestion that contemporary youth might find patronizing as well as unnecessary. The problem that may limit the commercial success of this book is its lack of focus. It is neither a Romance of the Harlequin fantasy type, nor a parody of that genre, though it has elements of both and potential success with either focus. It has the required exotic setting (a B.C. lumber camp in the "high and far off" 1947) and a "feisty" female protagonist (Anne Fitzgerald, fragile, blackhaired, the only woman in the camp other than a temporary threesome of prostitutes). Anne (or Fitz), who rules the chaotic office and outwits everyone by pretending to be a virgin, thereby succeeds in preserving her summer job and the income which will send her back to University and "medicine or law or one of the sciences (say biology) so that [she's] as well-equipped for the world as a man" and thus "can't be a man's victim." Her great difficulty comes from the other protagonist and narrative voice (alternating sets of four or two chapters for each, with Anne having the last one). Edmund is the self-named and proclaimed villain with an Oxford literary degree, who is putting in time in the Canadian Civil Service observing "the human comedy" (as he keeps on saying) while he looks for the money he needs "to get started as a crook." Unfortunately, Anne does not redeem him from his intended life of crime though he recognizes her type as his Achilles' heel, and Ed does not interfere with her plans to go to University a "free woman." The supporting cast of what, at times, seems hundreds of derelicts, frauds, University students, etc., with dialects more or less

to match, several lively crisis scenes, and the utter improbability of all this, makes for easy reading. This novel would be a boon to many a trans-Atlantic plane passenger. Unlike some of the romances Janice Radway analyzes in her study, *Reading the Romance*, this book is not even covertly subversive in its encouragement of changes in stereotypical gender characteristics, even though the female is tough and the males show some gentleness. Radway's conclusion that such books as this acquiesce in male dominance and reinforce patriarchal hierarchies is illustrated by the last words of the novel from the illiterate and lovable fraud who is the President of the Company. But by then the reader does know that "Flitterin' Judas" means continuing, ceaseless betrayal. Victoria Branden owes us another novel in which she focuses her considerable talent as a satirist. Joan Barfoot deserves to be better known for what she has already achieved in *Duet for Three*.

NANCY BAILEY

FOR PEOPLE

GEORGE BOWERING, *Seventy-One Poems for People*. RDC press, \$9.95.

EVERY POEM is a translation, taking a moment experienced physically with sensorius and cerebrum, and transforming it into an artifact of words — artifacts themselves that we learn to use when we wish to refer to particular fragments of reality. Thus: poet as maker and shaper. Thus: poet as liar.

Given the inevitability of distortion, the poet who, out of a sense of responsibility to the "real" world, tries to document its poem, must somehow find a way to reconcile it with the world created in and by language. More than the subject matter, it is the collision of these realities, and the energy released and manner in

which it is harnessed, that makes words poetry and not mere reportage or diatribe.

In *Seventy-One Poems for People*, George Bowering has gathered two decades of "lyrics about public struggle," and in so doing carries on a line of committed poetry begun in 1947 by Dorothy Livesay and *Poems for People*, and continued by Milton Acorn with his 1972 publication, *More Poems for People*. Appropriately, Bowering dedicates his addition to the forebears from which the torch is passed.

The book is divided thematically into six sections: "Some People," "Cops," "Canadian Scenes," "Vietnam & Other Wars," "Our Other America," and "The Poems of Ed Prato" who, it is rumoured, is one of the author's personae with much to say about Canadian poets and the scene with which they surround and swaddle themselves. The poems in each section are as straightforward as the titles of their sections.

However, the task Bowering sets for himself is not as simple. To write a consistently successful book of poems is hard enough; to write one composed of convincing topical work is even harder still. Much of *Seventy-One Poems for People* is an attempt to restore the immediacy and importance of some of the distant concerns of the sixties, and thereby recreate a political sensibility that was, to a large degree, created by the ethos of the times. Much of what was hip then is hackneyed now, and an attempt to revive it is almost certain to fail.

Yet there is much that is wonderful in this book. Fifteen adaptations of work by relatively obscure Spanish-language poets are exquisitely crafted into English poems that boil with image and emotion. Bowering as veteran craftsman and satirist also writes his own: "Ah, violence, ah violence, ah viet cong / infiltrating the faculty club," he begins one section of a

poem about the 1969 Sir George Williams University computer centre incident. "The Deathmaker at San Quentin" speculates on the psyche of that institution's executioner. Without possible recourse to fact, Bowering creates the poetry of the subject's possibilities, and shows that a poem grown in imagination's fertile soil need not betray the emotional seed that started it: "What do you have for supper / the night after you gas a man? / Does your little woman come on with boiled eggs? / . . . / when your arm goes up to the handle / & the serious warden nods at you / how do you do it? Close your eyes & pretend / someone's pushing down on your hand / in a voting booth? / . . . / Now it isn't you, it's the warden with that nod . . . They say he's dead & his body / just does that, like a chicken with no head. // & that's it, another day another dollar, / the world a little cleaner."

Not surprisingly, some of the best of Bowering's work is personal in nature. "The Dead Poets of Vancouver" is one of the most moving pieces in this book, and a serial poem that is a lovely elegy for the poet Red Lane ends with a mysterious and moving ambiguity: "... I am reduced // to these simple words, / to say I love you, sleep, // I love you, sleep."

There is no denying that *Seventy-One Poems for People* has its failures: throw-away poems, in-poems, ephemeral poems. But it also has its bright moments, and this, one could say, is an accurate mirror of the world of the poet is dealing with. Perhaps this is an apology for Bowering, but he has earned our respect, both as the young writer whose early lyrics everted reality as they quick-stepped over the page with quirky yet careful dance-steps, and as the writer of longer works, most recently, and perhaps most notably, *Kerrisdale Elegies*, a book that displays sustained thought and a calm, mature wisdom. Perhaps then, this same writer

can be permitted partial failure of a move in another direction.

But there is enough of both art and commitment here to satisfy all who would place themselves between the aesthete and his arid inanimate world, and the "doctrinaire believers who state that all artiness must be expunged from people's poetry, because it serves the taste & cause of the bourgeoisie." In *Seventy-One Poems for People* there is a sufficiently energetic meeting of poetry and politics to convince the reader that these are the words of a poet, who happens also to be a human being struggling with the rest of us to remain human in a beastly world, by responding as eloquently, and as honestly as he can.

NOAH ZACHARIN

NEW BRUNSWICK LETTERS

MALCOLM ROSS, FRED COGSWELL, MARGUERITE MAILLET, *The Bicentennial Lectures on New Brunswick Literature*. Mount Allison Univ., \$7.50.

IN THE FALL OF 1984, three public lectures were given at Mount Allison University in honour of New Brunswick's Bicentennial. These now appear in a small publication by the Centre for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University. The first lecture is by Malcolm Ross and concerns "Bliss Carman and the Poetry of Mystery: A Defense of the Personal Fallacy." This is a deliberately personal statement about Ross's own early encounter with Carman's poetry in the 1920's and his enduring love for much of it, nurtured by his acquaintance with members of the Roberts family (including Charles G. D. and Theodore Goodridge) and by his own experiences in Fredericton, a home to many poets (as

it still is), including the two Roberts, Carman, Sherman, and A. G. Bailey.

The unique and rich Anglican culture of Bishop John Medley's Fredericton and its role in fostering the creative genius of Carman and others provided the theme for an important essay by Ross in a 1976 number of *Canadian Literature*. The Mount Allison lecture is to some extent a natural successor. In it Ross confronts and defends his youthful liking for Carman, a poet who has long been out of critical fashion, ever since his reputation was apparently eclipsed by the quite different poetic tradition in Canadian letters represented by poets like Klein, builds a convincing apology for Carman's earlier poetry, providing examples of its musicality, its economy, its brilliantly observed seascapes, and, above all, its ability to retain a hint of the shadow of mortality and of mystery even in moments of great joy and affirmation. There is no doubt that Carman's reputation needs reassessment. Ross's lecture offers some stimulating pointers to those who may feel called to attempt that work.

The second Mount Allison lecture was given by Fred Cogswell on "Some Aspects of the Linear and the Non-Linear Novel." Cogswell's central concern is the rise of the non-linear Canadian novel following World War II. Initially, however, he ranges through the early evolution of the English novel and the fiction of Voltaire, Rousseau, and De Sade to show how the linear novel dealt with causality and envisaged humans as social beings to be valued for their potential or actual achievements. Quite different is the non-linear novel, of which examples are to be found in the works of Sterne, Proust, Woolf, Joyce, Beckett, Faulkner, Lowry, and Pynchon. This latter type of novel, represented in Canadian fiction by Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and David Godfrey's *The New*

Ancestors, is, according to Cogswell, neither widely read nor properly appreciated. So far so good, but from here Cogswell shifts into a plea for better informed book reviewers and an alternative type of critical evaluation to that represented in the past in Canada by the Colonial School of criticism, post-1960's Nationalist criticism, and post-Modernist criticism (he calls it Alexandrian). However, Cogswell's assertions are too broad (and vague), and the lecture ends up by saying little substantive about any of the authors and titles it refers to so fleetingly. Indeed, the lecture gets lost and never completes its journey by homing in on a specific Canadian work or group of works, let alone anything to do with the literature of New Brunswick.

The third lecture is Marguerite Maillet's "La littérature acadienne: d'un printemps à l'autre." Her focus is upon the burgeoning of Acadian literature in the period since the publication of Antonine Maillet's *La Sagouine* (1971) and since the founding in 1972 of les Editions d'Acadie. The true origins of the current rich flowering of literary activity may indeed be found among nineteenth-century Acadian writers and among the myths, hopes, fears, ideologies, and struggles expressed in their writings. Now, however, inspired by the example set by Antonine Maillet, contemporary literature has seized the freedom to work with oral structures and spoken dialect. Yet a number of contemporary Acadian authors have felt that there is a danger in this of remaining tied to the past and of giving Acadian culture a "folksy" image while failing to confront the very issues responsible for the Acadian situation. For this reason Marguerite Maillet's survey concludes with some comments on the work of such writers as Raymond LeBlanc, Guy Arsenault, Herménégilde Chiasson, Ulysse Landry, and others. In their different ways, such writers (and one

might add to these all the names of those who recently appeared in *Acadia Poetry Now/Poésie Acadienne contemporaine*) represent a new and exciting voice in Acadian literature, but Maillet can hardly do them justice here.

ALAN R. YOUNG

ATLANTIC HERITAGE

FRED COGSWELL, ed., *The Atlantic Anthology*. Vol. 2/Poetry. Ragweed Press, \$12.95.

FRED COGSWELL'S SPLENDID bid to provide Atlantic Canada and the teachers and students of its culture with a representative two-volume anthology of its prose and poetry is now complete with the publication by Ragweed Press of Volume 2 of *The Atlantic Anthology*. Sadly, commercial factors such as printing costs, copyright, and sale prices have resulted in severe and crippling space limitations. Cogswell tries bravely in his Preface to justify the limitations he has been forced to impose upon himself, but the problem remains. One looks in vain for pre-Confederation poetry, that fascinating body of material which is so important a part of the cultural heritage of the Atlantic region. Cogswell's assertion that, as far as he is concerned, "Canadian poetry proper began with the generation of Herbin and Roberts" is hardly convincing as a reason to exclude Henry Alline, Joseph Stansbury, or Jacob Bailey, for example. Also excluded are both Acadian poetry (a pity, because Cogswell knows it well and has in the past provided some fine translations into English) and the folk poetry that was such a major part of the oral culture of the region. A more serious shortcoming, however, is the exclusion of a number of poets whose place in an anthology of this kind should surely be assured — John Hunter Duvar, T. G. Roberts, Francis Sherman, Reshard Gool,

and Kent Thompson. Equally unfortunate is the fact that those poets who are included are often represented by only a very small number of poems — E. J. Pratt gets three, Charles Bruce three, and Charles G. D. Roberts only six. Playing about with numbers in this fashion is perhaps invidious; nonetheless, it makes for some odd statistics — Alden Nowlan twelve, John Thompson twelve, Bliss Carman ten, Fred Cogswell eight, Elizabeth Jones seven, Robert Cockburn three.

It is all such a pity, because this is not consequently a book that a teacher or student of Canadian literature can use without considerable supplementary material, nor is it one that the casual reader can pick up without running the risk of obtaining a distorted image of what's what and who's who in Atlantic poetry. As I hope has been made clear, the blame is not primarily Cogswell's. He has been trapped by the brutal realities of a regional publishing industry that, while often adept at producing small works of local interest, is unable to cope with a project of the size that Cogswell's ideally should have been.

ALAN R. YOUNG

IN CHARACTER

DOUG FETHERLING, *The Blue Notebook: Reports on Canadian Culture*. Mosaic, \$9.95.

SOLID CRITICAL WRITINGS on Canadian culture are even more rare than that endangered species, Canadian culture itself. Given its smothering by American culture (high, low, pop, and otherwise weaseling), such criticism is vital for its subject to have any hope of surviving. Rarer still the writer who has established a significant body of work in the twilight zone of Canada's cultures. We can therefore be grateful for this collection of oc-

casional pieces by Doug Fetherling, one of our wider readers.

In some respects the book is a kind of thermometer, gauging the fever of Canadian cultural nationalism in the past decade. What Fetherling says is often of less importance than the fact that a rigorous intelligence is casting an analytical eye upon, for example, the art of political cartooning in Canada or the strategy of Yousuf Karsh. Fetherling proves committed to engagement with the wide range of Canadian expression. Still, there remains a trace of timidity that bespeaks a coolness within the fever. Fully half the book is devoted to essays in traditional literature: the public and private aspects of F. P. Grove, Woodcock, Garner, Dudek, Lee, Nowlan. In these pieces Fetherling is just another reliable, interesting commentator. He's very good — see, for example, his shrewd observations on Alden Nowlan's voice — but on literature he remains just a bright member of the pack.

Fetherling doesn't hit his distinctive stride until he ventures into the less traditional study. He is illuminating when he draws on his experience in the newspaper world. He is especially good in his close writing on Canadian film. He salvages from obscurity Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore* and from oblivion the Canadian undertow in *Russian Roulette*. He decodes the *roman à clef* in Peter Ingersoll and nicely explicates *The Clown Murders* and the development of *Lies My Father Told Me*. Fetherling is at his best here because he is visiting his intelligence upon works not customarily so graced. He even has a fresh contribution to a familiar subject, Canada's penchant for documentary films. One regrets that his film section occupies but a fifth of the book, because these are the occasional pieces that most deserve preservative anthologizing.

Running through Fetherling's comments on other writers is a consistent admiration for the all-rounder. This is what he cites in Woodcock, Herbert Read, Nowlan, Glassco, Lee. It is also what Fetherling himself flexes in his various journalistic forays — a wide-ranging intelligence committed to the unity of diverse experiences and culture. So it's telling (not to say prescient) that he would write about Irving Layton as a persona-wielding strategist, but also as someone with unexpected political engagement.

As the title fairly declares, this book is a personal collection of occasional pieces of cultural journalism. It is always a risky business to revive items written for the moment. But Fetherling's wit and intelligence justify the collection of works that would otherwise flare ephemeral. Then, too, the ephemeral is all the more expressive, both more significant and signifying, in a society struggling to sustain its character.

MAURICE YACOWAR

PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF!

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH, *Melanie Klein: Her World and Work*. McClelland & Stewart, \$35.00.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH is arguably our most accomplished biographer, versatile, thorough, eloquent, and fearless in advancing into areas where the material she deals with is likely to be esoteric to the layman. She began with a superb life, marked by sharp psychological insight and fine literary judgment, of the Victorian writer John Addington Symonds. Then she advanced into the borderland of literature and psychology to write a sympathetic yet risible biography

of that strange turn-of-the-century pioneer in the free discussion of sex, Havelock Ellis. Now she has taken what seems a logical next step into an area where literature as such plays a relatively small role, by writing the first full biography of Melanie Klein, one of the great "heretics" of psychoanalysis.

Klein devoted her special attention to the development of children and related psychological problems. Without any medical training, she not only became a notable analyst, but also extended the theoretical basis of psychoanalysis in ways that led to her rejection by the orthodox Freudians and to a rivalry with Anna Freud that dominated the latter part of her life. Because the Freudians have long maintained a sectarian ascendancy in the psychoanalytical circles of the United States, Klein's name and her works have up to now been little known in North America, but her influence on child psychology in Britain, where she spent the most productive part of her career, was crucial, and at times the Kleinians formed the British Psycho-Analytical Society.

Melanie Klein is a personal portrait with a dense historical background. With a finely balanced combination of empathy and objectivity, Grosskurth traces Klein's childhood and the depressions of her Viennese young womanhood to the point where she enters analysis with Freud's Hungarian disciple, Sandor Ferenczi, under whose guidance she finds her own direction, and in turn engages in analysis, from the beginning mainly of troubled children.

Eventually, via Berlin, Klein made her way to Britain, where her views involved her in controversy that intensified with the arrival of Sigmund Freud and his daughter Anna in 1939. Freud soon died, though not before he had smelt out the heretical divergences in the theories Klein was developing, and though Mel-

anie never made a clear break with the Freudians, as others like Jung and Adler had done, she remained embroiled in doctrinal disputes to the end of a long life; the most painful aspect of this was that her own daughter Melitta, who in turn became a psychoanalyst, was now her bitterest critic and enemy.

The background to all this is the psychoanalytical community, with its religious patterns of orthodoxy and heresy, its witch hunts and its debates over points that to the layman often seem as bizarre as the Lilliputian conflict between the bigenders and the smallenders. The very jargon of the profession helps to turn it into a difficult world to penetrate, and one of the most impressive aspects of Grosskurth's achievement is the skill with which she makes the theories of the contesting psychoanalysts and the terms of their arguments comprehensible to the lay reader. Only occasionally does the material prove so intractable that the prose thickens into turgid explication. For anyone who might be inclined to glorify psychoanalysts, it is a salutary revelation of vanity, envy, jealousy, power-lust, pettiness, and at times sheer mental cruelty — all these shown to be common faults among those who minister to minds diseased. But at least in Britain the Freudians never succeeded in establishing their orthodoxy, and perhaps the freedom of innovators like Klein to develop their ideas without departing from the psychoanalytical community was worth the strife.

GEORGE WOODCOCK



FRAGMENTS OF IDENTITY

ROYCE MCGILLIVRAY, *The Mind of Ontario*.
Mika Publishing, \$15.00.

J. M. BUMSTED, *Understanding the Loyalists*.
Mount Allison Univ., \$4.95.

DOUGLAS EDWARD LEACH, *Roots of Conflict*.
University of Carolina Press, US, \$22.00.

WE HAVE SO LONG been talking about the Canadian identity that it is hard to think of anything more that can be said on this subject, which puzzles most outsiders, since no Frenchman or Englishman — even no New Zealander — would find it necessary to agonize as we have done over a question whose answer he already knows. Frenchmen are Frenchmen, English are English, New Zealanders are Kiwis; only Canadians, it has seemed for generations, agonize perpetually over what they are.

But even we have at last reached the point where we cannot bear to hear once again the ponderous question, What is a Canadian? This does not mean the agonizing search has come to an end; it has merely become fragmented, and instead of pondering over our *national* identity, we speculate (as the Québécois have long been doing) over our *local* selfhood. And this is a healthier thing, for in a country so deeply and variously divided as Canada among regions and pockets of historic and national identity, it is always best to begin with the basic loyalties, the local and particular ones.

Of the three items reviewed here, two have a direct bearing on this question, and the third a peripheral one. The first of them, *The Mind of Ontario*, by Royce McGillivray, is an intensely regional tract. People in Western and Eastern Canada, caught up in their historic grievances against the country's centre, tend to see Ontario as a dominating presence which has no character of its own; in

other words, a non-region. Royce McGillivray, however, claims that "No one will deny that there is something that can be called the mind of Ontario . . ." by which he presumably means a collective mental cast.

The Mind of Ontario is an eccentric and often a stimulating piece of writing, though McGillivray's history is at times quite odd. For example, he remarks of England in the Middle Ages that "foreigners thought very little about her at all." During the Hundred Years War, when more than half of France was in the hands of the English and the Black Prince rampaged up and down the land? He asserts that the Church of England "in its present form is Protestant," whereas for many decades Anglicans have been particularly anxious to stress their Catholicism. He declares that the English class system was "heavily influenced by the Hindu caste system," whereas the class system was in place in England long before the British Raj was born, and what really happened was that their existing class attitudes enabled the English to utilize the caste system in establishing what history may still show to have been the most stable and unified administration of the sub-continent.

Yet, errors apart, McGillivray does present very vividly the forces and traditions — English, Scottish Highland and Scottish Lowland, Irish Catholic and Orange Irish — which came together to produce that highly conservative Ontario society in which "Victorianism lasted . . . till the 1960s." There are, indeed, times in which he tends to generalize from Ontario to the rest of the country, as when he tells us that "Deference to authority is acknowledged to be one of the Canadian traits." In Ontario certainly. But in touchy Newfoundland? Or in perpetually polarized British Columbia?

J. M. Bumsted's little volume of three lectures, *Understanding the Loyalists*,

deals with a particular historic group that in recent decades has been given a central role in Canadian history, a role so important that we are led to doubt whether Canada could have survived or become a nation without the Loyalists and their contribution to our polity. *Understanding the Loyalists* is oblique history, since Bumsted is concerned primarily with tracing variations in the ways historians have treated this group. In the process he inevitably uses the texts he discusses to build up his view of the real history of the Loyalists. It turns out in the end to be a highly revisionist one, for, as Bumsted concludes, "the traditional view of Loyalists as representing the finest products of colonial society, distinguished for their accomplishments, their loyalty and their suffering, simply is no longer tenable."

Loyalists were in fact derived from all sections of the population in the thirteen colonies, and their motives were greatly mixed. Nor did they all settle for long in places usually associated with Loyalist domination. Small groups in fact stayed put for long periods, but many moved on, and where they went (to other parts of Canada or back over the border) has not been clearly established. It is even necessary, as Bumsted points out, to draw a distinction between "refugee Loyalists and resident Loyalists," for many of the people who chose to remain loyal to the British in Nova Scotia at the time of the American revolution were in fact New Englanders who had settled there and whose loyalty really lay in waiting to see which way the cat jumped in their territory before taking sides. They were loyalists in practice rather than in sentiment, but important in the sense that they show the spillover of population from the American states into Canada to have been larger than one is led to assume by considering merely "refugee Loyalists."

The third book I notice, Douglas Edward Leach's *Roots of Conflict*, concerns Canada only in so far as it deals partly with the expeditions against New France and Acadia in which British imperial troops and American provincial militia worked together and learned to hate each other. Leach's main point is that the roots of the American revolution can be seen not only in resentment against the high-handed actions of governments in Westminster, but even more in discontent over the presence of the professional soldiers who were the most visible representatives of British power.

Thanks to different circumstances and a few sensible British commanders, the same kind of confrontation between British regulars and local militias was not so visible in our history, with the result that we still count a British general like Isaac Brock among our national heroes, which would be unthinkable in the United States.

Still, even in Canada there was a conflict between British military elements, typified by the officer settlers of Upper Canada, and the first- and second-generation migrants from the United States with whom they were forced to mingle in the backwoods. A good deal of Susanna Moodie and Samuel Strickland is easier to understand with *Roots of Conflict* as background reading. Susanna would certainly have noted with approval General Wolfe's remark: "The Americans are in general the dirtiest most contemptible cowardly dogs you can conceive."

GEORGE WOODCOCK

POULIN

Etudes françaises: Jacques Poulin. PUM, \$7.00.

QUATORZE ANS APRES la publication prématurée de *Nord* (1972) sur Jacques Poulin, *Etudes françaises* consacre un

numéro sur l'oeuvre de cet écrivain québécois. Entre la parution du numéro de *Nord* et celle d'*Etudes françaises*, l'art de Poulin s'est enrichi et s'est épanoui pour arriver avec *Volkswagen Blues* à la création de ce qui est peut-être "le grand roman de l'Amérique."

Jacques Poulin a écrit entre 1967 et 1984 six romans dont trois, *Jimmy* (1969), *Les Grandes Marées* (1978), et *Volkswagen Blues* (1984) attirent de plus en plus l'attention des critiques. Cependant, son premier roman, *Mon Cheval pour un royaume* (1967), rejeté par l'auteur lui-même, *Le Coeur de la Baleine bleue* (1971) et *Faites de Beaux Rêves* (1974) n'ont pas encore été reçus avec autant d'enthousiasme. Les romans de Poulin, sans former un roman-fleuve, sont liés par des continuités et des récurrences au niveau thématique et au niveau des personnages. Poulin semble de cette façon inviter son lecteur à considérer son oeuvre comme une production unifiée. D'un style clair, honnête et transparent, proche de la technique behavioriste d'Ernest Hemingway et de l'écriture dégradé zéro d'Albert Camus, Poulin passe par des mythes, des légendes, et l'Histoire nord-américaine pour traiter les thèmes de l'écriture, de l'enfance, de la douceur, de la mort, et de la découverte de soi.

Ce numéro d'*Etudes françaises* cerne bien l'art poulinien par le sérieux de ses analyses, par une certaine variété dans leur approche, thématique et critique, et par l'impression globale de l'oeuvre qu'il réussit à communiquer. En s'attardant sur diverses questions reliées à l'autoreprésentation, quatre des huit articles examinent l'une des préoccupations majeures qui sous-tendent tous les romans pouliniens: celle de l'écriture et de la création littéraire.

Gilles Marcotte examine les "histoires de zouave" que se racontent les personnages de Poulin dans *Jimmy* et dans *Faites de beaux rêves*. Il observe qu'au

contraire des récits mythiques et des récits réalistes, les récits de rêve, de pure invention, posent des problèmes dans le processus de leur commencement et de leur fin.

L'analyse de Giacomo Bonsignore traite de la représentation de l'écriture et ses répondants textuels. L'article se concentre d'abord sur les diverses figures d'écrivain qui peuplent ces romans et ensuite sur la forme dite du conte adoptée par Poulin, choix lié étroitement à la représentation de l'écriture. Les critères servant à identifier l'oeuvre au conte (la dimension orale et le merveilleux) auraient cependant eu davantage à être plus explicites.

Les contes et leurs conteurs dans les romans pouliniens sont examinés par Jeanne Demers dont l'étude ne s'écarte pas non plus de la thématique de la création. Cependant, elle soulève brièvement l'importance que Poulin reconnaît aux pouvoirs des mots et sa conception de l'écriture comme exploratoire et initiatique.

Maurice Lachance analyse les problèmes de la communication et de la solitude éprouvés par le personnage écrivain qui, incapable d'interpréter les signes des autres, s'enferme dans la création des ses histoires tout en se déplaçant dans son isolement.

Après ce long voyage parmi des lieux un peu trop communs, les parcours que nous offrent les études de Pierre Hébert, Ginette Michaud, et Jonathan Weiss sont en contraste des perspectives inédites.

Pierre Hébert examine l'organisation spatiale eutopique et cacotopique (haut/bas, Nord/Sud) en tant que principe unificateur dans les six romans pouliniens: de l'espace motif des quatre premiers romans à l'espace organisateur des *Grandes Marées* et de *Volkswagen Blues*.

Le critique américain Jonathan Weiss nous fournit une lecture intertextuelle de *Volkswagen Blues*. En partant des

influences littéraires québécoises et américaines sous-jacentes à ce roman de voyage et de quête à travers l'Amérique, Weiss nous signale l'ouverture de l'espace qui, avec le franchissement de la frontière américaine, s'accomplit dans l'oeuvre.

Ces considérations autoréflexives et intertextuelles, éléments caractéristiques du roman postmoderne, nous mènent à la question posée par Ginette Michaud dans "Récits postmodernes?" Cet article dense et stimulant demande comment les romans pouliniens peuvent préciser le terme "plus que nébuleux" de postmodernisme. Or la nouveauté et l'ambiguïté de ce concept américain au Québec constituent la précarité de l'approche adoptée par Michaud. Par contre, l'analyse de Michaud a le mérite de révéler la problématisation de l'activité de la lecture dans les textes de Poulin là où les autres ont plutôt traité la représentation de la production. Quant à la question "récits postmodernes?", la réponse n'est pas sûre. Il se peut que ces caractéristiques postmodernes ne suffisent pas à qualifier ainsi les romans.

Finalement, le numéro comprend aussi l'essai de Pierre Filion "La marche des mots. Propos-contacts" dont l'apport critique est malheureusement nul sinon que de nous rapprocher de l'auteur Poulin qui clôt le numéro avec son texte "Le journal de la Grande Sauterelle."

Malgré le caractère un peu trop répétitif de la moitié des analyses, ce numéro spécial d'*Etudes françaises* vient opportunément attirer l'attention sur un auteur québécois qui, selon Gilles Marcotte et Laurent Mailhot, est "parmi les écrivains qui comptent" dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine. Les critiques ne peuvent plus tarder à le reconnaître. Tremplin des concepts actuellement en cours tels l'autoreprésentation, l'intertextualité et le postmodernisme, l'écriture de Jacques Poulin nous parle de sa qué-

bécité et de son américanité, c'est à la critique maintenant d'approfondir ces voies. Heureusement, *Etudes françaises: Jacques Poulin* nous propose des indications.

ANNE MARIE MIRAGLIA

PEACETIME

EUGENE MCNAMARA, *Spectral Evidence*. Windsor: Black Moss, \$12.95.

REG SILVESTER, *Fish-Hooks*. Moose Jaw: Co-teau Books, \$6.00.

THE SHORT STORY is a seductively tameable genre for the would-be writer, which is why it forms the backbone of creative writing courses the country, not to say the continent, over. Something small but complete is unequivocally there, and in a climate in which the small press is a rightly valued component of the publishing industry, it won't even take that much luck to see it, somewhere, in print. If that happens, one thing that won't be small is the enthusiasm of the advertising copy. Reg Silvester's first collection, for example, not only "takes the Canadian short story into new territory" but brings "a new perspective and a new sensibility to the consideration of the later twentieth century." Eugene McNamara's stories require, since his name is already familiar, less hyperbolic touting: more sedately, they merely "endure affirmations of human dignity," whatever that is supposed to mean. Regardless of rhetorical preference, anything less than *Dubliners* is going to be a let-down after the promise of the back covers.

The question is how rapid the descent from narrative nirvana will be, and in the case of *Fish-Hooks* it is meteoric. It is difficult to reconcile conspicuous originality with a dedication that offers the book to the author's family, the family of close friends, and the family of Man: "May we live through the future in

peace." Fortunately, the stories themselves do not echo this fulsomeness. On the whole they have a kind of flip chattiness in which an overindulged first person pronoun (used in nine of the thirteen pieces), which sounds to have been nourished in formative years by Kerouac, Salinger, Brautigan, and other such monologuists of the displaced, tries on a few improvisatory poses. Sixties-style expansion of mind and contraction of vocabulary are given full rein:

Your story begins with me in the bathroom one day when I had planned to tape all the everyday sounds I make. I was recording the sound of a good crap — the grunting and farting and splashing and flushing — when suddenly I noticed a small man under the bathroom sink.

If the narrative possibilities of this situation, encountered in a story entitled "The Unusual People in my Walls and Cupboards," entice, *Fish-Hooks* may snag a reader or two. The stories have a strained energy that not all readers will find grating — for example, the salmon trapped in a water-bed mattress in "Beserk in a Water Bed" is an undeniably startling metaphor with which to challenge the experiential constipation of suburbia. But with the exception of "The Real Harry," an elegy for a lost parent that manages just about to stay on the workable side of sentimentality, the collection's self-consciousness comes stridently through the tired cadences of the confessional personal voice. For long stretches the style is dominated by declarative statements that keep action locked within simple subject/verb formulations ("I paddle upstream . . .," "The water reflects . . .," "The clouds hang low . . .," "I take a heading . . .," "My arms enjoy . . ."), until the unpredicted turn of a subordinate clause relieves the tedium. "I am on the Trans-Canada, winding through Lake Superior country, somewhere between Thunder Bay and

Sault Ste. Marie" begins a story with the unprepossessing title "Adrift on Rock and Pine." Unfortunately, reading this collection too often feels uncomfortably like being the only, and very silent, passenger on the same journey.

Eugene McNamara's work is more mature, the personalities of his central characters more variously realized. Mid-life crises rehearsed through the memories of lost youth and cross-generational failures are the dominant motifs, and they are formed into workmanlike tales of alienation and misdirection. These embodiments of contemporary angst are periodically vitalized by excursions into the fantastic and, rather domestically, apocalyptic: hence the collection's title. The most interesting story, perhaps because it does not rely on the limited fascinations of growing middle-aged in middle Canada, is "1911," a historical puzzler whose shifting perspectives transcend their own capacity for mere gimmickry. Of the other ten stories, with their various journeys to and fro between present and past, marriage and separation, promise and failure, community and isolation, the most original are "At the Going Down of the Sun And in the Morning" and "Pushing Fifty" (although "Entropy" has its moments before the basic premise, involving computer composition, is allowed to dominate and it literally deconstructs). In short, this is a group that bears the stamp of the creative writing class: technical confidence and competence but little of great urgency for technique to exercise itself on.

Between them, these two collections show some of the difficulties of the small press phenomenon that sympathetic criticism, because it is sympathetic, should address more often. Both are very handsomely presented paperbacks whose production quality would do credit to much larger presses, both have been assisted by provincial arts councils and the Canada

Council, and both attest to the obvious fact that imaginative writing in Canada is a growth industry. But if truth were told, they also suggest that there are probably few inglorious Miltons — or even Alice Munros, Jack Hodginses, or Guy Vanderhaeghes — out there, and if there were they would certainly not need to be mute. There are some battles that have long since been won in the dissemination of our literary culture. Perhaps it is now time to confront the less stirring critical responsibilities presented by the comforts of peacetime.

KEITH WILSON

GHAZAL-MAKER

PETER SANGER, *Sea Run: Notes on John Thompson's STILT JACK*. Xavier Press, \$4.95.

THEODORE ROETHKE said it in his poem "The Waking": "We think by feeling." Logicians would reject this "thought," but poets and other artists would have no difficulty getting the feel of it, as they would also understand that other, more insistent line from the same villanelle: "I learn by going where I have to go." Peter Sanger, the author of *Sea Run*, is both poet and logician/academic. For purposes of his very careful and detailed study of sources in *Stilt Jack*, he kills his own poet-person in the service of consciousness and reason. A certain puritanical note enters this study of John Thompson, denying freedom, dream, the unconsciousness. It even turns Thompson's declarative and unambitious final statement in the Introduction to his beautiful, last, and awesome poems into a sober, "warning, and a confrontation as to how carefully *Stilt Jack* was written, and how carefully it can be read."

According to Thompson,

The ghazal allows the imagination to move

by its own nature: discovering an alien design, illogical and without sense — a chart of the disorderly, against false reason and the tacking together of poor narratives. It is the poem of contrasts, dreams, astonishing leaps. The ghazal has been called 'drunken and amatory' and I think it is.

A warning? To me, an invitation into the book, its heart of darkness, its shining spins and turns, its sober (and drunken) stains. And its method.

But let us take *Sea Run* for what it is, an exegetical study from a careful and respectful student of Thompson's ghazals. We do learn by going into the spirit of research and knowledge a great many clarifying connections, allusions, pure data about the sources of the poems and the processional intricacies of Thompson's thought/feeling. He was, after all, also an academic.

Sanger's tracking down of allusions with detective-like thoroughness reveals a specific cluster of associations which, once understood, make the work much more coherent, accessible, and, for me, even more desperate. Thompson, it is clearly seen now, was writing his last will and testament. A big hand and a big heart shape this cluster: Yeats ("Yeats. Yeats. Yeats. Yeats. Yeats. Yeats. / Why wouldn't the man shut up?"), Rilke, Melville, Isaak Walton, Levertov, Donne, Blake, Stevens, Shakespeare, especially "King Lear," Hopkins, Keats, William Styron. And the Bible. And René Char. And Theodore Roethke. Quite a handful. And the ghazal-makers, their whole tradition.

Sanger is totally convincing, and impressive, in his taut handling of all this material. He has led me to hear the shifts in voices and tones from Tom o' Bedlam, to Malachi Stilt Jack himself, to the pure poet ("I'm a poet, not a fool"); to mark more carefully the "you" he addresses in various moods without, oddly, ever employing the conventional

pseudonymous character that most ghazal writers invoked to distancing and double-edged effect.

The thematic strains are heard more clearly, the repetitions of symbols and signs — bread, stone, hook, trout, fire, light, dark, white, green, eyes, etc. — take on more exact resonance with the help of these notes. Some lines that seemed to defy understanding are explained. For instance, the somewhat ugly-sounding lines in Ghazal xxviii,

The white whale, STILT JACK, in her
face,
where I have to go.

refers first to Moby Dick “with a whiteness (see the last word of Ghazal I) that appears throughout *Stilt Jack* and connotes both spiritual destruction and regeneration. . . . The second metaphor is that of *Malachi Stilt Jack* in Yeats’ ‘High Talk’ (see note on *Stilt Jack*’s first epigraph and note (a) to Ghazal ix). STILT JACK in this couplet is both the poet and poetry, both of them amorally turbulent, unpredictable, calculating. . . . The third of the metaphors in Thompson’s couplet, one which gathers both *the white whale* and STILT JACK, is the *face* of the muse in her saving aspect, not as the *siren* of couplet 3.” Perhaps there is too much assurance here — does *this* face really belong to the muse? — but the theme-threading helps us through the eye of the needle. Beside this whale of a line it is telling to place the miniaturist perception and delicacy of,

I know how small a poem can be:
the point on a fish hook;
(Ghazal xxi)

Baited, of course, and baiting, as all these poems are. Sanger has taken the hook and he is sometimes misled by his insistent literal-mindedness and in his extrapolations to other matters. In his reference to my own line “All the big

animals turn toward the Great Wall of China” in connection with Thompson’s phrase “The wall of walls rises” (Ghazal ix), he says, “This may be the Great Wall of China, as Phyllis Webb seems to have decided.” Decided? As I remember, I wrote that line sitting on a B.C. ferry without a thought of thoughts; it arose from out of the deep and stunned me then as it stuns now. Where did it come from? Unconscious plagiarism, my own private associations and observations, or what? I don’t know. “I learn by going where I have to go.” And so, I suspect, did the poet John Thompson who seems in these lines as puzzled as I am:

It’s all in the books, save the best part;
God knows where that is: I found it once,
wasn’t looking.

(Ghazal ix)

I remain convinced that Thompson was an intuitive writer with a brilliant shaping musical imagination and intelligence who wrote poems that “can be spontaneous from moment to moment and yet fulfil a theme.” That, according to Robert Frost, is one of the great mysteries of a poem, and that, it seems to me, is what Sanger’s erudite study both exemplifies and denies.

PHYLLIS WEBB

VANCOUVER MIND

CAROLE GERSON, ed., *Vancouver Short Stories*.
Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$9.50.

DAVID WATMOUGH, ed., *Vancouver Fiction*.
Polestar Press, \$12.95.

TWO COLLECTIONS OF SHORT fiction have been published to mark Vancouver’s centennial. The editors of these books are concerned foremost to convey a sense of place and so in both collections can be found fiction set in prominent Vancouver locales such as Stanley Park, English Bay, Kitsilano, the North Shore, giving

British Columbia readers the experience of the familiar transmuted into the materials of art. That was part of the appeal that novels and stories first had in the eighteenth century; the mirroring of reality and imaginative map-making is always one of the first tasks of fiction in any new region of habitation.

Carole Gerson's *Vancouver Short Stories* is the more substantial and important of the two books, a scholarly edition that provides a history of the best and most representative short fictions written in Vancouver from 1900 to the 1980's. Gerson includes the culture of the Native Indians by reprinting two of Pauline Johnson's Vancouver legends and by means of representative pieces from each decade traces fictionally the growth of the city from logging days through Prohibition and Depression to the emergence of a modern urban centre. In making this survey Gerson has uncovered in a 1927 issue of *The Canadian Forum* a fine story, "Phyllus," by a writer named Jean Burton who is virtually unknown. Some of the pieces here are slight but their inclusion is necessary in order to document historically the imaginative experience of living in Vancouver. What offsets the inclusion of the weak pieces is the imaginative range thus achieved for the collection as a whole. A sound, objective editor, Gerson does not simply choose the kind of stories she herself might prefer, but includes writing in all modes: thus something of the epic is evoked in Johnson's Indian legends, the feeling for romance (the mode of action) in Bertrand W. Sinclair's rum-running tale, "The Golden Fleece," satire and irony in Ethel Wilson's "A Drink with Adolphus," and the pastoral mode, Vancouver as a setting for nostalgic memories, in Frances Duncan's "Was that Malcolm Lowry?". This imaginative range in the pieces selected evokes a large sense of the city, derived from the

full gamut of human experience in this place.

This is not to suggest that Gerson sacrifices the local and particular for the universal. The collection, on the contrary, is steeped with a strong sense of place — of mountains, forest, and ocean — and man's relation to the natural setting emerges as a distinct and unifying theme. The beauty of Vancouver's natural setting, as trite as that might seem as a literary subject, demands expression again and again — and is rendered fleetingly but most effectively in Ethel Wilson's "A Drink with Adolphus." The story's Mrs. Gormley, on her way to a cocktail party on Capitol Hill, orders her taxidriver to stop to allow her "ten cents worth of view," and for a transcendent moment the elderly woman revels in an evening perspective of inlet, mountains, and sea — "all the glory of the world and no despair." The beauty of nature, however, is always undercut by the threat of its destruction. The spoilation of the wilderness and the native peoples is a theme struck in the book's first sketch, Francis Owen's "The Prophetess," in which an ancient Indian woman foretells doom for the white intruders, a prophecy fulfilled in the story by the Vancouver fire of 1886. This theme emerges in other stories — in the plight of Emily Carr's Sophie who has buried all of her twenty-one children, in the tortured self-exorcism of Malcolm Lowry's protagonist in "Gin and Goldenrod" whose drunkenness parallels the ravages of modern civilization on the natural landscape. In contemporary urban stories this theme is felt in the haunting effect of nature on the protagonists — the Stanley Park whale in Audrey Thomas's "Aquarius," a garden full of birds in Cynthia Flood's "The Animals in their Elements" — echoes of a vitality and beauty that are lost.

Although Gerson carefully observes chronology, there is as well a fine sense

of arrangement in this collection. When read in sequence, the stories create tensions through contrast: "The Prophetess," decrying the white man's destruction of the wilderness, is followed by M. A. Grainger's documentary vignette of the carefree, optimistic young loggers at the turn of the century; William McConnell's impressionistic and romantic tale, "Love in the Park," is followed by Ethel Wilson's ironic portrayal of a sophisticated social gathering; and Joy Kogawa's bitter memory of childhood violence and dispersal in "1941-1942" is positioned between the gentle, happy childhood memories of Wayson Choy in "The Jade Peony" and Frances Duncan in "Was that Malcolm Lowry?". There is design in this collection that includes chronology, theme, style, and tone; altogether it is an exemplary volume of its kind.

David Watmough's *Vancouver Fiction* is a more accessible and, in some ways, more enjoyable collection. The book has large print, interesting photos of the authors, and an attractive cover featuring a Jack Shadbolt painting. This is not a scholarly volume. There are numerous typographical errors, occasionally there is misinformation (Wilson's "Down at English Bay" is set at the turn of the century, not between wars), and there is no serious attempt here to give a comprehensive overview of fiction written in Vancouver. Except for the first three pieces (by Hubert Evans, Ethel Wilson, and Malcolm Lowry) the fictions in this volume are contemporary, familiar in style, not experimental, and easy to read. One feels indeed that these are all stories that the book's editor enjoys.

But there is a negative side to this method of selection and that is lack of variety. Almost all the stories from Lowry forward are about "relationships." Taken together these stories create a world of fashionable love affairs, awkward friend-

ships, broken marriages. There is little sense of the past in this world — no ancestors or old places; the setting is always contemporary Vancouver, its denizens frequently émigrés. Some of the stories are distinguished in style (George Bowering's "Ebbie and Hattie" has verve and self-reflexive bravado; Keath Fraser writes elegantly and with economy), but they form part of a particular view and way of life in Vancouver, one in which the characters find solace in the easy, recreative pleasures of a mild, attractive west coast city for what is missing in their personal lives. The characters in these stories spend their time analyzing relationships, trying to understand each other. Frequently the authors provide answers. Only Lowry's "The Bravest Boat" avoids easy explanations and instead evokes something of the mystery of people and place.

This book should be read and enjoyed in company with Gerson's volume, for it extends our awareness of the number of gifted writers of fiction in Vancouver (only four appear in both volumes). These two books of short fiction, however, while complementary, are so very different that one is made to realize, forcibly, that a place is much more than geography — it is above all a state of mind.

DAVID STOUCK

PICTURE-POWER

JAN ANDREWS, *Very Last First Time*, illus. by Ian Wallace. Greenwood, \$10.95.

TIM WYNNE-JONES, *Zoom Away*, illus. by Ken Nutt. Greenwood, \$9.95.

IN THE GREAT PICTURE BOOKS — creations of such people as Randolph Caldecott, Virginia Lee Burton, Maurice Sendak, and Gerald McDermott — the meaning is communicated by the words, the illustrations, *and* the interactions be-

tween them. Caldecott, for example, was able through his illustrations to transform the simple nursery rhyme "Hey! Diddle, Diddle!" into a humorous story about a passionate, impulsive, and finally disastrous love affair. The opening pages of Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* contain the words, "The night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind and another" — but the illustrations show what the mischief is and provide hints about the reasons for it. In some books, the words are deliberately played against the illustrations, with the reader/viewer being invited to notice the discrepancies and then to complete the meaning. In Ellen Raskin's *Nothing Ever Happens on My Block*, the words of the bored narrator are contradicted by the scenes being played behind his back.

Very few Canadian picture books have used words, pictures, and their interrelationships to achieve levels of excellence such as those found in the picture books noted above. Two recent volumes, both dealing with Arctic adventures, reveal the reasons for success or failure. *Zoom Away*, by Tim Wynne-Jones, illustrated by Ken Nutt, a sequel to the pair's award-winning *Zoom at Sea*, does not succeed; *Very Last First Time*, by Jan Andrews, illustrated by Ian Wallace, does.

In *Zoom Away*, the feline hero spends a summer day knitting a sweater and then visits his human friend Maria. Together the two climb the stairs in her very large, old-fashioned house. They are travelling to the North Pole in search of Zoom's uncle, a sea captain who hasn't been heard from for six months. Going through a small door and along a dark tunnel, the cat arrives at the Pole, skates joyously on the frozen sea, discovers his uncle's abandoned ship, and learns that the uncle is safe elsewhere. Maria fashions a sled to bring the cat home and, at the end of the story, he dozes in a

chair by the fire, dreaming of helping his uncle and Maria in the recovery of the ship.

The story is designed for young reader-listeners (around four to seven years old). But even a story for young readers must possess depth in its simplicity. Unfortunately, *Zoom Away* does not. What is the relationship between Zoom and Maria? Are they equals or is she a benevolent mother/protector figure? Zoom's quest is to find a missing uncle; yet when he arrives at his destination, he cavorts on the ice, the search seemingly forgotten. And when he is alone, first in the tunnel and then on the ice, there is no sense of anxiousness or concern. Finally, when Zoom is back at Maria's he is in front of a fire (in summer?) dreaming of future adventure. Surely the adventure he has just completed would have had some impact on him; he would have been a changed individual. However, there is no indication that such is the case. The narrative is trivial, although pleasant.

Ken Nutt's illustrations, in black and white, are superior to the text, but even they do not give depth to the story. The cat is given little personality. When Zoom discovers that his uncle's ship is empty, he looks only slightly concerned and a little perplexed. In many of the illustrations he is pictured as very small. Whereas in many picture books smallness of size would indicate the character's vulnerability and courage in an alien setting, no such ideas seem to be communicated here. Instead, the illustrator has plenty of space in which to present backgrounds: the interior of Maria's huge Victorian home and the (imagined) Arctic setting. These illustrations are striking but not functional in the story. One illustration is particularly disappointing: Zoom, a candle-lantern in hand, looks down a long tunnel while in the shadows eight pairs of eyes gleam. One might ex-

pect this picture to illustrate the first stage of a long and dangerous journey, one in which the small character proves his worth. But the next illustration shows him leaping in the air on the Arctic ice. The visuals of the tunnel scene are gratuitous.

Like *Zoom Away*, *Very Last First Time* deals with the journey of a small character (this time an Inuit girl) from the security of home, into an alien environment, and back home. However, the words and pictures of this book transform an unusual northern experience into a universal journey of maturation. Eva Padlyat is going to travel alone under the frozen sea ice for the first time. When the tide is low, she will walk along the ocean bed gathering strings of mussels. Briefly lost when her candles gutter, she maintains her poise and finds her way to the ice hole where she rejoins her mother and returns home with food for the evening meal. Triumphant, she announces to her mother, "That was my very last first — my very last *first* time — for walking alone on the bottom of the sea."

Inherent in Eva's solitary circular journey, as it was in *Zoom's* is the theme of maturity. In *Very Last First Time*, the theme is fully realized both verbally and visually. The movement from village to seashore is one away from the known and secure: "She lowered herself slowly into the darkness. . . . She held her candle and saw strange shadow shapes around her." As Eva wanders from the ice hole, she is entering the unknown: "Eva jumped off the rock, stumbled — and her candle dropped and sputtered out. She had gone too far. The candles she had set down between the stones had burned to nothing. There was darkness — darkness all around." This is the turning point of her adventure; relighting her candle, she moves toward the hole, light, her mother, and finally the village.

"Looking up, Eva saw the moon in the sky. It was high and round and big. Its light cast a circle through the hole onto the sea bed at her feet. . . . Blowing out her candle, she slowly began to smile. By the time her mother came, she was dancing."

Wallace's illustrations reinforce and expand on the meaning of the text both in their overall arrangement and in their specific details. Two main colours are used: yellow and purple. Yellow, standing for the known and secure world, dominate the front and back covers; purple, representing the realm Eva enters alone for the first time, is the colour of the endpapers. Visually the reader moves from yellow to purple and, on closing the book, back to yellow, as Eva departs from and returns to home. Within the story the same movement is seen. In a second structural pattern, Wallace moves from single page illustrations for the above ice scenes to double spreads in the ocean bed scenes and back to single page illustrations as Eva rejoins her mother.

Details of individual pictures reflect the girl's inner experiences. Eva's home is ordinary: on the outside it is painted yellow; inside, there is a refrigerator and electric stove; a picture of Michael Jackson is taped to the fridge; a box of Corn Flakes is on the table. But from the window can be seen purple-hued expanses of sea ice. Once Eva has entered into the underworld, she is in a realm of dark shadows and strange shapes. She peers around anxiously looking at vague forms of bears, wolves, seals, and sea monsters. She is confronting her inner fears of the unknown. The glow from the three candles she lights only slightly diminishes the darkness. Exploring deeper into her "cave," Eva is surprised by the sound of the flooding tide, and, finding herself in darkness, covers her face in despair. Yellow has vanished completely from the illustration. The relighting of the can-

dles, the return of yellow to the pictures, signals the beginning of her return to the known world. As she dances beneath the cone of yellow moonlight streaming into the hole, the shadowy figures on the purple walls become dimmer. The final illustration shows her seated at the kitchen table. However, the purple hues are not absent; they are found in the mussel shells, her sweater, and the sky in the window behind her. Similarly, she has not rejected her experiences. She has brought the memories of them back to the ordinary world in which she lives.

As Zoom dozes before the fireplace, dreaming of future adventures, the reader has the sense that nothing significant has or will happen inside him. As Eva addresses herself to the plate of mussels she has gathered from the sea floor, we know that she will long treasure the memory of her experience. And we know this because Andrews and Wallace, in text and illustrations that work together, have implicitly communicated the importance of that adventure to their readers.

JON C. STOTT

FREUDIAN FARCE

T. P. MILLAR, *Who's Afraid of Sigmund Freud?*
Palmer Press, \$19.95.

Who's Afraid of Sigmund Freud? by T. P. Millar is an amusing exercise in fantasy romance. Its characters are light-heartedly and imaginatively drawn, with much of the book's energy coming from its heroine, Sandra, whose habit of shouting quotations from *Ecclesiastes* at the moment of orgasm threatens to drive her boyfriend to impotence, and does drive her to a young psychiatrist, Miles Waring, in search of a cure for her disturbing symptom. Two plot lines intertwine in the process of bringing the novel to its

happy conclusion. One is the story of Miles' disenchantment with his profession, which comes about from his realization of the pomposity, venality, and triviality of his mentors, and joins with the romantic plot line when his lively patient whose case he is required to discuss with his supervisor, one Dr. Jungmeister, challenges his certainty that transference and counter-transference are different from falling in love. These two intertwine with another story line which is about Freud's post-mortem conversion from what the novel portrays as his psychoanalytic faith to something that seems like the creed of the moral majority. This argument that organizes these various farcical strands, and asks to be taken seriously, is that, though Freud himself was a man of good intentions, he in fact loosed on the world an heretical religion which, with its emphasis on sexuality, is responsible for the moral laxity, loud music, fast food, poor education, bad art, and general decline of standards in all aspects of mass culture and the modern world.

The novel opens with a lively scene Dr. Miles Waring and Sandra in which the latter succeeds, without the Doctor's awareness, in turning the therapeutic tables. While he congratulates her and himself for how well she is doing in developing her transference neurosis, she challenges analytic orthodoxy by questioning the difference between falling in love and transference, or between getting the hots for her analyst and getting them for anyone else. While he reassures her that the analytic situation changes the nature of the phenomenon, and that though the analyst can, and in this case as she gradually forces him to admit, does experience comparable feelings, analytic training ensures that they are subordinated to the interests of the patient's cure. Nonetheless, in the course of the session she succeeds in softening the pa-

tient-doctor definition of their relationship by manipulating him into abandoning orthodoxy and calling her by her first name. Somewhat chagrined as he prepares notes for a session with his supervisor, Miles avoids looking the bust of Freud that presides over the doings in his office "in the eye."

Though Miles and Sandra are in the process of falling in love, their moral credentials to be the protagonists of this novel are made clear. Miles Waring's supervisors are somewhat suspicious of his "monkish" disposition, and his ruminations make clear the moral earnestness he brings to his profession. And though Sandra acknowledges having taunted her boyfriend Vince by telling him that she has thought of sleeping with her analyst, she has promised monogamy, does not lie, and has a preacher for a father. These moral issues also inform the humour of the next scene set in the Visa Court of Limbo, over which the shades of Robespierre and Judge Bean preside. This court decides on the applications of various figures, including that of Genghis Khan, for visas that would permit them entry into the celestial realms. Otherworldly computers help the two shades, who as part of their "redemptive tasks" must sit on the bench with the Chief Justice, decide on whether the applicants are sufficiently humble to be granted a visa or, if not, what task should be set them before they can re-apply. After his death, Freud, we are informed, refused to acknowledge the court's jurisdiction to decide his "post-mortem domicile," even though, as the chief judge points out, only believers find themselves in the court. The theoretical point being made by the author is similar to that he makes through the story of his lovers, that human nature is based on a moral unconscious rather than a "Freudian" one. Freud, who is characterized by a somewhat Shavian irrever-

ence, has also contested the court's charge that he is the initiator of a secular religion, and on his previous application showed an unbecoming presumption and lack of humility in psychoanalyzing his judges. However, he has succumbed to the boredom of limbo, particularly since Leonardo whom he has been psychoanalyzing has been granted his exit visa. In part for fear that Jung will supplant him, he now accepts the court's imposition of a redemptive task which consists of occupying for a month his own alabaster busts, one in Miles' consulting room in the Psychoanalytic Institute and another in a brothel run by a Madame Revello, who doubles as a sex-therapist (one of whose clients is Sandra's boyfriend, Vince). However, Freud does so without agreeing that his theories constitute a heretical religion, or that they have harmed rather than helped mankind.

After a month of that "Hell," he sees, but does not acknowledge responsibility, for the debased forms in which his theories are practiced and the sad state of affairs to which they have brought the world. The court, finding him still deficient in humility, confronts him with a choice between spending another fifteen years encased in the plaster of his own busts, smelling the smoke of others' cigars, and shortening his sentence by proving his true humility by helping undo the harm he has done. Freud accepts this "redemptive task" which will be accomplished when he persuades one practicing, fully trained analyst (Miles Waring it turns out) to give up both the theory (not so hard, Freud says) and the lucrative practice (harder, Freud says) of psychoanalysis. The rest of the novel traces the process by which Miles discovers the source of Sandra's symptom in her father's discovery of her first experience in "show and tell" in the vestry of his own church, and that by which Freud converts both himself and Waring

to a pre-Freudian intellectual and religious world view. Miles renounces psychoanalysis, particularly the theory of transference, and they embrace in old-fashioned love, shouting at each other quotations from *Ecclesiastes* while Freud is accompanied to the celestial launching pad.

The novel is fun, its action light-hearted and clever. Though the language is often witty, it is sometimes strained and oddly twisted, as though it attempts a kind of mixture of Shakespearean poetry and Victorian formality, spiced with contemporary colloquialism. For example, Freud, observing the process of Miles and Sandra's love, observes "Can it be this Sandra, wittily sweet and feminine knowing, plays the ancient seductress game and will soon defrock this doctor priest and swell time's lengthening score of confessors deflorated?" And again, "Has gentle Miles, misled perhaps by theory of my contriving, fallen so deep into the porridge of transference, that he'll ne'er understand his heart's been breached?" But the satire is sometimes pointed, the plot is built on nice imaginative play, and the characters are clearly, if simply, drawn. It is a generous entertainment, but might, I think, disappoint its author in that a reader immersed in psychoanalytic theory or practice would enjoy it and at the same time emerge from its pages with Freudian feathers all unruffled.

KAY STOCKHOLDER

WHERENESS

CLARK BLAISE, *Resident Alien*. Penguin, \$7.95.

IN THIS SIXTH BOOK by Clark Blaise, it is "Who am I?" and "Where is here?" time. *Resident Alien* is about borders and border-crossings. These borders are geographic (Canada/American), cultural

(English/French), and literary (short story/autobiography). Blaise says, in an introductory passage that calls out to be quoted by reviewers, "This book is a journey into my obsessions with self and place; not just the whoness and whatness of identity, but the *whereness* of who and what I am. I call it an autobiography in tales and essay, though it contains some of the most thoroughly invented stories I have ever written."

Readers who have followed Blaise's work from *A North American Education* to *Lusts* will already be familiar with many elements to be encountered in *Resident Alien*: the first person narrator looking back on his experience growing up as the only child of mismatched parents in "an emblematically Canadian family"; the marital conflict between his Francophone, philandering, sociopathic, travelling-salesman father from Montreal and his Anglophone, upright, reliable school-teacher mother from Winnipeg; his journeys, north and south, east and west, across North America. New, however, is the attention directly focused on these autobiographical elements as sources of Blaise's storymaking. Section one, "The Voice of Unhousement," begins, "I have been trying to find the centre of my imagination."

The relation between lived experience and the translation of that experience into fiction is a theme that engages writers and confuses readers. In "What is Real?" Alice Munro has remarked that at readings people always ask, "Do you write about real people?" and "Did those things really happen?" Direct answers to such questions always seem unsatisfactory, but *Resident Alien* offers an indirect answer, partly as a result of its intriguing structure. Two so-called autobiographical fragments, "The Voice of Unhousement" and "Memories of Unhousement," begin and end the collection, framing four fictional "Porter/Car-

rier Stories" entitled "South," "Identity," "North," and "Translation." Readers can therefore trace the shifting autobiographical and fictive forms taken by such motifs as the narrator's love for his father or the final break-up of his parents' relationship.

"The Voice of Unhousement" is an autobiographical fragment focusing on remembered events and images that Blaise claims were decisive in the making of Clark Blaise, the writer. He recalls his formal apprenticeship in writing that included a writing class at Denison University, Malamud's summer writing class at Harvard, the Writers' Workshop in Iowa City in 1962, and the founding of the Montreal Story-Tellers in 1970. Interwoven with this chronological account are memories of important images such as the atlas, described as "the one book in my life, at least up to the age of twelve" (and also mentioned in "The Salesman's Son Grows Older" from *A North American Education*). The watery, primordial world of Florida swamps, where Blaise lived from ages six through ten, is recalled as an analogue for "the simultaneity of visible and occult worlds: duplicities, masks, hidden selves, discarded languages, altered names, things not being what they seemed." There were the continual moves — "thirty before the eighth grade" — and, finally, the cataclysm of his life, his parents' divorce, occurring when he was nineteen. "I write," says Blaise, "from an undisclosed adult perspective at a point in time after their break-up, looking back to a time before it happened. . . . Even when their divorce is not mentioned, it is the subtext, the precondition, the 'big truth' behind the story."

A short-cut to conveying the flavour of the Porter/Carrier stories might be to talk about their titles. "South" and "North" refer to the cardinal compass points of Porter/Carrier/Blaise's jour-

neys represented by Florida and Canada. "Identity" is about a turning inside out that occurs when the narrator is twelve. When the Porter family flees Pittsburgh for Montreal in the middle of the night, the father having assaulted a man at work, the narrator is told that his real name is Philippe Carrier, not Phil Porter as he had always believed. The story ends with the family crossing the border into Canada as the mother says, "You can be anything you want to be." "Translation" probably refers to a lot of things, among them the literal translation of Porter's autobiography *Head Waters* into a French edition *Les Sources de mémoire* by Carrier as well as the metaphoric translation of life into art and past into present.

In "Translation" we learn that Porter, during his years as a professor, had often lectured on autobiography, "calling it a maligned and poorly described art form that attracted more than its share of hacks" — the sort likely to start their books "with the fatal words, "I was born. . . ." Porter's own book *Head Waters* starts, "The sons of suicides bear a graceless burden" / "*Les fils des suicides supportent un fardeau sans grace.*" How then is the reader to respond to the opening sentence of "Memories of Unhousement": "I was born in Fargo, North Dakota, in 1940." Possibly in a number of ways, including a heightened awareness of the art of autobiography and the autobiographical elements of art.

Resident Alien: another oxymoron. Straddling the boundaries of autobiography and fiction, Blaise's book is a strong addition to the Penguin Short Fiction series.

CATHERINE SHELDRICK ROSS



ICONOGRAPHIES

MICHAEL THORPE, *Out of the Storm*. Penumbra, \$6.95.

LESLEY CHOYCE, *The End of Ice*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books & Goose Lane Editions, \$7.95.

MICHAEL THORPE'S *Out of the Storm* begins with "A Child's War," seven memories of air-raids and alarms told with unflinching realism, from the angle of the child. The following sequence, "Six Museum Pieces," starts with "Tollund Man," addressed to the primitive bog-man whose blackened visage is reproduced as frontispiece. Other poems deal with artists. Caspar David Friedrich's violet light is linked with a nostalgia for the infinite, while "Liebe Angst Tod" reflects Edvard Munch's existential themes. The Munch Museum "Is a free-entry Hades / Hot with his vision," as befits the painter of "In Hell, Self-Portrait."

Thorpe's sombre themes of transience and death are allied with a strong grasp of Nordic landscape. His poems are solid, rough-hewn, with jagged edges — a sculptural quality that matches his uncompromising human vision. Isolated man's contiguity with other life-forms is the theme of "Marsh Crow," which, in a minor key, invites comparison with the predator poems of Lawrence, Jeffers, and Hughes. Appetites of bird and man are wryly compared in "Natural Selection," where Thorpe focuses on the otherness of non-human consciousness, rejecting anthropomorphism: "What bird-fancying bard would care to skim / With the sea-bird the killing black water?" In "Spring Watch" Thorpe handles images with a clear-eyed precision and understatement that recalls Robert Frost. The debt is made explicit in "Scything Comparisons," where the uncluttered movement of Thorpe's lines, with their mimetic rhythms, shows that he has learned his

lesson well. He has a special sympathy for survivors in a bare land, like the prairie settlers, "whom deprivation drove / There and rich isolation sustained" — an oxymoron that displays his humanistic values. He aspires, as in "Sawn-Off Symbol," to go beyond symbols into naked confrontations with reality, and has a strong ecological sense of life embedded in the cycle of seasons and natural environment.

Literary allusions sit comfortably with Thorpe who can be maliciously playful at the expense of romantic attitudes, as in "Hazlitt and the Bee." Teaching the Romantics gives rise to ironic reflections in "Of Many, One," whose title links all things that pass, from "the sullen leaves [that] fall" outside the window to the treadmill of twenty classes on the same subject. Being concerned with time and change, Thorpe is also intrigued with the illusory, nostalgic art of photography, with its "Perpetual images — [that] parade us now / As if we lived three lives ago. . . ." In his Gothic title-poem, the speaker tells how he wandered out of the storm into a hallucinatory time-warp, whose inhabitants dissolved again with coming day.

The iconography of Dante's *Inferno*, illustrated by Gustav Doré, adorns the cover of Lesley Choyce's *The End of Ice* and points to the theme of weathering a frozen hell with "fortitude" (epigraph). "Fog" is a paean to the grey god of the Maritimes, and Choyce's animistic imagery earns him the right to boast: "Carl Sandberg you know nothing of fog / of intoxicating Halifax sea breath / lusting after the land. . . ." Fog creates surreal conditions, as in Eliot's "Prufrock," so that "To jump [from the bridge] would be to dissolve slowly to sweat and salt. . . ." Fog billows forth on a kind of bardic afflatus, and becomes the vehicle for a vision of urban "anaesthesia." Yet it stimulates the subversive poet.

"The North Wind in Winter" also celebrates the stimulus of harsh weather. Here free verse gives scope for bustling invention, and the poem is packed with anatomical, musical, and electrical variations on creation and destruction. Traditionally, a stiff wind sweeps clean, breeding courage and aggression, and when the wind relents, "those who have lived out your demands / have been saved and renewed." Despite surreal touches and apocalyptic overtones (as in "Interruptions from Kubla Khan" where Coleridge appears in an opium vision), Thorpe's focus remains fixed on natural phenomena — "In Canada, we hold on hard to the land." The regenerative power of spring loosening the grip of "masculine winter" is the prelude to a major ecological statement in "Inside the Arboreal Embassy," where Choyce links the fate of forests with that of upstart man — this race of the thin, the crowded, the quick-growing stilts / whose abrupt green needles grab for the sky / before rotting from the roots."

Choyce's most original poems show an empathetic closeness to nature. "Driving the Crow to Halifax" details the thankless task of healing and releasing an injured crow, concluding with the wry (perhaps Promethean) reflection:

If I'm not careful
you would unzip my chest with your claw,
snatch out my liver with your beak
and make me think twice
about the quality of mercy.

After its season in hell the crow emerges unregenerate, but with renewed lust for life. Again there is sympathy for the predator that ruthlessly fulfills its own nature.

Choyce sees many of man's activities as a "conspiracy" against nature:

trees kidnapped, ripped, plied,
sawed, set straight, cut to length,
hauled miles from foot then riveted to rock
with drill, hammer, gun,

set straight again at angles to the sun,
knifed together with spikes
into new, clean geometry.

The point-of-view is that of primitive ecology and emphasizes the provisional structure of a human reality on loan from nature.

In "Local History," Choyce stresses that Canadian experience is rooted, not in social forms, but in the earth itself: "This is not Europe / where lives are played out / over layers of history. . . / Instead, our heritage is geology." His "Final Instructions" have to do with internalizing the ecological vision. Thorpe's sense of time matches Choyce's sense of space, as both articulate a self from close observations of nature.

JACK F. STEWART

IN VOICE

JONES, *The Brave Never Write Poetry*. Coach House, \$8.50.

KAY BURKMAN, *Champ*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books/Goose Lane Editions, \$6.95.

LAURENCE HUTCHMAN, *Blue Riders*. Maker Press, \$4.95.

ABOUT A YEAR AND A HALF AGO I had occasion to review Jones' chapbook, *Jack and Jill in Toronto* (Unfinished Monument Press, 1983) for *Canadian Literature*. Of four chapbooks I'd chosen from a pile of mostly unmemorable works that I felt were worthy of some comment, his was the one I liked the least. I dismissed it at the time as "sophomoric pastiche," the formulaic rantings of a streetwise poetaster bent, alternatively, on self-destruction and self-aggrandizement. Its rhythms seemed to have been derived from the worst hip cant of poets like Purdy and Bukowski.

The Brave Never Write Poetry has given me pause. I find I must revise my opinion. It is not that this first full-length collection of Jones' poetry is sub-

stantially different in theme or approach to that earlier work. Indeed, one section of the book is composed of reprints from *Jack and Jill*. The excesses of the style are simply given a broader context; the range of the rhetorical pastiche is broader; there are short, terse senryu and haiku (themselves reprinted from a 1984 chapbook, *Two Cops Kissing*, HMS Press, 1984) that add wit and levity, acerbity and ballast to the whole.

The book begins with a self-deprecating "Preface" in which the poet takes on all that is egoistic, sycophantic, bombastic, and ugly about the Canadian poetry establishment and its chief organ of self-flagellation, The League of Canadian Poets. The Preface is written in a very unpretentious style and is all the more endearing for its analysis of the poet's motives in seeking to become "A Poet." Along the way, and through the title section (new poems) and two sections I've briefly mentioned, we meet a workingclass everyman, whose voice — sometimes wry and witty, sometimes maudlin — is deliberately unrehearsed; through the urban ghettos, cheap bistros, fern lash bars, and soirées we follow the bleary-eyed, alcoholic persona in his quest for the next oasis, the next hairy grail. The glasses he wears are not rose coloured, but neither are they smoky. The squint sometimes leads to a sharp, relevant image:

Summer afternoon:
a broken neon sign argues
with cicadas.

More often the effect of the poem depends not on keeping lyricism, but on the stark, matter-of-fact juxtapositions of the quotidian:

'You took a deliberate
overdose,' she said.
I watched her lips; the
lipstick was perfectly applied . . .
(*"White Bread"*)

The rhythms are loose; the poems tend to sprawl in open-ended anecdotal swatches down the page, switching from gritty third-person realism to first-person meditations with a loping kind of ease. To the extent that they turn a spotlight on real people and events and don't romanticize or short circuit in cul de sacs of ennui or invented angst, the poems are a breath of fresh air. If they don't quite reach the anti-poetic verve or breadth of a Nicanor Parra, they do have a good deal of honesty and humour to recommend them. The book is fun to read.

Kay Burkman's is a very different aesthetic. The poems in her first book, *Champ*, are spare, pinched back; the lines more deliberately honed. She seldom evinces a flair for the colloquial without holding the rhythms in check with tight sound clusters of alliteration and assonance, toeing in the narrative cadences with tight strophes and quick shifts of perception:

Slugger hefts a humid bat
The sky is black & spitting
A baseball wheels onto home plate

Lightening illuminates the crowd . . .
(*"Gods At Baseball"*)

This is both a strength and a weakness. It yields a taut, tough, visceral music in keeping with her subjects and themes; it also restrains and contains what narrative development there might be. The poems are often more cryptic than revealing, require further development.

The jacket tells us these poems are witty — part chronicle, part meditation; that they ostensibly deal with the life and professional career of Tommy Burns, the Canadian who became Heavyweight Champion of the world and held that title from 1906 to 1908, when Jack Johnson, the first black champ, took it away from him. This is unfortunate: there is little chronicle here. The book, in fact,

leaps from one sports figure and one sport to another as the poet/persona meditates on images from her T.V. screen and popular culture. This creates a problem when the second person form of address is used and there is little narrative connection between poems. "Champ" is but one stand-in among shades; a lot of the allusions remain private, a lot of the leaps obscure.

Laurence Hutchman's volume, *Blue Riders* (his third) occupies a middle ground between the demotic prose rhythms of Jones and the pinched and acerbic wit of Burkman's clipped rhythms. Alas, the poetry is more competent than exciting, and, for its lack of risk-taking, sustains neither the heightened tension of the latter or the engaging voice of the former. While there is a narrative cycle, "Shadows," ostensibly a celebration of the poet's Irish ancestry; a section of occasional meditative pieces — including the stock-in-trade landscape, graveside-of-the-famous-poet, and still life pieces; and a shorter, darker sequence of three related meditations, "Vigil," there is an evenness in tone and approach here that is monotonous.

The poet insists on telling the reader everything, rather than seeking out the singular telling image:

Sarah,
you carried coal from the shed through
years
of fires, cooked potatoes on misty Sundays.
Beneath Mary's Shrine and Grianan's
pagan ring
you were born, sneaked out the back door
leaving your strict father and Catholic
family . . .

("Grandmother")

The lines (such as those above) are often flat; the line breaks arbitrary. As often as not the poet eschews metaphor as well; the poems bog down in description and narrative scaffolding. At his worst, Hutchman trades in dreadful cli-

chés and the poems fizzle out in abstraction, trying to sound the ominous note:

We struggle against family roots.
Outside the window the trees
sway in the territory
we call the world.

And in the sky there are voices.
("Beyond Words")

At his best, he turns out a serviceable poem. The poet is still essentially manipulating bits of description, and affects the stance of the poet maudit; he has yet to find a real subject to explore. If he can find a dramatic curve to connect up the narrative bits, and borrow some of the economy of the impressionist painters he seems to admire so much, the poems will find the tension they need.

Three new poets then: none in complete command of a style; one in command of a persona and voice, one exhibiting a terseness and command of image, one struggling with the exigencies of narrative and description, turning out the occasional effective set piece.

RICHARD STEVENSON

GRIEF & MEMORY

RACHEL KORN, *Paper Roses*, bilingual with translations from the Yiddish by Seymour Levitan. Aya Press, \$9.00.

PATRICK WHITE, *Homage to Victor Jara*, bilingual with translations into Spanish by Juan O'Neill. Steel Rail Publishing, \$7.95.

HELEN POTREBENKO, *Walking Slow*. Lazara, n.p.

SHAUNT BASMAJIAN, *Poets Who Don't Dance*. Unfinished Monument Press, \$3.00.

WHEN RACHEL KORN was born in East Galicia, Poland, in 1898, she entered the world of the last generation of the East European Jews. Her family had joined the process of linguistic assimilation which had eliminated Yiddish in Western Europe in the eighteenth century, and her

first publications at the end of the First World War were in Polish. She then had to learn to become literate in Yiddish, the mother language of the great majority of the East European Jews, from which all the poems in this collection are translated. When she died in 1982 in Montreal, her culture and adopted language had been virtually eliminated in her place of birth. The poems in *Paper Roses* cover the period from 1928 to 1968 and thus offer an overview of the possibilities of poetic response to the last years of that world, to the nightmare of the Holocaust, and to the difficult problem of having survived, and then carrying on as a writer in the aftermath. This edition, which includes both the Yiddish originals and Seymour Levitan's excellent translations, demonstrates both the powerfully evocative poetry of a young writer describing the world around her with an observant eye and clear sense of literary control, and the technical problems which such an aesthetic talent faced when attempting to describe in lyric form a world which could no longer bear observation and an experience which usually overwhelmed aesthetic control. In short, the first third of this book is wonderfully successful in presenting a poet who was capable of finding powerful and effective imagery in creating lasting images of a world that is gone forever. There are a dozen poems here which would grace any collection of twentieth-century poetry. After that the flashes come only occasionally and *Paper Roses* runs the danger of no longer moving the reader because repeated expressions of grief cannot maintain the intensity which the poetic experience is attempting to convey.

The Ottawa poet and artist Patrick White has taken on a challenging task with his volume of poetry, nothing less than 19 cantos in memory of the tortured and executed Chilean poet and musician Victor Jara, with lengthy contemplations

of the position of the writer in Canada and the situation of the world in general. His problem is how to sustain the fury of the searing scenes from Santiago in the quiet of Ottawa, and beyond that how to speculate philosophically on universal matters while remaining in the same poetic framework. The results are bound to be somewhat erratic and the reader eventually begins to flounder beneath the weight of the late discourses. But there are also sections of great power, particularly in the evocation of the terror of the stadium of Santiago and in the descriptions of the sacrifices demanded of a committed artist in such an environment. When a kind of bitter humour enters the fabric of the poem, as it does when the author compares the fate of Victor Jara in Chile to that of a poet in Ottawa where "the government tends its flower-beds / the teeth of the people / have some recourse against decay," the whole work gains from the shift in mood. Like *Paper Roses*, this is a bilingual edition, perhaps a hopeful sign that there will be more Canadian publications which recognize that bilingual does not only mean French/English.

Walking Slow is the first publication of a writer who has become familiar as a reader of her poetry in British Columbia during the last decade. The poems in this volume cover the period from 1971 to the present, and it is surely about time that these became readily available. Some of these poems are, to be sure, little more than small anecdotes, perhaps originally designed as filler material for readings, but a good proportion of them are wonderfully articulate and effective poetic commentaries on life in general, the west coast in particular and women's position in that society specifically. In her better poems, Potrebenko confronts the reader with the absurdities or injustice of some condition of contemporary life, which often but not always cen-

tres on the problems of women's role in it, skewers the viewpoint which allowed it to happen, and treats a perhaps exaggerated attempt at rectification with a gentle humour. Sometimes these poems do not successfully make the transition from a kind of short story to poetic form. In fact there are also some successful examples of her prose style included in the form of memoranda, which however do underlie the closeness of the poems to prose. In a poem such as "Days and Nights on the Picket Line," however, everything comes together to produce a rare example of a Canadian poem which is at the same time powerful social commentary, lyrical evocation of the landscape, and humour. Here Potrebenko imagines the spectacular walk she would have taken if all her marching on picket lines had been stretched across British Columbia. Ultimately she can also poke fun at herself, as she hopes that "another picket happens soon / I never was very impressed with Malakwa," where her imaginary walk has stranded her. It is a saving grace in this impressive work about social injustice and human foible.

Poets Who Don't Dance is the Toronto author Shaunt Basmajian's ninth book since 1970, all with smaller presses. He is described as working at numerous jobs to support his writing; in short, this is a writer who has worked continually at his poetry for many years, has had a modicum of success, and is waiting for a breakthrough. There is much in this edition which could lend support to that hope. In his best poems, such as "Falling in Love for the Wrong Reasons" or "The Woman Back in Bars," there is an evocative mixture of commentary on the predicament of the middle-aged and the comedy of those obsessed with avoiding its pitfalls: "celibacy got to her / one year two months and 26 days / was the longest she'd gone / without it," "but / in the aftermath / as we watch a younger /

generation / dress up for the same / Saturday night dances / the weekend parties / holding hands at the movies / like we once did . . . / we're the ones that sigh / and frown / with envy / with a longing / watching the next generation / chase the dream / we thought / only belonged to us." There is an appealing whimsy in these descriptions of "the soul of the suburban martyr," a somewhat mocking self-description which is bound to touch a responsive chord upon reflection in many Canadian readers. Basmajian's monument may be unfinished, but it is built on a solid foundation, and one can only hope the work upon it will continue.

PETER STENBERG

QUESTIONNER ET REVER

GERALD GAUDET, *Voix d'écrivains: entretiens*.
Québec/Amérique, n.p.

THIS HANDSOME BOOK is a collection of twenty-five interviews with poets, novelists, dramatists, and literary critics: "Dans ce premier livre d'entretiens, j'ai voulu rencontrer l'écrivain au niveau de ce qui le fait humain en l'invitant à questionner et à rêver les thèmes que convoquent le désir et la passion dans son oeuvre." Each interview is preceded by a photo of the person interviewed and a quotation from his work. There is a brief biography of all the authors at the end of the volume. The interviewer's remarks and passages from the author's works, interspersed throughout, blend together with the author's own comments in the interview to lend insight into the author's world. The interview with Marie-Claire Blais conveys her passionate desire to confront the very essence of peoples' lives through their pain in moments of crisis. Life, for her, is about risk: daring to

suffer and to love, in order to understand oneself and one's world.

Marie Cardinal talks about the difficulty of being a woman and how that informs her writing. She states that women are subjected to norms and rules that constitute an obstacle to the realization and fulfilment of the self. What is most interesting and revealing in the interview is Marie Cardinal's conviction that the freeing of women's energies is, in fact, potentially a liberation of thought and feeling itself, independent of the male or female stereotype. There is an energy, a force, an excitement to her thought and her writing that is conveyed in this interview.

The interview with Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska is followed by a brief excerpt from her address to the 10th International Conference of Quebec writers. Both texts demonstrate the author's political "engagement," her commitment to a world no longer divided and living under the spectre of nuclear destruction, but instead a society based on "le fusionnel," united and harmonious. She talks, as well, about the way in which her books reveal her preoccupations, and how her childhood in a large rural family caused feelings of loneliness. Her writing is an intensely joyful undertaking that helps her overcome the loneliness and absence she knew as a child.

Journalist and poet Jean Royer is described as "un homme de coeur" who exemplifies "la générosité de la présence amoureuse." All his writing constitutes, for Gérard Gaudet, "un acte de tendresse" and his poetry is characterized as "une poésie de l'aveu." Royer talks about his love for Les Iles de la Madeleine and their influence on his creative writing. One could always challenge the interviewer on his choice of authors, the length accorded one author as opposed to another, or even the style of interview employed, but, in the end, Gérard Gaudet

succeeds in presenting us with a glimpse into the private world of a wide variety of contemporary writers.

PAUL G. SOCKEN

FEMINISM CHANGING

ANGELA MILES, *Feminist Radicalism in the 1980's*. Oxford, \$3.50.

MARILOUISE and ARTHUR KROKER, et al., eds., *Feminism Now: Theory and Practice*. Oxford, \$12.95.

LEONORE HOFFMAN and MARGO CULLEY, eds., *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy*. MLA, \$27.50; pa. \$17.50.

ELLEN CAROL DU BOIS, et al., *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe*. Univ. of Illinois Press, \$19.95.

IT HAS BECOME APPARENT in the last five years or so that feminism has reached a turning point. In the 1960's and 1970's feminism was a movement principally devoted to demonstrating equality (but on male terms) and therefore stressing its own unity and solidarity. In the 1980's feminism has become — or been revealed as — manyheaded, pluralistic, potentially factional, opposed to simple binary oppositions, stressing the importance and value of female difference, of female activities and biological destinations. From the outside feminism can look fatally fractured, its achievements achieved. From the inside you begin to realize that something truly revolutionary, truly international is taking place. What current feminist thinkers are emphasizing is the value of pluralism, rather than the divisiveness of separation. As Angela Miles puts it:

As black, disabled, lesbian, old, Jewish and working-class feminists find their voices women are discovering the richness of their shared specificities.

Angela Miles in her monograph *Feminist Radicalism in the Eighties* has writ-

ten a historical guide to the thickets of feminist radicalism. She makes the point that many members of the women's movement had always understood their struggle in much larger terms than "mere pressure for women's access to equal participation," and goes on to explicate what these larger terms are.

If there were a word more all-embracing than *revolution* we would use it. Shulamith Firestone.

Miles introduces radical feminist thought and its history and development and discusses these ideals in the context of, or in relation to, radical thought generally. She concludes "feminism is potentially a universal politics against all domination" and sees an "emergence in the 1980's of an embryonic universal feminist politics." As Miles so lucidly describes it, the perspective of the women's movement has been widened. Early feminism was a reaction to an "androcentric" world and the ways in which women sought to be successful in establishing their equalities had been defined by men. It wasn't until women started to question the assumptions behind their struggle and at the same time re-evaluate the experience and qualities of women that feminism became truly radical.

The assertion of female difference as female value quite unlike the values of male defined achievement has allowed feminists to reassess traditional female experience, especially domestic and nurturing. But from the affirmation of woman as she is both in fact and in potential can follow a simplistic anti-humanism, as in "the simple positing of an essentially good human female nature against essentially bad and sub-human male nature." That this simple opposition has often been allowed to stand for the "feminist stand point" (and not least by men) is acknowledged by Miles, but her rhetorical phrases ("deathly patriarchal

separations") suggest it is not yet overcome. However, as Miles goes on to demonstrate in her section on theory, the movement from Firestone in the early seventies to Hartstock in the eighties is a movement from a feminist critique contextually defined by and dependent on Marxism, "the feminism of the pseudoman," to the integrative feminism of Nancy Hartsock, a

'feminism whose vision is not the entry of women into man's world but the "reintegration of men in general into the harmony of people and nature".'

Miles' discussion of the development of feminist thought makes lucid enjoyable reading. While she looks back at the origins of new feminist thought with the affectionate sympathy for their limitations that historians have for nineteenth-century reformers, she recognizes also that where we are is still the beginning, and the evidence of the greatly promised revolution proclaimed by early feminists is still only partially demonstrable in life around us. Nevertheless Miles' is a profoundly optimistic view. Perhaps one of the greatest attractions of feminism is the possibility of hope it offers, through its willingness to be flexible, to accept and use its own differences, and to enter the political arena as a force on many different fronts. What Miles reveals is the history of a movement refusing to be imprisoned in its own ideologies.

The second half of Miles' monograph is included in *Feminism Now* which is a collection of essays in three parts. The first, which includes Miles' contribution, is essays on theory; the second is entitled Pornography/Ideology/Power; the third Textual/Sexual Strategies. The collection is simultaneously published as the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue Canadienne de théorie politique et social*, Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, and contains a review section in French and English and an article by Mair Verthuy.

The collection has a Canadian cast of feature, especially the section on pornography which is concerned with Canadian law and practice, but the literary section is more international, including Toril Moi's well-known essay on reading Virginia Woolf. This is a reflection of exigency; it is not possible to keep up with new feminist literary theory without being international, whereas pornography though an international concern, can only be attacked as a local problem. It is the pornography section of this book that seems to have most to do with the preface.

In the preface the editors, Marilouise and Arthur Kroker, expand an elaborate analogy between feminism, the Calvin Klein perfume ad, and Magritte's painting *Memory*. The question they ask is twofold: what's feminism in the age of ultra-capitalism, and what's the fate of feminism in the age of postmodernism? According to the Krokers the answer lies in the representational imagery of the Calvin Klein ad "reversing, the big signifiers of sex . . . to sell commodities," and Magritte's *Memory* "postmodernism *par excellence*."

Everything in *Memory* screams out *our* imprisonment in a disembodied and inhuman landscape of dead images, but the sign of blood from the head also speaks of the possibility of *embodied* remembrance, signifying both the trauma of postmodernism and the wound of memory which refuses to close.

When the editors get round to stating their claims for the book as they do at the end of the preface, you wonder why they depend on an image by a Belgian man born last century. It seems a gratuitous coathook transplanted from another time and place on which to hang remarks that are better made directly.

The essays on feminist theory and practice in this volume. . . . represent a calling back to feminism as a universal politics. . . . and

the writing of the text of a new feminist discourse.

Nonetheless their point is an important one; that the feminist critique is a kind of antibiotic (to transfer to another imagery) to the "whole schizophrenic world of electric women for a world whose dominant mode of social cohesion is the shopping mall." The images of women that surround us are a guide both to the dangers we face and to the power we must use to face them.

The three essays on pornography confront these issues directly. The connection between pornography and the culture we regard as normal is, as Eileen Manion points out, disturbingly close.

In reality, pornography gives us the same old world view we see everywhere else; men are subjects, women are objects, not even objects to be "known," but discrete items to be scanned, viewed, taken in, or exchanged, like bits of information.

Manion explores historical parallels with nineteenth-century feminists attack on prostitution and the subsequent — inadvertent — disservice done to women in general and prostitutes in particular by social purity advocates. Moreover, as Manion points out, not only is there disturbing historical precedent for the subversion of an attack on pornography into an attack on morality in general (and especially free speech) by groups of fixed ideological persuasion, but also pornography itself is only part of a war that must be waged on the nature of gender-related imagery.

It's quite obvious that in this struggle over images we can't stop with pornography; we also have the whole domain of advertising to contend with, not to mention a staggering proportion of our television, movies and books.

It becomes clear on reading the pornography section of *Feminism Now* that pornography is one of the great testing grounds of feminism. Not only is it en-

demic in Western culture in ways that Manion and Geraldine Finn detail in *Feminism Now*, the detail of how to deal with it is also hedged about with difficulty. Pornography is not just about sex; it is about power. Pornography is an "issue that graphically illustrates the underlying basis of patriarchal society. . . . Hard-core or mild, these are all scenes of male control of women." There can be no doubt that pornography is damaging to women; the problem is how to deal with it in ways that are not as damaging. Patricia Hughes discusses mechanisms of controlling pornography from the pessimistic premise that it cannot be eradicated. What she calls "ad-junct" solutions range from self help like that of the Wimmins Fire Brigade who firebombed three video stores in 1982, to invoking sections of the Criminal Code, but her preferred solution is to act against it under Human Rights Legislation. As she remarks

It has been understood for some time that societal disapproval of racism is necessary, regardless of the effects of racism on racial minorities. . . . We need that same kind of assertion in relation to women.

To move from pornography to feminist criticism might seem like a move from action to theorizing, but the importance of each to the other needs hardly more than Gilbert and Gubar's metaphor to establish it.

In patriarchal Western culture . . . the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis's power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim. . . .

Barbara Godard in yoking the act (feminism) with the artifact (literature) quotes Barthes: "It is virtually impossible to deal with literary creation without postulating the existence of a relation be-

tween the work and something besides that work." It cannot be possible any longer to ignore the power of women's writing as a counter view of history as literature, language as domination, a view of another kind of freedom, another kind of imprisonment. The related, but not so obvious question, why there is a need for a theory of feminist criticism, is answered by a consideration of the many voices that make up women's writing whose interests lie in shared gender identity rather than shared national identity, who are, in their polyglot way, the answer to the Great Tradition, or the American Novel; and who illustrate the need for, as Patrocinio Schweikart puts it,

a conceptual model that will allow us to make sense of feminist criticism as a whole, to see it not as an *ad hoc* collection of concerns and strategies, but as a segmented, variously focused yet coherent and genuinely collective enterprise.

Whether or not such a conceptual model could ever be arrived at is still a subject of debate, but as the floodwaters of women's writing ever increase so does the spawning of feminist criticism, an activity at once dependent and productive. As Elaine Showalter points out, the efforts of early feminist criticism to expose misogynist literary practice succeeded in "changing the atmosphere of literary response." The current effort to express a female aesthetic has expanded from the recognition of women's writing as a literary movement to a

radical rethinking of the conceptual grounds of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing that have been based entirely on male literary experiences.

Increased interest in women's nontraditional literature is recovering history as well as literary artifacts, changing perceptions of what history is and of what constitutes "literature," as well as deliberately deconstructing traditional teaching

hierarchies. As the new feminist criticism produces its theorists so it enlarges the ground of its theory, for, as Barbara Godard says, "every theory of language implies a whole philosophy of history." As feminists uncover and analyze the condition of women and their expression of it, the field grows both wider and deeper. "The female text, like the female body, is irreducibly plural."

Feminism Now is a more dynamic book than *Feminist Scholarship*, which is a history and analysis of scholarly feminism, but both are valuable, even essential contributions to feminist study. To read work like this is to participate in the activity at the cliff face. My only reservation is a problem unrelated to feminist criticism as such, and it is that I have a low tolerance of the language of the new criticisms, and was interested to note that the two most pronounced examples of it in *Feminism Now* were the Preface and Pamela MacCallum's introductory article to Textual/Sexual Strategies. On the whole the contributory articles forming the major part of the book seemed to me to draw part of their strength from their clarity of expression, speaking to me as a woman, and not as a postmodernist, or a poststructuralist, or a deconstructionist. Barbara Godard makes the point when she says:

In defining ourselves within the frames of reference chosen by men we risk losing any sense of ourselves as subjects. In order to find ourselves, we must move outside of the critical space altogether to find meaning in what has previously been empty space.

LYDIA WEVERS



QUILTED PATCH

BERT ALMON, *Deep North*. Thistle-down, \$18.00; pa. \$7.95.

CHARLES NOBLE, *Afternoon Starlight*. Thistle-down, \$18.00; pa. \$7.95.

CATHERINE BATES, *Counterpane: Poems and Drawings*. Lansdowne House, \$7.00.

KAREN MULHALLEN, *Sheba and Solomon: A Poem for Voices*. Eleftheria Press, \$8.95.

CHARLES NOBLE'S *Afternoon Starlight* consists of 56 poems in three parts: "drawbar seance," "drawing," and "to the naked city." Structurally, the sequence circles from the first poem, about the settling of legalities following the death of the persona's father, to the fifty-second poem, when the father dies. However, Noble does not end his volume here, he appends four more poems, each rather different from all the rest. The father figure appears frequently in the first part, while the mother is given prominence in the second part. The father-dominant section deals mainly with the running of a farm, and the imagery refers to machinery and open fields; to immigrants who came from Denmark; to Canadians who travel south. There is a montage effect in this section which resembles that in his earlier volume, *Banff/Breaking*. The second part deals more with childhood experiences with a mother who taught drawing to children in the nearby Hutterite colony. Most of the poems are episodic, narrating everyday incidents on the farm and at school in images that are crystalline in their clarity. Tenderly the poet delineates animals: a cat that held on to the mouth of the water trough until rescued, horses, field mice. There is some raunchiness: "Through slats and rods I saw his ass / as he shit down through the maze / Like a canned-pear half it was." There is also an underlying humorous jab at people and events:

as I sat on the tractor twisting
like I'd kissed a girl pregnant

and

[father] sprinkled feed in the garden
for the chickens
blasted the heck
out of their pecking order.

The language is flavoured through and through with the prairie — “flax straw,” “black bales,” “steam-rolled barley,” “drills like a camel going down on its knees,” but there is food, or fodder, for those with other backgrounds as well. There are universal elements. This Noble Savage persona dedicated to hard physical labour, spending long hours nurturing the soil, coaxing the crops against odds of a hostile climate, has a loyal heart and proud legacy. There is a tribute to his grandfather, a pioneer who loved horses, which he vowed were better than tractors, but was converted to buy “a whole trainload of tractors,” and to his grandmother whose lilacs he picked “and sold them back to her.”

The persona’s feelings for his father forms a backbone to the volume. Two poems about his death are very moving. Whereas machinery fitted right into his prairie landscape, Noble protests the use of machinery in the hospital which “calibrated mechanical breakdown into your soul.” And then when the expected telephone call came, he went to the nursing home and “on his hand put down my hand / till it answered.”

The bond between generations is brought out poignantly also in Catherine Bates’ *Counterpane*, a book of 37 poems and 12 pencil drawings. The sketches add to the poetry, sometimes by being directly related (as in the sketch of a bowl of flowers in a hospital room to accompany a poem for her aging mother), and sometimes by providing a visual background for narrative poems. The poetry itself is visual, and one can see the influence of the poet’s skills at sketching. Drawing is the driving need “to make by hand some other different / combinations

of reality.” Poem-shaping is analogous to archaeological work: one digs deeper and deeper and comes upon words buried deep in concrete, “bones of something / searched for all my life,” now exposed by brushing with delicate implements the archaeological find.

The cover of the volume shows a colourful patchwork quilt where orange-red squares alternate with squares of different patterns and colours. The red squares naturally stand out; so also do the poems that deal with aging and death. Both are more numerous and more striking than what surrounds them. Virginia Nixon, in her introduction to the volume, has said Bates sketched beautiful portraits of older family members; the same may be said of her poems about the persona’s mother. Euphemisms are avoided and the diction is painfully realistic and yet poetic.

In “For my Mother,” the persona returns to her childhood to draw a girl of eleven being told to take peonies to “an old lady at number ten twelve,” then moves forward to a time when “peonies held by old hands have a special meaning” to the poetic present, when “I take my mother / a bouquet of peonies.” She has transferred the respect for old age taught by her mother to her mother herself.

She describes all the phases and aspects of aging, the humiliation of being “turned in bed according to the clock,” the children’s guilt

We all feel terrible, visit sometimes,
but living afar, more often we write notes,

and the “heart-wrenching, blood-gurgling end.” “It doesn’t seem right that Death, at the end, dallied and played long games. But it’s over.” Not really, for then comes the aftermath, the disposal of the body and personal effects. From “bouquets of peonies” that drive away the “smells of death” to the acceptance

of the inevitability of death and its final impersonality, "a body rolled out with only a tag," is the journey the persona makes.

Even more than the theme, Bates' carefully plotted lines and images are noteworthy. "Memory stirs another fly / that searched in vain for a safe exit"; "Impatient lines on pages tumbled into rhythms/"; "I'd flex those fingers to twice their normal length." Bates succeeds in stretching her poems and drawings beyond their own frame.

With Karen Mulhallen's *Sheba and Solomon*, it is the other way around. The magic of those names and the potential for handling the Biblical story in modern terms is not exploited; rather, the story and charisma of this famous pair of lovers is boxed into a frame. The blurb says the love affair is "told from a feminine perspective." I tried to read some feminist statement in the collection; I experimented with the structure: whether the poem on the even numbered pages seemed to be objective or historical while those on the opposite page were subjective, and enunciated from a feminist angle. This was not consistently so. Besides, the Sheba of the sequence is about as traditionally subservient as can be: "If you would only allow me a mendicant / to touch my lips / to this jewel"; "Wear me as a precious made jewel." There are echoes of Blake (O earth, O earth, return) and of Masfield (loaded/ With smelted copper, to / Ophir, / to return with gold / jewels, apes / peacocks, baboons) but these are not enough to lift the sequence out of cliché-logged mediocrity.

Bert Almon's *Deep North*, like Noble's collection, is a substantial sequence that has many episodes. The wit is quicker and the experiences delineated are of the city, not the country. The book would provide pleasure to casual and serious readers. Of the four sections — "Modern

Times," "Deep North," "Western Roads," and "Poet on Expense Account," the last is the shortest and most pleasurable. The poems are everyday incidents in the life of a city man, and that he is an academic comes through not only in the events and characters but in the cultivated artlessness, crafted naturalism of language and tone.

The persona remembers Zoology 3101 as the course in which so many students felt queasy and some girls fainted but "In fourteen years of teaching English / I have never made any student faint / over a line of bad poetry." Another recollection is "For a Failed Brunette," a song of his misplaced love for a red-haired majorette and his own misplaced head against brick and concrete walls courtesy of her jealous and bigger-built boyfriends. Poet and persona come together again in the title poem of this section where (courtesy of the Public Library) he has lunch at an elite restaurant. He is like a fish out of water with the relishes that arrive in "a boat-shaped dish / manned by celery and carrot sticks" and the bread "still crouches in the basket under a napkin." The elaborate metaphor of a victim attacked by a sea of monsters is hilariously developed.

Unlike Noble with his John Deeres, this city academic (like most of housebound Canada) sits too often and too long before the TV. And his references to the screen pictures are too frequent and too long. The title segment — "Deep North" — is the weakest of the four segments. The satire is too obvious and in the serious poems his characteristic twist that is the source of so much humour elsewhere is not effective. "Western Roads" is a raconteur segment where the persona's travels are the subject of narration. They have what Robert Kroetsch celebrates as the ultimate Canadianism — a sense of region, a colloquial style, and a catalogue of pithily described arti-

cles and artifacts. This is Almon's fifth collection of poems, and after reading it one is sure to pick up his earlier volumes.

Of all these volumes one could say what Bert Almon says of the skills of a translator for the deaf: "I'm astounded to see a speech / gaining so much in the translation." Which is a double-edged statement. And is meant to be.

UMA PARAMESWARAN
and TERESA MALLAM

INTRODUCTORY

ROBERT LECKER, JACK DAVID, ELLEN QUIGLEY,
eds., *Canadian Writers and Their Works*,
Poetry Series, Vol. 9. ECW Press, \$40.00.

THE ECW PRESS "Canadian Writers and Their Works" project, which entered the crowded field of monographs on Canadian writers with much fanfare a few years ago, is nearing completion; the final volumes in the twenty volume series are due to appear in 1987. So far, the project seems to be fulfilling its mandate: to provide for "libraries and schools . . . a new literary history of Canada that has biographical, critical, and bibliographical elements" in "durable, well-designed, and easy-to-use volumes." Questioning the mandate itself, of course, leads us into the quandary of Canadian literary criticism: do we need more scholars providing more undergraduate "introductions" to more writers (many of whom are not yet in mid-career)?

This volume, like the others, presents "essays" on five writers — Margaret Atwood, D. G. Jones, Patrick Lane, Dennis Lee, and Gwendolyn MacEwen — with an overall introduction by George Woodcock. As he points out, these poets are "in their mid-forties or -fifties . . . the second generation of the modern movement in Canadian writing," well-established

but still developing. This seems to be the only rationale for unity in the volume, although Woodcock makes an attempt to establish "acquaintanceships" — not difficult in the incestuous world of Canlit. His comments on the style and substance of each of the essays are perceptive and not simply congratulatory.

The first two essays in the volume are, unfortunately, the least helpful to the students for whom the series is intended since their insights are so often hidden in "thickets of critical jargon" (Woodcock's phrase). Jean Mallinson has concentrated on a formal approach to Atwood's poetry "to make up for a certain lack" which she perceives in Atwood's critics. In the longest essay of this volume she gives detailed prosodic readings of several poems to illustrate her thesis that Atwood has moved from "near invisibility" in her poetry, through mask lyrics, to a real and personal presence. Mallinson's analysis of Atwood's "fictions" and tropes is technically impressive (students will need a glossary), but her prejudice against thematic criticism somewhat distorts an author who has said more about her own poetry than anyone else's in *Survival*, a work which Mallinson completely ignores. Also missing are two of the most significant books on Atwood: Grace's *Violent Duality* (1980) and Grace and Weir's *Atwood: Language, Text and System* (1983); the bibliography was at least four years out of date at publication. The limitations of this essay, including ten pages of pedantic endnotes, suggest an imperfectly digested dissertation.

In contrast to Mallinson, E. D. Blodgett extensively discusses D. G. Jones' critical work, *Butterfly on Rock*, as an "allegorical metafiction" and companion to his poetry. Blodgett argues that Jones perceives the world as a division; his poetry is a search for an appropriate expression and reconciliation. His artistic

development has been a process of abandoning "discursive logic, linear syntax, and extended metaphor" for "indeterminacy" and "a constant reintegration." While I agree with Woodcock that this essay is "a work of notable insight," I would not call it translucent. The critical jargon, again, will be an obstacle to the general reader, and Blodgett's desire to avoid closure and embrace indeterminacy in his conclusion results in some frustration.

Each of the essays in this series begins with three brief sections — "biography," "tradition and milieu," and "critical overview and context" — before the main analysis of "works." Often, these sections are ill-defined and repetitious. In Woodcock's essay on Patrick Lane, however, they provide a clear explanation for his aloofness from the other poets in this volume (and from the mainstream of Canadian poetry) and a foundation for Woodcock's characterization of Lane as a "populist," "regionalist," "nihilist," and "moralist" poet. His lucid analysis traces the development of Lane's philosophic pessimism as articulated in his growing mastery of poetic technique, and rebuts those critics who have not seen the compassionate epiphanies that redeem his violent visions.

The final two essays are also clear and helpful with cogent theses developed through careful close readings. Dennis Lee has often been criticized for intellectual abstraction in his poetry; T. G. Middlebro' analyzes Lee's development as a struggle to reconcile philosophic, religious, and political concepts with "the sensualities of verse." He probes the legacies of Heidegger and Grant in Lee's didactic poetry and concludes that, although Lee has not always been successful in the expression of his "felt thoughts," he cannot be faulted for glib imprecision or intellectual apathy. We miss in this essay, however, the irony of

any contrast between the political evangelist and the author of *Alligator Pie*.

Jan Bartley also challenges accepted critical wisdom in her lively and sensible treatment of Gwendolyn MacEwen. Denying that the poet has "repudiated the actual world" in "her desire to reveal the mythic in the mundane," she stresses MacEwen's engagement in poetically synthesizing the "binary structure of existence." Bartley carefully delineates the sources of MacEwen's poetry, its use of alchemy and archetype, myth and paradox, her development of symbol (particularly the male muse), and her growing maturity of language and form.

Ultimately, these essays are an intelligent contribution to Canadian literary criticism. But if ECW, in fact, produces definitive sixty-page introductions to one hundred Canadian writers in this series, might we then go on to more profound scholarship in the field?

BARBARA PELL

THÉÂTRE AU MASCULIN

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Remember Me*, trans. John Stowe. Talonbooks, \$6.95.

ROBERT MARINIER, *L'Inconception*. Prise de parole, \$7.95.

ROBERT BELLEFEUILLE, JEAN MARC DALPE et ROBERT MARINIER, *Les Rogers*. Prise de parole, \$7.95.

IT IS TEMPTING TO CALL these three works by and about men "post-feminist" plays, francophone male responses to the recent "théâtre au féminin" in Canada which has focused stagelights on sexuality. Liberated from macho stereotypes, the male characters of these plays are no longer strong or silent about their sexual and emotional needs. They feel free to talk about their fears and fantasies. In doing so, they draw the audience into their

often bewildering, often funny struggle to find personal fulfilment in a society transformed by the sexual and women's liberation movements of the past decade.

The original French version of Tremblay's play, *Les anciennes odeurs*, was first performed at Montreal's Théâtre de Quat' Sous in November 1981. *Remember Me*, the English translation by John Stowe, premiered at the Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg in January 1984. The play marks a new phase in Tremblay's theatrical career, beyond the material, spiritual, and linguistic poverty of his East End housewives, whores, singers, and transvestites.

Remember Me is an intimate dialogue between former lovers who have both established their professional careers but are still searching for artistic and emotional satisfaction. Jean-Marc is a thirty-eight-year-old French professor with a gift for nurturing talented students. He would like to be a writer but his own lucid critical sense tells him he has no talent. Luc is a thirty-two-year-old actor who, after ten years of obscurity in legitimate theatre, has achieved stardom playing a lisping idiot on a television series. Angered by the mediocrity of the public's taste and by the need to hide his homosexuality in order to preserve his public image, Luc is unhappy. His depression is deepened by the spectacle of his dying father's suffering and by the loneliness of the promiscuous life style he has chosen. Luc and Jean-Marc lived together for seven years until the monogamous professor found out about the actor's flagrant infidelities. Although a young teacher named Paul has replaced Luc in Jean-Marc's home and bed, it is clear that Jean-Marc and Luc will always be tied to each other by memories of their shared past, their shared passion. At the beginning of the play, Luc describes the Proustian olfactory memory

which explains the title, *Les anciennes odeurs*:

It's true, you know, it always smells the same . . . Whenever I come here — into the study, that is, since the bedroom is now forbidden territory — I breathe in, and all these images are conjured up.

(Silence.)

I don't know why the past always smells so good.

The conversation does not dwell exclusively on the past. Tremblay deals with a number of issues related to the personal and career choices which must be made by gay artists and intellectuals in a predominantly "straight" society: coming out versus staying in the closet, stable monogamous relationships versus exciting promiscuity, job security versus artistic creativity. Tremblay's homosexuals are no longer outrageous drag queens; they are honest, humorous, sensitive men able to express their love, sexual desires, fears of loneliness, old age, and death as well as their frustrated career goals. *Remember Me* amuses, touches, and moves the audience because Jean-Marc and Luc transcend their marginal status and speak for us all.

The two plays published by Prise de Parole remind us that francophone theatre is alive and well in Ontario. *L'inconception* was first presented at the Centre National des Arts in Ottawa in November 1983. Robert Marinier, a Sudbury native, studied acting in Montreal and directing in Paris before returning to write and act for the Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario. *L'inconception*, his fourth work, examines the problems of a married couple trying to decide whether or not to have children. Pierre, who claims to be the "new man" — the product of Romanticism and psychoanalysis, does not want children; his wife, Claire, does. In scene 2, Claire explains directly to the audience that her husband has been suffering some serious psychologi-

cal problems since his thirty-first birthday party. The rest of the play is a series of flashbacks to conversations between Pierre and Claire, and to Pierre's hallucinations about his encounters with the sons he has not had. It is only at the end of the play that we discover that Claire is actually discussing her husband's mental condition with the doctor who has just informed her that she is pregnant. She interprets Pierre's hallucinations as the result of his inner conflict between his fear of the responsibilities of fatherhood and his guilt for not wanting children.

L'inconception is an amusing and original play complicated by its antirealistic technique, its futuristic hallucinations and the unresolved questions it raises. It flashes back and forth over a thirty-year time span but the characters all remain thirty-one years old. Pierre meets his unborn sons, Marc and Claude, in the park where the naked thirty-one-year-old babies have arrived after travelling back through time. They give us comic glimpses of future society and of Pierre's career as a father. Marinier's play also takes a satirical look at society — its fascination with pop psychology and how-to books on parenting, its narcissism and fear of sense-dulling boredom. For all its wit and offbeat humour, *L'inconception* leaves the spectator somewhat disappointed. The fast-paced, satirical sketch format does not allow for the deeper discussion warranted by the issue of parenting in the eighties. On another level, the picayune reader is dismayed by the editor's failure to correct grammatical and orthographic errors in the text.

Les Rogers is a collaborative effort by three Franco-Ontarian actor/authors: Robert Bellefeuille, Jean Marc Dalpé, and Robert Marinier. First staged by the Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario and the Théâtre de la Vieille 17 in Sudbury in February 1985, the play examines with humour the changes in male roles and

male-female relationships over the last fifteen years. The characters, thirty-year-old professional men who have been friends since childhood, are trying very hard to switch from the macho male ideal of their adolescence to the liberated male feminist ideal of the eighties. They grew up thinking real men ("les vrais Rogers") spoke with their fists; now they are learning to express their emotions verbally, to treat women as equals, to share domestic chores. The discussion of changing gender roles takes place during a night spent drinking, reminiscing, and brawling. Guy and Etienne, two married men, have been summoned to console their hysterical friend, Denis, who has found out that his former live-in girlfriend is out on a date with a new beau. Even though it was Denis who initiated the break-up with Geneviève and despite the fact that he has dated other women since, he feels jealous, betrayed, and resentful of all the changes brought about by the women's liberation movement. Guy and Etienne endeavour to cheer up Denis with booze and jokes but the forlorn lover insists on going to spy on Geneviève. As the three friends stake out her apartment, they talk about their old girlfriends, their first sexual experiences, and their adjustment to post-feminist society. The conversation heats up, fueled by alcohol and anxiety, and the farcical fight ends with all three friends tumbling into the river. By the fourth and final act, Denis has begun to see the humour of the situation and he joins Etienne and Guy in watching the sun rise on a new day.

Les Rogers is a wonderful light comedy which uses a whole range of satiric, farcical, and burlesque techniques to keep the dialogue running and the audience laughing. There are funny phone conversations, a taxi cab chase scene right out of an old detective movie, slapstick fights, and men dressed in women's cloth-

ing. All these "shticks" complement the honest look at changing sex roles, making *Les Rogers* a comedy in the classical sense, a play which makes us laugh and think.

JANE MOSS

FINE LINES & FRACTURES

MARY DI MICHELE, *Immune to Gravity*. McClelland & Stewart, \$9.95.

Though its sources are mountain
glaciers and Alaskan rain,
the icy river looks warm,
steeped in sunlight,
translucent as clarified butter,
that brilliant light bouncing
off my wristwatch
its scrambled code without a message.

Salmon struggling to spawn in a stream
no deeper than a rain trough,
the fish speckled green and pink or red
like a yogurt culture long past
its best before date,
slap their bodies like thick
leather straps on palms
curling in pain.

This is how love became blind,
dashing its brains out
against the rocks,
reciting in an unwholesome, hooked
mouth,
sweet *nada*, endearments, proposals.
These are the dead whose appetites are
alive,
decadents fond of the beach
and the beauty of blond boys.

THESE FIRST THREE (of seven) stanzas of "Sex and Death" are typical of *Immune to Gravity*, Mary di Michele's fifth book of poetry in less than a decade. Stanza 1 provides the slow entry evident in many of the poems; di Michele's exposition is often cumbersome (see "Lunar Eclipse of the Heart" or "Starlight Theatre"). Here, she is at pains not only to set a scene before moving into the heart of the poem, but also to establish

herself (that is, her vision of experience: *my* wristwatch) as the true subject, a subject to which she returns explicitly by stanza 6. The last line of stanza 1 alludes, in "scrambled code," to one of her favourite themes, the difficulty of understanding life.

Stanza 2 introduces the ostensible subject of spawning salmon, though the salmon are merely this poem's means of getting at the real subject of all her poems: the poet's response to stimuli. We are in the mind of a romantic poet whose proper occupation is contemplation of itself.

Di Michele's self-contemplation leads, in stanza 3, to that most misleading and powerful of romantic characteristics, the impulse to define universal experience on the basis of the ultimate in what statisticians call "limited numbers": the single example. One person's moralizing is what we get: "This is how love became blind, / dashing its brains out." It is the statement of a powerful prejudice which we may or may not accept, depending on the strength of the poet's content and language.

An examination of content includes, most obviously, some consideration of the scenes and themes of di Michele's poetry, and for the most part these are powerful. She writes much of temporality, populating her backgrounds with flowers and other mortal creatures such as fish, as though demonstrating that fecundity is no solution to the problem of dying. She writes much of sex, of the violence of sex (primarily human though sometimes piscine), of television, of movies and movie stars for analogy, of alcohol — "love is a dry martini / part distilled liquor, / part a seasoned wine, / it invests too much sugar / in the blood and offers / the olive with its pit, / small memento of lost lovers" — and predominantly of men. Her relationships with males have defined her and still do, though revolt

against that fact has changed the definition. In "Hunger," a poem which deals with sexually-related murders, di Michele refers to a *Penthouse* reader's penis as "a third and murderous arm." It is only the most notable of numerous complaints of the dominance of males.

More important than the nature of content is its handling, and di Michele often clutters potentially-powerful scenes. In part, this is because she piles on too much in the way of detail, or races with the impulse to analogize: "We learned to listen to Beethoven / with the length of our bodies, / the pulse in the circulation of blood, / the rumbles and rhythms of internal organs, / the mute transfers of chemicals in cells, / the electric rushes through the brain." One or two of these lines would have been more powerful than the whole string, and the poet should have taken her pick instead of leaving the business of poetry to the reader. Another part of the problem is di Michele's need to explain rather than simply crystallize experience. The second parts of both "Maps of All We Have Been" and "False Analogies," as well as many other poems, exemplify her desire to be essayist rather than poet. Thirdly, di Michele clutters her poems with details so personal as to be either mundane or, at the other extreme, esoteric. Should the reader expect to know who "Roo" is, in "Love Scenes"? Or that there is a statue of Sibelius (otherwise a most confusing reference) in the park setting of "Hunger"? A more striking example of the problem is the reference, at the end of the first part of "Maps of All We Have Been," to "the mummies of Guanajuato." Those *momias* are a potentially-vivid image worth perhaps a whole poem for a writer as preoccupied with mortality as di Michele, but mere reference to them transmits nothing to the vast majority of readers who have never travelled north-west of Mexico City. The poems of di

Michele almost need heavy footnoting *in her own time*.

No less important than poetry's content is its language, including here accuracy of image, economy of expression, and aptness of figures. In this category, di Michele demonstrates more strength than weakness, but the latter definitely diffuses the former. This is exemplified by the three stanzas quoted at the beginning of this review. The effective break between lines 1 and 2 — which conveys two meanings, one dependent upon no punctuation, the other upon an implied colon — is overshadowed by the imprecision of line 3. How do we know that the river is icy if it looks warm? To whom does it look warm? (The poet may be an implied perceiver, but allusion to the poet seems unnecessary — except to justify sloppy language.) Moving further, does butter add to this stanza, or to the poem as a whole? Do we need to hear about the speaker's wristwatch? To what does the scrambled code belong, wristwatch or sunlight? Stanza 2 is much stronger, perhaps because the real poem begins here, but it includes a banal allusion to supermarkets. Immediately after that come three compact, vivid lines, the last of which reaches out to modify both bodies and hands effectively. In stanza 3, after the moralizing which is her custom — indeed, she sometimes seems maxim crazy — di Michele delivers five lines which leap swiftly from accuracy to dramatic impact.

Although it would be possible to list numerous examples of bad language in this book, it is even easier to identify much strong phrasing: "menstruation, that betrayal of the self / to the species"; "sunglasses slashed across their eyes / like censor bars"; women in skin magazines who "proffer their breasts to release, / as if from brandy snifters, / the full bouquet of the body." Some of the poems, such as "Wasted on the Old" and "Beauty

and Dread in 1959," are wholly satisfying. But the overwhelming conclusion is that *Immune to Gravity* is both good and bad in roughly equal amounts: fine lines broken by rough ones, powerful content fractured by moralizing, or by seeking aphorisms to define what is more clearly revealed by the thing itself.

RON MILES

ERASURES

STANLEY FOGEL, *A Tale of Two Countries: Contemporary Fiction in Canada and the United States*. ECW, \$17.95.

TOWARDS THE "END" of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s *Slaughterhouse Five*, Billy Pilgrim blunders into a radio station next to his hotel in New York: "there were other people up there, waiting to go in. They were literary critics, and they thought Billy was one, too. They were going to discuss whether the novel was dead or not. So it goes."

So it goes on. Literary critics (minus Billy), are still "going to discuss whether the novel [is] dead or not." *A Tale of Two Countries* is an astringent, if not always clear, voice in that dialogue. Stanley Fogel's concern is not life-and-death, but the relative vigour or morbidity of current fiction-writing in Canada and the United States. Inevitably, such a comparative study also asks after the health of literary criticism and the broader cultural enterprise in the two countries.

Fogel describes his purpose in terms of questions about cultural differences: "formalist or metafictional concerns . . . are almost completely absent in Canadian journals and in the works of prominent and even for the most part peripheral Canadian writers of fiction. Why is this the case and what does it reveal about Canadian letters and the Canadian cli-

mate of opinion in general? . . . why has metafiction . . . gained so many American practitioners?" Fogel coins a nicely forensic distinction: the United States is "cathectic"; Canada is "anorectic." The United States "has imagined and created itself as a distinctive and forceful entity," often inflated and mythically bogus; Canada is starved for mythical substance. So, "deconstruction of Western heroes is not required in Canada because their heroic-mythic characteristics were never constructed in the first place." In general, identity-hungry Canadians strive to raise the sort of national mythos which is ripe for deconstruction in the United States. Fogel accounts for lack of experimentation in current Canadian fiction "by demonstrating Canada's affinities . . . with tepid British variations as well as its writers' desires to nourish the Canadian identity."

Fogel devotes one long, breathtaking, analytical chapter to the criticism and metafiction of William Gass and Robert Coover, and another to the novels of Robert Kroetsch, following these with a waspish and often accurate deconstruction of the mythical status of Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies. Thus he draws a continuum from the radical scepticism of the American metafictionists to the methodological conservatism of the Canadian magic-realists. Kroetsch occupies a middle, or transitional, place, ideologically acceptable to Fogel; between the parochial devil of nationalism/regionalism and the deep blue sea of deconstructive unknowing.

A Tale of Two Countries is weakened by some technical affectations, such as the author's penchant for a kind of adjectival name-dropping: Borgesian, Nabakovian, Barthesian, and Derridean epithets in honour of the post-structuralist pantheon. Occasionally, the argument gets tied in a curious knot, as when Fogel declares that "the receptivity to

Gass's pronouncements and also the fervent backlash they have produced attest to the repugnance of most of the American literati to be subsumed in some cultural mission." Here, apparently, "fervent backlash" is really proof of agreement.

But there are more glaring strategic flaws. Although Fogel wearily anticipates objections that metafiction is as old as Sterne, he does not meet another objection of the same vintage. While Sterne was busily deconstructing the young genre, the novel, Dr. Samuel Johnson was wondering, in his "Preface to Shakespeare," whether audiences were in any sense fully deceived by the illusions of the theatre — whether they ever ceased to admit that even "just representations of general nature" were nothing but representations. (The arch-sceptic David Hume wondered the same thing.) So, when Fogel claims as a sign of Robert Coover's strong-mindedness that in Coover's works "there is appreciation of man . . . the inventor" but "there is also a refusal to accept his products in any, except semiotic, terms," is he not assuming that most ordinary boobs are constantly guilty of the fallacy of reification — of mistaking signifier for signified? The power of deconstructive criticism or of metafiction (lacking which Canadian culture is *really* "anorectic") depends upon a rather patronizing summary of all modern culture: the reader/citizen is a fly stuck in amber, disinclined to realize the contingent status of artifice — including, incidentally, the artifice of deconstructive criticism (allowing the same radical scepticism to operate upon itself).

When Fogel sets his terms of comparison, he is loaded for bear. And comparison falters, becomes disingenuous, tendentious. Gass "is seminal to this study, firstly, because he relentlessly attacks those conservative dimensions of life and art . . . that are staples of Can-

ada's social and literary context." Gass is important because his work contrasts with the backwardness of Canadian writing — which remains to be proven! Fogel also has to run in circles in order to establish the dominance of the metafictionalists: Coover, Gass, Barth, and crew are the dominant American fiction-writers *because* theirs is the fictional equivalence of deconstructionism, the anti-ideological mode which is itself ideologically correct. Non-metafictionists, in America, need not apply. By definition, they are trivial. Exeunt Updike, Bellow, Carver, Phillips, Tyler, Dubus. The emergence of ethnic nationalism and of regional literary culture in the United States embarrasses Fogel's comparative conclusions. North of the line, Kroetsch's fiction gets brilliant illumination, but such writers as Gallant and Munro, who have experimented more and more with the undermining of rigid conventions of structure or voice, fall into the outer darkness, perhaps because they, too, would embarrass Fogel's thesis about Canada's cultural anorexia. Thus *A Tale of Two Countries* is as significant for its critical erasures as for its healthy disengagement from the thin thematicism of a certain Canadian critical orthodoxy.

MARK S. MADOFF

REAPPRAISALS

The Thomas Chandler Haliburton Symposium, ed. Frank M. Tierney. Univ. of Ottawa Press, \$7.95.

THE COVERING TITLE for the series to which this book belongs is "Reappraisals: Canadian Writers," and if you are a keen watcher of what's going on in Canadian literary criticism of recent years you will know about the springtime symposia at the University of Ottawa which have sustained the series for long enough to

make it something of an institution. If you are a compulsive buyer as well as a keen watcher, you might by now have ten volumes on your shelves, beginning with a volume on F. P. Grove, published in 1974, and ending with one on Charles G. D. Roberts, published in 1984. Arithmetic may suggest eleven volumes, but not to worry; the series lay fallow in 1977-78. The present volume on Haliburton is therefore number eleven; and there is a volume in the press which documents the 1985 symposium on Stephen Leacock.

It is well to keep the underpinning of the symposium in mind, which is where in a sense it all happens and which cannot in an ordinary way be reviewed. I suppose the papers reflect in some degree the live audiences for which they were prepared, but more important in the generative force of the symposium itself, a kind of happening that at its best sizzles with sounds print cannot hear, or at any rate does not report: the clink of glasses and the clunk of coffee cups, and over and around these in spurts and rushes the clatter of conversations in dining-rooms and hallways and residences. Everything here is conducive to a fertility beyond the reach of the given papers. This is therefore as good a place as any to pay tribute to the University of Ottawa for holding fast to a good idea and for seeing the good idea into print these many years. For over a decade scholars from far-flung parts of Canada have been brought together to share with others their expertise in the study of major Canadian authors. In the process the hosts to the undertaking have been heavily burdened, as I am sure Glenn Clever and Lorraine McMullen and Frank Tierney and others will attest, those people who have not only convened and administered one or another of these gatherings but have also, after the tumult and the shouting has died,

faced the tough task of editing symposium papers for publication. Hats off. *Salut.*

Good strategies and good people taken care of, I must now complain a bit. To apply the term "reappraisal," whether to the present volume on Haliburton or to any others in the series, is not quite right, indeed often misleading. There were times, as in the case of the colloquium on Grove, for example, and again in the case of the colloquium on Klein, when a certain electricity charged the air so that the subjects were truly seen in a different light. For Grove it was Douglas Spettigue's biographical *coup* in the unveiling of Felix Paul Greve; for Klein it was the impassioned argument between David Lewis and Irving Layton about the Bronfman question and the artist's right to do what he wants with his own life. Characteristically, however, and certainly the Haliburton volume is in line with the general practice, the proceedings of a given colloquium reflect not so much a reappraisal of the author as a series of reports on up-to-date inquiries into aspects of his life and work — biographical, bibliographical, technical, thematic, contextual, and so on. I have taken part in several of the assessment panels which conclude these gatherings, and I have always been uneasy in the role. Should one try to press it all into a ball and say that this or that is a new face of D. C. Scott, of Haliburton, of Leacock? The best most of us seem to manage is to throw another pebble into the pool in the hope of creating a few fresh ripples. Perhaps it could not be otherwise, and what I am making may be less a complaint than an attempt to induce realistic expectations of these volumes, and in particular of the volume on Haliburton.

If I do not see a new Haliburton here, I do however see the lights go up on many places that were shadowy before:

on the building of Haliburton's "Clifton"; on the Bentley correspondence; on the sayings and doings of "The Club" in Halifax; on publishing conditions in Haliburton's time and on the fixing of the copy text for *The Clockmaker*; on the broad untidy field of popular American humour. Much more. Read Frank Tierney's excellent introduction, where the papers are diligently summarized. As is to be expected, the presentations vary a good deal in style and force of argument. Some are well written and some are not so well written; and I could wish that on the average the standard were higher than it is. If I must make choices, perhaps idiosyncratic, I'll take Gwendolyn Davies, George Parker, Bruce Nesbitt, and Daniel Royot. But all said and done, what I value most in the volume (as in the series as a whole) is the sense I have of a bustling and productive scholarship that would have been inconceivable to me when I first broached Haliburton in the forties under the guidance of Donald Creighton and Claude Bissell. It was lonely then and the landscape was dimly lit. The Bentley correspondence was something to be noted for first-hand inquiry far away down the line. We thought we were lucky to have Chittick. The picture is much better now and it is good to have access to the on-going work that continues to extend our horizons.

R. L. MCDOUGALL

CRUSZ

RIENZI CRUSZ, *Singing Against the Wind*. Porcupine's Quill, \$7.95.

IN "THE LITERATURE of Canadians of South Asian Origins: An Overview" (*Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 17, No. 1, 1985), Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri point-

edly calls our attention to the many novels, stories, poems, and plays that Canadians of South Asian origin have been writing and publishing in English. This body of writings has been generally ignored by the Canadian literary establishment.

Rienzi Crusz was born in Sri Lanka and was educated at the Universities of Ceylon, London, Toronto, and Waterloo. Of his origins, he writes in "Roots":

A Portuguese Captain holds
the soft brown hand of my Sinhala mother.
It's the year 1515 A.D.,
When two civilizations kissed and merged
and I, burgher of that hot embrace,
write a poem of history . . .

Two civilizations again kiss but do not necessarily merge in Crusz's own life when he emigrates to Canada in 1956. The following lines from "In the idiom of the sun" express Crusz's smouldering rage against racism in Canada:

It would have been somewhat different
in green Sri Lanka . . .
The blood would have shuddered a little
under your Aryan skull . . .
Here in this white land . . .
I must hold my black tongue . . .
I can now only spit frozen-eyed
and gently demur.

But most of the poems in this collection are even-tempered musings.

Nostalgia for Sri Lanka is evident in several, I liked the concluding lines of "Galle Road":

Here, the world's greatest urban drivers
display the art supreme of brinkmanship;
How under a hammering sun,
they dance the tango
of flesh and fender
without each ever touching the other.

Crusz's love for his wife and son Michael — to whom the book is dedicated — is the central theme of (almost too) many poems. In "You gaze at the sun," Crusz asks Anne about watching daytime soap operas:

Daughter of the sun
 have you found the light
 in the darkness of your gaze?
 Do you still hear the Kandyandrams
 Call the elephants to Perahera?
 Are you now ready for . . .
 this kind of light preaching nothing
 but the tyranny of indoor games?

One could continue in this vein exhibiting Crusz's contrapuntal and symbolic use of snow and sun, machine and elephant, dogs and children. I found the capitalization of certain words in some poems — IZUKI buses ALL MY CHILDREN, etc. — unnecessary and annoying. Yet Crusz made me wonder if life itself is a series of unarticulated poems laced with bitter irony. The cover illustration of this book, perhaps, best summarizes the many themes in these mostly well-crafted poems. It shows a bonsai pine tree, twisted out of shape and yet possessing a strange beauty; the tree casts its shadows on two huge boulders set in a barren landscape.

MATHEW ZACHARIAH

MARITIME LETTERS

HUGH MACLENNAN, *On Being A Maritime Writer*. Centre for Canadian Studies, Mount Allison University, \$6.50.

DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS, *Road to the Stilt House*. Oberon, \$14.95.

ROBERT GIBBS, *The Tongue Still Dances*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, \$7.95.

THESE BOOKS, while they differ in genre and approach, illuminate the Maritime experience and condition. As one has come to expect (given his broad classical education and interest), Hugh MacLennan places his subject within a large historical and humanistic frame. The Maritime writer, he states, writes out of the experience of a particular place, but does so within the context of larger world events and the larger tradition of litera-

ture. He is hardly parochial. The great wars of this century in particular have kept the Maritimes abreast of current world events and his father's interest in classical literature and specialized medical studies in Europe provided a larger context for MacLennan's personal development. Great literature tends to emerge at great moments in a country's destiny. There is a tendency for powerful countries to be parochial in their appreciation of writing. New York and Hollywood, for example, have little interest in writing that expresses the Maritime experience. In fact, parochialism often exists not so much in the (perceived) lesser regions, but in the larger cities.

Nothing MacLennan says in these two papers delivered as the Winthrop Pickard Bell Lectures at Mount Allison University in 1982 is particularly new or startling. What gives them their interest and charm is their remarkable literary and historical breadth of reference and allusion and MacLennan's ability to express clearly the significance of contemporary events within the context of western civilization. MacLennan's is a rich and unique vision of contemporary Canadian letters.

The writing of David Adams Richards and Robert Gibbs illustrates most of MacLennan's points, including fidelity to place, response to the larger literary tradition and the difficulty of finding recognition outside the region. It is truly wrong that a novelist of the achievement of Richards until very recently has been given almost no critical scrutiny or recognition in this country.

Road to the Stilt House is a remarkable novel for its stunning presentation of the tragic lives of a welfare family in the Miramichi region of New Brunswick, and for the direction it shows in the development of Richards' fiction. The author is already well known in the Mari-

times for the penetrating social wisdom with which he has portrayed the economically and socially disadvantaged people of his region (where unemployment hovers around the staggering level of 25%) in his three novels and one collection of short stories published since 1974 when he was twenty-three years old. In his fiction Richards has articulated with compassion and terrible beauty the lives of his inarticulate (at least in conventional terms) countrymen. This is not a paradox for Richards, who has stated that he finds it easier to understand and present those not given to much talk. Speech, particularly the polite formulas and fashionable utterances of the educated middle class, can mask the true person. Richards' characters are revealed through their manner (often quiet and self-deprecating but sometimes defensively aggressive and belligerent) and through unspoken thoughts and feelings (particularly their response to their basic world of family and land).

The significant stylistic development in *Road to the Stilt House* is its tighter handling of the material, seen in its length (about half that of the earlier novels). In it, too, Richards has resigned his use of multiple points of view, the larger social panorama, and he focuses for the body of the book on one character, the sensitive, even poetic Arnold, an inhabitant of the stilt house. This part of the novel presents the day-to-day unhappy lives of Arnold and his family, including his brother's death on a cub expedition and his mother's death from a botched operation, and ends dramatically with Arnold burning the stilt house to the ground. There is a short second part that functions as a kind of sequel and describes Arnold's life in prison for arson. It is told from the point of view of Norman, Arnold's cousin. The effect of the shift of point of view in the second part is one partly of shock in that the

reader realizes how much he had become part of Arnold's world and grown to have sympathy for it. It is also one of anger, for we see how detached the wine-drinking Norman and others are from the problems of the stilt house. Norman wallows in a little self-indulgent regret that he did not do more to help his relatives, but that is all. Through Norman, Richards presents society's detachment from the desperate lives of the poor.

Because of the novel's shorter form Richards' images stand out clearly and insistently, supporting the tragic inevitability. The central image is that of the stilt house itself where Arnold's welfare family with its irregular relationships live in a state of tension that frequently erupts into violence. The ominous buzz of the hornets that infest the hole-pocked walls of Arnold's bedroom where he spends much of his time reflects the confusion, frustration, and anger of poverty. The wall through which Arnold listens to the hornets is an image of his isolation; it remains even after his destruction of the house to recur in the prison wall through which the threats of the truly evil Jerry, who will eventually murder Arnold, are whispered.

Standing out in sharp relief, too, is Richards' grim humour, based on the absurd incongruity between the utter hopelessness of Arnold's condition and his dreams and desires: Arnold, hairless, undernourished, garbed in a cowboy hat with a bald feather and tight red pants, dreaming of a happy Christmas or a house with a duck pond and having poetic turns of thought. In fact, Richards frequently uses lyrical language to present Arnold's mental world. This serves to increase the reader's sympathy for Arnold, to intensify the novel's theme of social injustice and waste and to contribute to the book's terrible beauty.

Richards' vision is darker in this novel than in the earlier ones, a result of the

tighter structure and sharper use of imagery. Also, Richards has Arnold actually express his condition, something his earlier characters did not do: "We are all nothing anyway" and "loneliness is the human condition." Violence and physical pain are more in the ascendancy here as well, in images of illness, fighting, suicide, and murder. This is Richards' most angry novel, in which he holds the reader's head to the horror of the plight of the poor. Richards in this novel proves himself a master of naturalism and a social novelist of major stature.

Robert Gibbs' *The Tongue Still Dances* is a collection of selected and new poems that spans the past twenty years of the poet's development. One watches the rather associational, experimental style of the earlier poems transform into the more quiet, understated steadiness of the mature voice. The central theme in Gibbs' poetry is the exploration and celebration of the relationship of the artist and his world and of the creative spark that ignites at the intersection of the two:

Your audience girl halflights that
glimmer across your hall and deepen

its pit Is it you that hold them
or let them go? Your antics

their antics dance like sparks
above them and go out

("Figures in a Wind")

The world the poet presents is one of quiet beauty and awe inhabited by makers: singer, dancer, poet, jeweller. The awe is apparent in images of wide-eyed, childlike wonder: nursery rhymes, children's games, the fascination for words and naming, the child's perspective on this green, new, and renewing world. There is a fine tranquility, a soft, modest poetic voice that speaks of a man at peace with himself, his world and his craft. There is even a gently humorous self-deprecation:

I who scarcely know my right hand from
my left Who asked me to be a reader
of entrails or unraveller of dreams?

....

He called the moon bloody and so it was
He stopped on my threshold and would not
come in took sips of tea outside but refused
meat wasted As for me

What would I do when winter days came
on?

I would keep my two ears warm unnip
my nose and muffle my feet I would walk
around my neighbourhood with no falls

("Who Asked Me To Be A
Reader of Entrails?")

Familiar, loved landscapes appear in most of the poems, particularly coastal Saint John and riverain Fredericton. Out of them step objects of special significance: the old Fredericton bridge, Fred Cogswell's overcoat, Route 7. Although the poems are apparently placid pools, beneath their surface run currents of fundamental truth and understanding about love, life, and death. In "It Won't Work For A Snowman" an ordinary garden straw man of corn stalks, denim, and flannel, buffeted by the seasons, becomes a metaphor for human life.

When he's no more than tatters
streaming from a stake leave

him there among shuffling
cornstalks and bowed

sunflower heads to wait
his turn

At the centre of the sure peace one finds in Gibbs' poems is a steady faith which is perhaps most memorably expressed in "The Perpetuation of Worlds Knowledge Has Disproven." In this poem the archetypal images of a mariner, a boat, and a voyage represent man's ability continually to discover/create new worlds of wonder. The poems in their celebration of life and creativity intimate overall design and purpose:

some
breath that breathes through like
a wind from outside this hall an
unlullibying rocking that rocks
you both and rocks this curtain
wall of light and right

("Figures In A Wind")

CARRIE MAC MILLAN

LANDSCAPES & EYES

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Twelve Landscapes*. Shaw Street Press, \$20.00.

DORIS HILLIS, *The Prismatic Eye*. Thistle-down, \$7.95.

KEN NORRIS, *One Night*. Black Moss, \$7.95.

HARRY THURSTON, *Clouds Flying Before the Eye*. Fiddlehead, \$7.95.

THE IMAGINATIVE DEPICTION of experience or reality in a manner that hopes to transcend the difference between the mind of the author and the mind of the reader has always been one of the central concerns of poets. In different ways, these four writers have succeeded in reaching their respective goals.

It seems to me that too little attention has been paid to the medium of print and the book as art object. Ralph Gustafson's collection of twelve poems is a notable exception. The edition is limited to 200 books signed and numbered, the first twenty-five being hand-bound in boards. The fibre of the cover, the earthy green sleeve and the body paper all complement the finely crafted poetry within. *Twelve Landscapes* is a celebration of a mystic union between self and landscape. Gustafson counterpoints views of natural scenery with a sense of self that transcends both ego and the spatio-temporality of the physical world. There is a Zen-like sense of wonder permeating meditative visions of flora and fauna that takes us back to a lucid experience of reality, back to the thing itself: "Alone

with the lost experience only. / Break off the thinking... The sun is hot, / The hayfield smells of coming harvest." *Twelve Landscapes* was designed, typeset, and printed by Glenn Goluska formerly from the Coach House Press, now at The Nightshade Press. Goluska is a craftsman of the highest order working in the tradition of masters such as Tim Inkster, but Goluska has clearly developed his own unique style. This slim and elegant volume is typeset in linotype Walbaum and foundry Torino. It is hand-printed on mould-made Frankfurt white stock that is characterized by its softness and subtle wave-form texture. This attention to craft and detail, this marriage of idea and form, echoes the spiritual union between reality and its experience depicted in Gustafson's writing. The book as a whole is a very welcome change to the slick products of mass commercialism.

Doris Hillis' collection of poems also addresses the question of landscape, but where Gustafson sings a song of self, Hillis always has another in mind, a lover, a child, often absent, distanced by geography, or time, or death. The first four sections of the book deal with a sense of isolation and a psychic inter-relation between mind and land that is occasionally reminiscent of Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Hillis offers both mythopoetic and impressionistic visions drawn with the eye of a painter. The final portion of this collection titled "Practices of Death" is a departure in some ways. Here, Hillis leaves landscape behind and addresses the failure of language, its inability and inappropriateness as a vehicle for expressing the mind's retreat from contemporary post-apocalyptic experience. Hillis is sometimes melo-dramatic in this section, but it could be argued that the horror of war is difficult to overstate. We are left with what George Steiner called "the language of silence,"

a sense of claustrophobic paralysis, a conjugation of fear and emotional collapse.

In Harry Thurston's vision, the antithetical voices of a newborn daughter and dead ancestors are set against a backdrop of rock and ocean, of changing seasons and traditional folk wisdoms. These poems are dark and heroic, sometimes surreal. They are well represented by the cover image featuring David Blackwood's "Lone Mummer Inside." Thurston's fine craftsmanship is evident from the first. His startling but appropriate metaphors portray disorienting perspectives which succeed in the difficult task of conveying an ambiguous and often paradoxical sense of reality. His allusions to the Bardic tradition and literary ancestors such as Virgil, Mary Shelley, Gide, and Camus, create an unusual contrast with the bedrock of Atlantic Canada. But Thurston goes beyond a representational view, particularly in the second section of this three-part collection. Here the poems address the problems of creation. "I can take any colour, you say, / cut it to black. True / but light enters your art — / if through the belly of a gutted fish / the crystal of an oarsman's eye / frozen open." Thurston's eye is unrelenting: it observes in detail things that would make the average viewer turn away out of queasiness; it penetrates surfaces entering micro-biological worlds of disease and decay. It probes recesses of the mind, and uneasy memory, it caresses death, and the solitude of the artist.

In Ken Norris's *One Night* the landscape is a textual incarnation of desire to unite with the reader/lover. This is a chiaroscuro world of shadowy emotion in the light of pleasures of both physical and textual bodies. It is a clear echo of Barthesian theory: "I move / down between your legs, caress your sex / with my mouth, speaking words / that are pleasure." Later portions of the suite

form an intratextual departure. The "eye" moves outside of its traditional context. Sections of the book are printed in italics and present a detached first-person perspective. This distancing could be considered both as a representation of the protagonists' self-consciousness, and as a deconstruction of the traditional three-way relationship between audience/artist/art, "the air-conditioned room / where I sit writing this, and wherever you are now, reading this / — it isn't taking place at all. Though again from the outlook / of reality, it *did* take place, if you are the reader." Norris leaves the more conventional love-lyric approach behind in order to make overtures to the reader, a textual seduction, until the reader finds him or herself engaged in an act of textual copulation. The reader is further engaged by the choice of four generic endings; comic, satiric, tragic, romantic. One may choose one of these, or choose not to choose. Either way, the reader becomes an active participant in the "writing" process. Finally, we are left with a split-screen "movie" image of the reader closing the last page of the book while at the same time the author caps his pen and leaves the room. This self-referential and dualistic motif is a confrontation. As a reader, one who is pushed into observing the parallel binary relationships arising from sexual and textual intercourse. Norris manipulates the reader into a questioning the "verité" of the text. In so doing, he draws the reader's attention to the gap or difference between the reader and author, a gap that can sometimes be bridged by language.

KARL JIRGENS



ROY'S LANGUAGE

ELLEN REISMAN BABBY, *The Play of Language and Spectacle: a structural reading of selected texts by Gabrielle Roy*. ECW, \$14.00.

THIS ANALYSIS IS an attempt to examine Gabrielle Roy's use of language in order to discover the images and structures that shape the novels, especially some of the lesser known works. The introduction, in which *La Petite Poule d'eau* is dismissed as being "of questionable literary value," is followed by an examination of the spectacle construct or "the spectacular," in the first part, "The Language of Spectacle." The critic demonstrates how spectators become the spectacle and how the theatre serves as a structural form in the novels. Babby notes the cinematization of reality and realization of cinema in the novels and suggests that *La Rivière sans repos* deals with the polarization of reality and fiction as well as with the polarization of white and Inuit societies.

The play with perspective is observed as the mountain and valley polarization in *La Montagne secrète* is seen to be similar to the Mont Royal and St. Henri opposition in *Bonheur d'occasion* and the "ascending" and "plunging" views of *La Rivière sans repos*. In addition, the critic discusses the clash of visions in such works as *La Rivière sans repos* and "La Vallée Houdou," where reality and fiction are opposed and some characters will choose the one or the other based on cultural assumptions or material perceptions.

Babby studies the occurrence of windows and mirrors in the works which suggest distance and alienation. The artificial and natural landscapes reinforce the basic theme of characters looking at each other and at themselves (termed "the spectacular act"). This distance is a metaphor expressing the extent to

which the characters' lives participate in the fiction they create for themselves or the reality they create from their imaginative lives. There is also an examination of narrative mode ("the manipulation of point of view") and narrative voice ("the audibility of vocal intrusions"). Abrupt shifts in perspective as well as subtle ones are found to be affected by means of the visual act.

Alexandre Chenevert is the main focus of the second part of this study, "The Spectacle of language." The theme of Alexandre Chenevert as a prisoner in a restricted environment, a lengthy repetition of work done better elsewhere, most notably by Ben Shek, serves as an introduction to Babby's thesis. She introduces the idea that Alexandre Chenevert is as much imprisoned by language as he is by social and economic factors. This observation is followed by a demonstration of the problem of expression and the imprisoning force of language in other works. Gabrielle Roy's works are seen ultimately as a transition between novels representing submission and silence and those involved in the liberation of speech. In the final analysis, this study is a loosely connected series of sometimes interesting observations, but one that raises more expectations than it can satisfy.

PAUL G. SOCKEN



REREADING LOWRY'S "LUNAR CAUSTIC"

GORDON BOWKER'S RECENT *Malcolm Lowry Remembered* (1985) performs the service of putting into print some of the oral histories of people who knew Malcolm Lowry. These narratives are fragile since Lowry's contemporaries are now in their eighties, and their importance for our knowledge of the writer is obvious. Unfortunately, we cannot be confident that what is presented as historical fact is always true. Hugh Sykes Davies addresses one aspect of the problem in his own testimony:

... please remember I am talking about forty years ago. I am an old man and I don't necessarily remember everything right. I might even improve on it or make it worse either way. (Bowker 41)

And occasionally there are self-contradictions, as when Jan Gabriel describes a house as "pretty and very unprepossessing," "quaint and ... grand" (Bowker 117). Bowker does not intrude or interpret enough to make sense of this. Even when he does provide an objective, editorial voice, his notes do not always coincide with other information about Lowry. Bowker reports, for example, that Lowry's stint in Bellevue occurred in June 1936, but he does not explain the reason for this revision of the 1935 date in Douglas Day's biography (Bowker 58, 103; Day xi). But unless (or until) we have contrary evidence, we may reasonably assume that these are accurate transcriptions of good-faith recollections. The significance of this book for a disinterested study of biography is self-evident.

What is less clear is the impact of these revelations on critical readings of Lowry's work, in particular the effect of new testimony, especially Jan Gabriel's, on a reading of *Lunar Caustic*.

Many of the commentators on *Lunar Caustic* agree with Dale Edmonds on the point that it constitutes Lowry's "most explicit social criticism" (66). Keith Harrison, writing in *Canadian Literature* 94, also represents this view:

the hospital ... becomes a symbolic microcosm of the external social order that should seek renewal. It is precisely this theme that is central to ... *Lunar Caustic* ... [that] social order excludes naive goodness. (182)

Ronald Binns identifies the influence of Jan Gabriel, "a feminist ... who certainly took a keen interest in left-wing politics and proletarian fiction," in the novella (*Malcolm Lowry*, 24). But these readings are threatened by a portrait of Lowry as a man "who was *not interested in social reality*," which is the recollection of Eric Estorick (Bowker 106, my emphasis).

Estorick was an English friend of Lowry's in New York. They may have lived together after Lowry left the Hotel Somerset, where he lived with Gabriel. During his association with Estorick, Lowry entered Bellevue. (The two men may have met as early as 1934, so Estorick's evidence does not help resolve the question whether the hospital stay was in '35 or '36.) In fact, Gabriel claims it was "Eric Estorick [who] had him committed to Bellevue" (Bowker 101). Estorick says that Lowry's entrance into Bellevue, while ill-advised, was voluntary; this is also what Lowry later admitted ("The Outer Ring of Hell," *TLS*, 21 March 1968, 285). Lowry was searching for writing material, so the story goes, and he decided to spend time investigating the alcoholic word. But it does not follow necessarily that his fiction of that experience need take the line of social realism. New evidence in Bowker suggests that

Lunar Caustic may be more concerned with the problems of sanity and sexual identity.

This is how Estorick remembers Lowry and Gabriel writing in New York in the mid-thirties:

It was a time when there was a rage for what is euphemistically known as 'proletarian literature,' and I think she was writing a book about miners and mining [cf. Binns 24], which was a subject which must certainly have bored the pants off Malcolm, who was not interested in social reality. . . . He was the artist and was trying to be the artist rather than the propagandiser, the carrier of a banner. (Bowker 106)

Significantly, Gabriel's testimony concerning the same period is spotty, vague, and ambiguous. Even the interviewer (Robert Duncan) isn't able to follow her meaning:

[GABRIAL] . . . Malc moved out. And that was when I got the letter that, you know, he was — we thought maybe something had happened with Tony.

[DUNCAN] *What was that, now? I don't understand that.*

[GABRIAL] I didn't either, at the time. . . . Apparently he had gone out drinking with Tony and other people. And Tony was a homo. . . . He said he wasn't sure what happened and Tony had syphilis and he didn't know what the situation was. He wanted time to test and find out if he had it. (Bowker 100-01)

Besides suggesting the possibility of Lowry's engaging in a homosexual affair, Gabriel's uncertain and halting remarks illustrate that she and Lowry were estranged. At this time, she was not a part of Lowry's private life. Although Lowry and Gabriel would eventually reconcile sufficiently to travel west and then to Mexico, their New York period is better characterized by separation than by connection. In light of this and Estorick's comments, we might assume that *Lunar*

Caustic is more hostile than hospitable to Gabriel, her ideology, or even her sexuality. The issue of homosexuality in *Lunar Caustic* has been proposed before, certainly. Sherrill Grace refers to it as an intended theme of the projected work, which was left unfinished and in two versions at the time of Lowry's death (*The Voyage That Never Ends* 30). But this new evidence that Lowry caroused with homosexuals predicates the homosexual theme in the work as we have it, in the spliced edition of Earle Birney and the writer's widow.

Lunar Caustic begins with "A man" and ends by comparing him to "an embryo," suggesting that this is a sort of anti-*Bildungsroman*, a narrative of regression to a state of undetermined sexuality (9, 76). The man, who is drunk, is repelled by both "arrogant bearded derelicts" and "a terrible old woman" (10), but by the end of the chapter, he announces that he is in search of a mystical, quasi-religious union with men: "I am sent to save my father, to find my son, to heal the eternal horror of three, to resolve the immedicable horror of opposites!" (11). But the form of the narrative, in which the first and last sections establish a frame (Grace 31), as well as its perspective, a strangely distanced third-person, belie the hope of unity.

The novella is full of narratives of disunity. Garry, who figures as the son in Plantagenet's quest, loves to tell stories with disastrous endings. A typical tale, of playing with two friends on a barge, ends: "A few years later the barge fell apart. It was all collapsed" (67). Mr. Kalowsky, the radical Jew who plays father for the other two, responds with his own story, the upshot of which is that "once they pulled three teeth out of me, out of my mouth" (67). Both "father" and "son" tell tales of broken union and separation. Beverly Rasporich

is among the critics who write of *Lunar Caustic* as Lowry attempting to come to terms with despair (*Mosaic* 1977). But the tentativeness of human connections and the impossibility of any permanent union in the story reflect a different condition from despair, indicating that the central concern is what might be called the problem of (dis)pair.

Garry's is a face of innocent homosexuality. He is the darling of the ward ("everybody's fond of him" [56]), and the first time Plantagenet sees him, the boy conjures up a "a portrait of Rimbaud at twelve or thereabouts" (15). When he tries to teach Battle flag signals, a passing inmate observes, "That's semaphore code. All Boy Scouts use it" (25). Whether Garry is a boy scout or is the boy scouted by older inmates, his history includes an act of violence against the opposite sex. Another reference to women corroborates an actively hostile misogyny at work in *Lunar Caustic*. The newspaper account of the Birmingham barber "at his trial for the murder of his golden-haired bride," casts a pair of phallic snakes as weapons. Two rattlesnakes are entered in evidence, "'glittering in their new skins,' with the effect in the courtroom that women 'QUAKE' and 'shiver'" (32).

In the climactic tenth chapter Plantagenet faces the incompleteness of his sharing himself with Garry and Mr. Kalowsky. Their affinity seems strong, but the "anguish of separation" is irresistible (66). A fragmentary reminiscence of a summer's day with Ruth, the girl he lost, contributes to his final, identity-shattering realization that all wholeness is illusory:

While metamorphosis nudged metamorphosis, a kind of order . . . exploded itself into the age of Kalowsky again, and into the youth of Garry, who both now seemed to be spiralling away from him until they were lost . . . But while that part of him only a

moment before in possession of the whole, the ship, was turning over with the disunion of hull and masts uprooted falling across her decks, another faction of his soul . . . knew him to be screaming . . . yet saw him too . . . passing beyond the asylum walls melting like wax . . . (72).

In sum, new evidence in Bowker's book indicates that we should not attribute an uncharacteristic impulse for social "relevance" to Lowry's work in *Lunar Caustic*. If we focus on the hospital as a homosexual experience (as, in the most ingenuous sense of that phrase, it undeniably is), then the novella presents a narrative sequence from heterosexuality to homosexuality to presexuality (which previously was Plantagenet's mock-pedantic rationalization for drinking). We witness the regression into narcissism and isolation when Plantagenet curls up "like an embryo" in a dark corner of a bar. He is less sure of sobriety, sanity, or sexuality than he was since before he entered the hospital. Because Plantagenet is unable to connect with anyone outside himself, everything that defines his identity dissipates until finally he can "not be seen at all" (76).

MARK THOMAS

THE MYSTIQUE OF MEZCAL

'If I ever start to drink that stuff, Geoffrey, you'll know I'm done for.'

'It's mescal with me . . . Tequila, no, that is healthful . . . and delightful.' (uv 219)

On the other hand there had been until recently several drinks of mescal (why not? — the word did not intimidate him, eh?) waiting for him outside in a lemonade bottle and all these he both had and had not drunk . . . (uv 304)

A CONFUSION BETWEEN THE DRINK mescal and the drug mescaline seems to lie at the bottom of *Under the Volcano*, as

if it were *con gusano*, with an agave worm in its gourd:

The worm isn't there for looks. It is meant to be eaten. Because it is believed by many that within the worm lies the key. Some say it unlocks the door to a world of wondrous experiences. Others say it sets free a spirit of celebration. Still others say that eating the worm locks in the enchantment and excitement of Mezcal...^{1*}

In his article "The Place of Hallucinations in *Under the Volcano*,"² Thomas Gilmore suggests that the Consul's exaggerated fear of mezcal is thus explicable:

the Consul's (and Lowry's — see *Letters*, p. 71) apparent assumption that mescal is the liquid equivalent of the hallucinogenic drug mescaline is erroneous. But the assumption explains why the Consul dreaded the great potency of mescal and why, after he begins drinking it in Section X, his hallucinations seem to increase in frequency and intensity. (287, n. 4)

However, it seems rather that the drink, with its unsubtle, smoked-tequila flavour, and high alcohol content, is a symbol to Geoffrey of the point of no return. The guilt he feels in connection with mezcal has a historical origin, when the *conquistadores* "ran out of their traditional rum, the battle-scarred fighters looked for something else to celebrate with,"³ and they developed a method for obtaining mezcal out of the Aztecs' *pulque*.³ These connotations of exploitation of indigenous culture — " '... no, the point is, Yvonne, that the Conquest took place in a civilization which was as good if not better than that of the conquerors, a deep-rooted structure' " (uv 301), as Hugh says — of over-sophistication and greedy consumerism, culminate in the bad press mezcal had in the early days of Spanish rule in Mexico as the means by which Spanish mine-owners were able to pressgang farmworkers into the mines.

As Gilmore notes, Lowry indicated the Consul's apparent inability to distinguish

between alcohol and hallucinogen: "It would appear that (he) has fuddledly come to confuse the two, and he is perhaps not far wrong" (SL 71). In itself, such a confusion is not startling; in his essay "The Present Status of Ololiuhqui and the Other Hallucinogens of Mexico,"⁴ R. Gordon Wasson explains that dried *peyotl* (commonly eroded to "peyote"), a small woolly plant of the amaryllis family, and not a cactus as is often assumed, is the hallucinogen known in the West as mescaline:

For reasons that seem to have sprung from popular confusion, the English-speaking population of the Southwest came to call the dried *peyotl* 'mescal buttons'... Later, when the active agent came to be isolated, the chemists called the alkaloid 'mescaline', thus compounding the mistake. 'Mescal' comes from the Spanish of Mexico *mescal*, derived in its turn from Nahuatl *mexcalli*, the name for the agave, *maguey*, or century plant from which pulque is made, which, when distilled, yields *mezcal*. *Mezcal* has nothing to do with 'mescal buttons' or 'mescaline'. (166)

It is a fortuitous coincidence in a work which extends the periphery of hallucination beyond the clinical boundaries of the alcohol-induced, that Oaxaca, site of the terrible hotel and restaurants, the very word sounding like 'the last syllables of one dying of thirst in the desert' (uv 53), should be at the centre⁵ of the sacred mushroom cult of Mexico.⁶ As Gilmore points out (285), Art Hill's discussion of *Under the Volcano* as primarily the portrait of a drunkard⁷ makes little mention of the Consul's hallucinations, and Gilmore himself concentrates on Lowry's treatment of them as a means for subverting the division between sober reality and fantasy. As ever, this symbolic purpose is based firmly on a mimetic foundation, thus echoing the nature of the hallucinations themselves. Although Gilmore states that drug-induced hallucinations include abstract elements

— perception of colour, geometric shapes — which are absent in alcohol-induced ones, where the emphasis is more on feelings of fear and paranoia, often leading to death, what happens to the Consul seems to fit descriptions of hallucinogenic experiences, which include:⁸

1. “changes in mood (sometimes euphoric and megalomaniac, sometimes fearful, panicky, and anxiety-ridden)” — the Consul never reaches heights of unself-conscious joy, but he does experience flickers of sudden hope for his future and his salvation (cf. UV 88, 217), counterpointing a host of the “fearful,” ranging from vindictiveness and the desire to hurt and provoke, to the longing for a mother and security, and the constant sense of being watched and spied upon.

2. “a sense of threat to the ego” — as Aldous Huxley points out in *The Doors of Perception*, this is at once the prize and the price of the mescaline experience; liberation from the self can be insupportable. In the Tibetan Book of the Dead,

the departed soul is described as shrinking in agony from the Clear Light of the Void, and even from the lesser, tempered lights, in order to rush headlong into the comforting darkness of selfhood as reborn human being, or even as a beast, an unhappy ghost, a denizen of hell. Anything rather than the burning brightness of unmitigated Reality — anything! (DP 43)

3. “intensification of the other senses so that inaudible sounds become magnified or food tastes better...” — Geoffrey’s perception of sounds becomes personalized and not quite in tune with their sources:

Tak: tok: help: help: the swimming-pool ticked like a clock. (UV 75)

... while from above, below, from the sky, and, it might be, from under the earth, came a continual sound of whistling, gnawing, rattling, even trumpeting. (UV 144)

Yet the place was not silent. It was filled by that ticking: the ticking of his watch, his heart, his conscience, a clock somewhere. There was a remote sound to, from far below, of rushing water, of subterranean collapse ... (UV 338)

4. “... or normally unnoticed aspects of things (such as the pores in concrete) become strikingly vivid” — these unnoticed aspects are, for the Consul, all fierce and unhappy ones: in Laruelle’s house he notices on the wall

a terrifying picture *he hadn’t seen before*, and took at first to be a tapestry ... Down, headlong into hades, selfish and florid-faced, into a tumult of fire-spangled fiends, Medusae, and belching monstrosities ... plunged the drunkards. (UV 202, my italics)

Yet there are also moments of appreciation of a kind of newly revealed beauty:

... ‘how, unless you drink as I do, can you hope to understand the beauty of an old woman from Tarasco who plays dominoes at seven o’clock in the morning?’ (UV 55)

5. “a sense of depersonalization...” — Huxley describes this as an awareness which is “not referred to an ego; it was, so to speak, on its own” (DP 41); the Consul has difficulty in separating himself as perceiver from the intensity of his visions (cf. the vision of swarming insects, UV 152). The fierce flora which surrounds the Consul — the accusing sunflower (UV 148) and phallic plantains (UV 70) — suggests a vision opposite to Huxley’s amazed perception of some Red Hot Pokers, “so passionately alive that they seemed to be on the very brink of utterance.” (DP 46).

6. “... of being simultaneously both within and without oneself, a closely related feeling of merger (dissolving) with the external world and a loss of personality” — Geoffrey contrasts the separateness of the features of his life which he enjoyed when he first met Yvonne with his present state:

And had it not turned out that the farther down he sank, the more those features had tended to dissemble, to cloy and clutter, to become finally little better than ghastly caricatures of his dissimulating inner and outer self, or of his struggle, if struggle there were still? (uv 361)

which is often apparent throughout the day:

The toilet was all of grey stone, and looked like a tomb — even the seat was cold stone. 'It is what I deserve . . . It is what I am,' thought the Consul. (uv 295)

. . . he was surrounded in delirium by these phantoms of himself, the policeman, Fructuoso Sanabria, that other man who looked like a poet, the luminous skeletons, even the rabbit in the corner and the ash and sputum on the filthy floor — did not each correspond, in a way he couldn't understand yet obscurely recognized, to some fraction of his being? (uv 362)

Everything he sees is deranged and doomed; he experiences the world as he experiences himself:

The huge looping-the-loop machine . . . suggested some huge evil spirit, screaming in its lonely hell, its limbs writhing, smiting the air like flails of paddlewheels. (uv 224)

and it is even questionable whether much of what he sees is there at all: "Obscured by a tree, he hadn't seen it before (uv 224).

7. "a perception of ordinary things as if seen for the first time unstructured by perceptual 'sets'" — Huxley also mentions the cleansed, childlike vision imparted to the world by mescaline: "the percept had swallowed up the concept" (dp 42). Geoffrey sees things anew, glowing with menace: in his garden are

tools, unusual tools, a murderous machete, an oddly shaped fork, somehow nakedly impaling the mind, with its twisted tines glittering in the sunlight . . . (uv 132)

and without perceptual sets the true nature of what is before him shines out:

. . . on his extreme right some unusual animals resembling geese, but large as camels, and skinless men, without heads, upon stilts, whose animated entrails jerked along the ground, were issuing out of the forest path the way he had come. He shut his eyes from this and when he opened them someone who looked like a policeman was leading a horse up the path, that was all. (uv 342)

Huxley goes on to describe the fear of a mind confronted with a reality overwhelming in comparison with the "cosy world of symbols" (dp 43), "the home-made universe of common sense" (dp 44), which he says is the constant state of the schizophrenic.⁹ In *Moksha*, Huxley points out the loss of symbolism which accompanies mescaline and is the everyday experience of the schizophrenic: "the meaningful things seem in the mescaline experience are not symbols. They do not stand for something else, do not mean anything except themselves" (m 63). The schizophrenic

can't shut off the experience of a reality he isn't holy enough to live in, which he can't explain away and which, because it never permits him to look at the world with merely human eyes, scares him into interpreting its unremitting strangeness, its burning intensity of significance, as the manifestations of human or even cosmic malevolences calling for the most desperate counter-measures, from murderous violence at one end of the scale to catatonia, or psychological suicide, at the other. (dp 44)

This seems particularly applicable to the Consul (cf. his thoughts on the relief of madness — "psychological suicide" — and his propensity for violence: the questionable fate of the German officers in his ship the *Samaritan*, his machete-wielding in the Farolito); the hallucinations he experiences function simply as intensifications of his own *angst*.

8. "hallucinations of flowers, snakes, animals, other people, etc., which subjects usually know to be hallucinations though they are powerless to stop them" — Geof-

frey inhabits a veritable jungle of snakes, Hugh being one of their number (UV 145), which are never clearly either visions or real reptiles (e.g., UV 131). He almost imagines the sunflower strolling into his room (UV 183), and among the people he sees or speaks to when they are (probably) not there, are the dead man in the swimming-pool, Hugh in the Calle Nicaragua, and Laruelle in the Café Paris.

9. "voices commanding the user to do something" — the Consul is constantly subject to a cacophany of voices berating and mocking him, a chorus of guilt made audible, which belong to his own Good and Bad Angels as well as to the figures of his past.

10. "the release from the subconscious of repressed material, sometimes in the form of terrifying, dreamlike, visual symbols, and breakdown of conscience and super-ego restraints" — in some ways the whole geography of *Under the Volcano* is akin to a region of the "subconscious," and all that happens to Geoffrey in it is so elemental, so rawly powerful and significant, that it has some of the qualities of the Kafkaesque vision: the subject is placed, fully conscious and able to record literally, within his own nightmare. Huxley suggests that under certain conditions, such as after ingestion of mescaline, or following deprivation of sugar and certain vitamins, the mind gains access to a way of seeing the world which is "biologically useless," possessing "no survival value" (DP 12), but which "may be extremely helpful to us in so far as we are creatures capable and desirous of understanding" (HH 101). He shares Lowry's image of the land of the heart: "A man may be said to consist of an Old World of personal consciousness, and, on the other side of a dividing ocean, of a series of New Worlds . . . of the subconscious" (M 58).

In earlier drafts of *Under the Volcano*,¹⁰ the Consul actually did take a drug — at Señora Gregorio's he "sat with his drink for a long time smoking the marihuana,"^{10a} and when he sees the *pelado*'s hands trembling on the bus to Tomalín he thinks that perhaps, "like the Consul himself, he had been sampling, but not subtly, the mighty marihuana."^{10b} However, no special effects follow, merely

an opiumish clarity of vision in which each object was in its proper scenical place and touched with a supersensual significance . . . The holy virgin, the pyrene, the advertisement for the Red Cross, the jacket from less than these could a universe be constructed.^{10c}

The same confusion reigns here in the Consul's mind over what is drink and what is drug — "The first drink I ever had, Father gave me on the q.t. . . our old man never called it anything but soma. The curious thing about it is, it's exactly the same as this mescal here, I could swear,"^{10d} but he sees more when, in the published version, he only imagines he, or likens himself to one who, has taken a psychadelic.

Markson describes mezcal as "symbolically connected with the hallucinatory drug"¹¹ the Consul's confusion certainly mirrors a more widespread one, allowing him to benefit from the visionary aspects of mescaline without ever taking it. Not only are his hallucinations hybrids of reality and the imaginary, in form and content, but also of drug and drink experience. This is characterized for Geoffrey by what Huxley calls "visionary hell"; for people such as he, everything in the universe,

from the stars in the sky to the dust under their feet, is unspeakably sinister or disgusting; every event is charged with a hateful significance; every object manifests the presence of an Indwelling Horror, infinite, all-powerful, eternal. (HH 49)

It is in this way that the idea of entering

the afterlife you deserve when you die has its full meaning: fear and anger, of themselves, make for a hell of unlovely visions. The clear light of understanding becomes a hateful spotlight glare.

References in the text are as follows:

- UV: Lowry, Malcolm, *Under the Volcano*. Penguin edition, 1981 reprint.
 DP: Huxley, Aldous, *Doors of Perception*. London, 1954.
 HH: Huxley, Aldous, *Heaven and Hell*, London, 1956.
 M: Huxley, Aldous, *Moksha*, London, 1980, ed. M. Horowitz and C. Palmer.

NOTES

- 1* This, the title, and all following quotations denoted by an asterisk, are taken from the short leaflet supplied with bottles of *Monte Alban Mezcal con Gusano*, which is *Fabricado y embotellado por Mezcal Mitla, S.A. Libertad Nol 35, Oaxaca, Oax.*
- 2 Thomas B. Gilmore, "The Place of Hallucinations in *Under the Volcano*," *Contemporary Literature*, 23, no. 3 (1982).
- 3 According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the Consul is in fact correct in his insistence on the healthfulness of *pulque*, it is "an important and inexpensive source of carbohydrates, amino acids, and vitamins for Mexico's low income population. *Pulque* may in some regions provide the major liquid intake during the dry season."
- 4 R. Gordon Wasson, "Notes on the Present Status of Ololiuhqui and the Other Hallucinogens of Mexico," in *The Psychedelic Reader*, ed. Gunther M. Weil, Ralph Metzner and Timothy Leary (New Jersey, 1973).
- 5 Cf. Wasson's essay, especially p. 174, and accompanying maps.
- 6 Wasson's mention of an ancient mushroom religion is corroborated by Albert Hofmann's comment in his Preface to Huxley's *Moksha*: "Psychotropic substances of plant origin had already been in use for thousands of years in Mexico as sacramental drugs in religious ceremonies and as magical potions having curative effects" — it is instructive to compare abuse of such substances with the Consul's guilt over his abuse of the mystical properties of wine.
- 7 Art Hill, "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism," *Canadian Literature*, no. 62 (autumn 1972).

- 8 From Richard R. Lingeman, *Drugs from A to Z* (New York 1974).
- 9 Richard K. Cross, in his *Malcolm Lowry: A Preface to His Fiction* (Chicago, 1980), notes Geoffrey's "acute ontological insecurity" (37), and quotes from R. D. Laing's study of schizophrenia, *The Divided Self*.
- 10 This and the following four quotations are from the Malcolm Lowry Collection: University of British Columbia, The Library, Special Collections Division. The references are to box, file, and page number: (a) 22(23)35, (b) 23(1)3, (c) 23(1)8, (d) 28(5)18. See also 24(2)292 and 24(5)394.
- 11 David Markson, *Malcolm Lowry's Volcano* (New York, 1980), 134.

SUE VICE

"UNCERTAIN FLOWERING" AN OVERLOOKED SHORT STORY BY MARGARET LAURENCE

IN THE SPECIAL MARGARET LAURENCE ISSUE of the *Journal of Canadian Fiction* (No. 27, 1980), four early and hitherto uncollected short stories were reprinted, and John Sorfleet's reference in his introduction to "those four stories which Laurence never included in any of her books" (7) seems to imply that this publication made *all* Laurence's fiction readily accessible. This is not, however, the case. In 1953 Laurence published a short story entitled "Uncertain Flowering" in the fourth number of *Story: The Magazine of the Short Story in Book Form*, edited by Whit and Hallie Burnett (New York: Wyn, 1953, 9-34). As the contributors' page remarks, "this is her first story published in the United States" (247). It is not, however, included in the standard Laurence bibliographies and checklists, nor, so far as I

know, has any commentator discussed it. Perhaps the story was forgotten because it appeared during a time of resettlement and changed addresses after the Laurences moved from Somaliland to the Gold Coast; one of its chief claims to interest, indeed, lies in the fact that it is set in Somaliland and thus provides an interesting link between the non-fiction material later written up in *The Prophet's Camel Bell* and the African stories that grew out of her Gold Coast (Ghana) experiences.

Because "Uncertain Flowering" seems to be unknown and is not readily available, a summary of the plot may be helpful. The chief character is a sixteen-year-old English girl named Karen Aynsley, and we first encounter her on a plane bound for the Somaliland Protectorate, where she is to spend her school holidays with her parents, Philip and Jo Aynsley. She is weeping, but we do not understand why until later. A cockney sergeant in an adjoining seat tries to strike up a conversation, but she is curt in her replies. "You *are* a funny kid," he comments (12), and she bristles at this remark. We soon realize that she is at the painful stage of growth between girlhood and womanhood.

On arrival at Bor Mado in Somaliland, she is met by her parents, who still treat her as a child, her father referring to her kindly but inappropriately as "bairn" (13, 21, 24, 29). Not only do their references to child friends and childhood pursuits grate on her, but it becomes clear that the relationship between her parents is on the point of break-up. Karen has long been aware of the situation, and this explains her initial tears. She is roused only by mention of her pony and the prospect of a gymkhana. A few days later, Karen rides off with an old Somali servant named Yusuf to an old haunt of hers which, in Yusuf's words, is "fit only for those who dream dreams" (17).

After an exchange in which she is surprised to find that she is speaking once again in Somali without realizing it, she tells him that it was a place where she used to come "to pray" (17). She finds, however, that she can no longer do so.

The climax of the story occurs at a dance following the gymkhana. Karen is standing "unobtrusively beside one of the doors . . . just far enough around the corner to be out of sight of the dancers" (23), overhears her father engaged in an affair with a family friend, and comes to suspect that an army captain is her mother's (latest) lover. A young and somewhat drunk lieutenant, Howard Tavershaw, is detailed to escort Karen home early. She soon extracts from him confirmation of her parents' affairs and confides that she herself "had an affair in England" (32). This provokes Tavershaw into making love to her; as Laurence rather coyly puts it, he "pulled her closer to him and let all his young longing for a woman take her as its object" (33). The final revelation comes when he discovers that she was a virgin. Asked why she implied the contrary, she admits: "I don't know." Her last words — to herself — are: "You think I should be glad . . . You really think I should be glad . . ." (34).

"Uncertain Flowering" is a workman-like, often quite accomplished, but ultimately somewhat formulaic story. The sense of place is evoked economically and effectively, and Laurence's ear for dialogue is remarkably skilful. She has an enviable capacity to convey meanings and implications that are not directly expressed in conversation. Karen's situation, poised between child and adult, is sensitively portrayed without ever suggesting condescension. The weakness of the story lies in its contrived quality. Revelation follows revelation too relentlessly; we are too conscious of authorial control over the material. Thus the ser-

geant's "you *are* a funny kid" (12) is balanced by Tavershaw's "you *are* a queer kid" (28) and "you *are* a peculiar kid" (31). Similarly, the sergeant's offering her a cigarette to show that he no longer considers her a child is echoed when Karen herself insists on a gin and lime rather than "squash or lime" from Tavershaw (28). One feels, however, that these formal effects are imposed upon the narrative from outside; in short, the story seems to arise less from a sense of personal urgency on Laurence's part as from a dogged determination to produce a "well-made" fiction.

Its fascination resides in the glimpses it affords of attitudes and preoccupations that are to recur elsewhere in Laurence's writing. This is her first attempt at fiction created out of her African experience, and it is an index of her caution that she writes not about the Somalis themselves but about the British administrative class. Clearly, she has not yet thought her way through to the kind of vision that is to distinguish the stories that constitute *The Tomorrow-Tamer*. The scene between Karen and Yusuf is perhaps the most tender in the whole story, and it is significant that he understands her better than the whites. While they can only see her as a child, Yusuf remarks shrewdly: "You are no child. . . . But you are not a woman, either" (19). Her automatic switch into Somali is poignant evidence of an emotional bond, but the scene is close to a dead-end so far as the plot is concerned. References to "the proud impoverished Somalis with enigmatical eyes" (22) and "the quavering sadness of the songs the Somalis chanted around their fires" (23) — first hint, perhaps, of Laurence's interest in the material that became *A Tree for Poverty* — read a little too much like "local colour" exoticism. At the same time, they indicate the direction in which Laurence's interests will move.

In addition, there are some intriguing and more specific connections with Laurence's later writings. Yusuf the servant, who had served with the Camel Corps in "the later Mullah Campaigns" (16), may well have been based on the "old warrior" who is central to the twelfth chapter of *The Prophet's Camel Bell*. The general subject of young people coming to Africa — and coming to terms with Africa — is explored later in "The Drummer of All the World" and "The Rain Child" (both in *The Tomorrow-Tamer*). Here it is a simple return from school on Karen's part, but in "The Drummer of All the World" a black/white childhood friendship is involved, while in "The Rain Child" the girl is an African born and educated in England who is encountering Africa for the first time. The increase in subtlety is noticeable. Again, Karen's dislike of being called "kid" or "child" or "bairn" looks forward to later reactions by Rachel Cameron in *A Jest of God* and by Morag in *The Diviners*, while the rather contrived overhearing scene anticipates similar (and, in my view, similarly over-contrived) scenes in *The Stone Angel*, *A Bird in the House*, and *The Diviners*. More dramatically, the realization after the love-making that the girl was a virgin is repeated, with greater violence but at the same time with greater poignancy, in the scene between Johnnie Kestoe and the young black prostitute (who is also "very young, not more than sixteen") in the twelfth chapter of *This Side Jordan*. Above all, the pervasive sense of sexuality as a sub-text within the story, the strong impression we receive of Karen as a growing physical being, underlines the extent to which this is a recurring and developing preoccupation in Laurence's major work.

One significant difference, of course, between "Uncertain Flowering" and the other African stories is that here Laur-

ence focuses almost exclusively on the group that she later categorizes, in the fourteenth chapter of *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, as "the imperialists." This is doubtless another reason why the story has been overlooked. Once she realized that she had a rich and suitable subject in stories about Africans approaching political and personal independence, this story would have seemed conventional and even trivial. The political undercurrent is always secondary here. The British are characterized with some asperity but not totally without sympathy. Seen in virtual isolation from the Somalis, they are ridiculous in their weaknesses but are also presented as victims in a situation which, as individuals, they did not create, and which they cannot control. Karen herself transcends the categories; she is offered not politically as an imperialist but individually as a child-woman. By the same token, however, the story's connection with Africa may thus be seen as merely incidental. The "well-made" quality of the construction cannot wholly disguise the split between theme and setting. This is, then, apprentice work, but for serious students of Canadian literature it represents an important first step in the development of Margaret Laurence as a writer of fiction.

W. J. KEITH

A NOTE ON ONDAATJE'S "PETER": A CREATIVE MYTH

IN "PETER" OF *The Dainty Monsters*, Ondaatje explores the artist's ability or inability to rise above personality and experience.¹ He creates a myth around a vindictive artist figure which recalls other implied analogues or figures for the artist in various of the "dainty monsters" that

appear in this volume: the mad heron of "Birds for Janet" and "In Another Fashion," the monstrously deformed Philoctetes of "The Goodnight," the decadent Paris whose belly is an "undigested beast" or Prometheus who is "scientifically" "splayed" on a rock but fights back with ever-restored energy.² Although all literature borrows from mythic or story elements as its essential understructure, the creative myth typically stylizes its material and reduces it to archetypal essentials so that a speculative element surfaces within the basic structure and development of the story. Thus Ondaatje in "Peter" (perhaps significantly the last poem in *The Dainty Monsters*) deftly objectifies the artist's dilemma by representing him as "court monster" in a fairy tale setting. Using images of surrealistic dislocation, Ondaatje jolts us into a psychological world where we recognize elements of ourselves through what must be considered a post-modern extension of the artist as *everyman*.

Rather than following any one borrowed mythological structure, "Peter" as a creative myth which is built around the tale of the beauty and the beast echoes *The Tempest*, the Golden Fleece, and Minotaur stories.³ Here the artist as Caliban and Minotaur figure expresses his sense of persecution and personal frustration at physical handicaps (literally inflicted by society in this story) first through his art, and later by victimizing the young beauty Tara, who has been the one person to treat him with kindness. Accordingly, Tara may be seen as an Ariadne or Miranda figure.

As with Ondaatje's "Potter" of *The Man With Seven Toes*, the artist in "Peter" is ambivalently presented as victim and victimizer. This precludes our complete sympathy, and he finally proves himself a figure more negative than positive.⁴ The convict, Potter, who gains the distinction of "seven toes" through bru-

talizing experience, provides a parallel for the court monster Peter, who, having been deprived of his tongue, must express himself against all odds in a particularly literal and physical manner. Since the number seven is traditional in fairy tales, it is perhaps no coincidence that the number (also notable in reference to the convict's seven toes) comes up again.⁵ The series of poems entitled "Peter" unfolds in seven notable instalments.

In the first section of the series (71), Peter is discovered in the gruesome act of reconstructing a cow from its skeleton through ice sculpture. A significant ambiguity in the syntax surrounding "freezing," and a manipulation of line-endings implies the ambivalent role of the artist as both victim and victimizer:⁶

That spring Peter was discovered, freezing
the maze of bones from a dead cow,
skull and hooves glazed
with a skin of ice. (71)

This somewhat disturbing activity tells us that Peter is a perverted individual, a suggestion that does much to undermine our sympathy, even at this early stage. Ondaatje thus links art with morbid behaviour in which the ice surface, the medium of Peter's art, is considered a "skin." On the night villagers attempt to capture him, Peter retaliates in a vicious manner. He defends himself with "three throats and a wrist." Suggestive of the artist's intensity and his need to express himself orally and manually, this symbolic evocation carries the implication of monstrosity. The villagers retreat and return at night to discover, significantly, the cow "frozen in red, and Peter / eating a meal beside it."

In the second section (72), the hunting party manage to snare Peter and subsequently torture him. A "brown bitch," a familiar symbol in Ondaatje's poetry representing a survival instinct, dispassionately "nose[s] his pain" and "stare[s] in interest." Peter is "froze[n]

into consciousness," or distanced from his own pain. Here we identify a "freezing motif" which reflects an attitude necessary to the artist if he is to transcend his own pain through art.

In the third section (73), Peter in captivity expresses his resentment. Although his words, which are composed of "growls," seem "meaningless," "disgust in his tone burn[s] everyone." After the passage of a year, society retaliates by cutting out his tongue. As an analogue for the persecuted artist, Ondaatje with particularly visceral effect introduces the tableau of a baited fish which loses matter in its throat when the hook is removed:

difficult
to unpin a fish's mouth
without the eventual jerk
to empty throat of pin and matter. (73)

Having escaped being caught but maimed in this way, the fish (which carries ambivalent spiritual and phallic connotations) is thus aligned with the artist, Peter.⁷ Following this cruel chastisement, Peter endures several months of silence. But eventually he overcomes his speech impediment by learning to express himself more fantastically in grunts by using the air in his body:

There followed months of silence,
then the eventual grunting;
he began to speak with the air of his body,
torturing breath into tones; it was
despicable,
they had made a dead animal of his throat.
(*Ibid.*)

The line ending "it was despicable" jolts our sympathy by registering the villagers' point of view about this human gargoyle but, merging with the following line which establishes the extent of Peter's chastisement, returns the blame with equal force to society. Since society has "made a dead animal of his throat," the artist who is reduced to a "monster" by society's persecution of him is not entirely

responsible for the cruel intensity expressed in his art. Society's restraints speak through him, and his art is autonomous. It is an "animal" whose features and size are determined not only by "genetic" (traditional genres) but also by "organic" (internal form in the individual work) necessity. Typically, Ondaatje reflects his ambivalence concerning this interesting problem of the artist's relation with society and with his art.

The spiritual connection in the fish symbol is apparent when Peter is associated with his Biblical namesake. Of course, "Peter" translates as "the rock," and this artist, Peter, is described as a "marred stone." Interestingly, Cirlot cites an instance of the stone image as a symbol for reconciliation with the self since it connotes removal from biological processes of decay.⁸ The "marred stone," therefore, might imply the inner turmoil and antagonistic feelings which Ondaatje identifies in the artist. As himself an imperfect "creature," the artist must "create" to compensate for this deficiency. A complementary analogy of the "baited gargoyle" to the stone association, moreover, adds the suggestion of perverted monstrosity to this artist figure:

He was little more than a marred stone,
a baited gargoyle, escaped
from the fountain in the courtyard:
his throat swollen like an arm muscle,
his walk stuttered with limp, his knees
straight,
his feet arcing like a compass.

(*Ibid.*)

Peter's throat which is enlarged like "an arm muscle" and the "stuttering" metaphor convey the extent of the artist's compensation for a personal deficiency. An application of a psychological metaphor to the throat, an organ of speech for transcending the physical world to register meaning, and the unusual language metaphor that describes his physical activity effectively suggest the state of the frustrated artist and his need for expres-

sion. The fact of "his feet arcing like a compass" makes implicit a writing metaphor using mathematics (as opposed to the oral language metaphor of "stuttering"), which indicates the artist's striving for an absolute east and west direction equivalent to dialectical truth. Also, the compass's circumscribed movement suggests the artist's paralysis.

In the fourth section (74), the occupants of the castle build a "hive" or sanctuary for Peter.⁹ Jason, representing a man of action and an idealist, provides the artist with "bones," or basic ideas, with which to reconstruct real-life forms. As a projection of the artist's own *psyche*, this Jason figure in Ondaatje's poem suggests MacEwen's sacred figure of the king or dancer.¹⁰ Jason's daughter, "Tara," at once recalls the Irish home of kings and a Buddhist deity who provides essential life energy to *everyman*.¹¹ Appropriately, she grows fond of this artist figure, Peter:

... tousling in detail
the hair that collapsed like a nest
over his weaving eyes. (74)

In her "bored innocence," Tara with unconscious condescension dotes on Peter, "pet[ting] him like a flower" and "plac[ing] vast kisses on his wrists." Because she is "delighted at sudden grins / that [open] his face like a dawn," she tolerantly makes allowances for his "scowls and obscenities." The artist's moments of sincerity and insight, therefore, compensate for his vulgarity and ill-temper.

In this position of resentful subservience, the shackled artist remains "bouldered" at the feet of society. The stone metaphor implies his situation on an ambivalent pedestal of prospective immortality and death-in-life existence:

He ate, bouldered at their feet,
vast hands shaping rice,
and he walked with them on grit drives —
his legs dragged like a suitcase behind him.
(*Ibid.*)

An image of Peter's "hands shaping rice" suggests the artistic process of casting amorphous reality into form.¹² Paradoxically, "grit" representing immediate circumstances of intractable reality, however, impedes his way so that his legs drag "like a suitcase behind him." As in Gwendolyn MacEwen's "Manzini: Escape Artist" or Eli Mandel's "Houdini," the artist ultimately cannot escape his own physical limitations. His art, therefore, expresses this basic deficiency over and over.

In the fifth section (75), Peter is seen as an artist of "violent beauty," first as an artisan, but later as an expressionist artist. Accordingly, we may trace the evolution of art from its function as useful craft and its part in religious ritual to its modern autonomy:

He carved death on chalices,
made spoons of yawning golden fishes;
forks stemmed from the tongues of reptiles,
candle holders bent like the ribs of men.

(75)

Since death is carved on chalices, the sacred takes on a new profanity in which the absurdity of death is represented in art. Other sacred objects such as "golden fishes," and "candle holders" are also distorted and given a new function to justify their desecration for art's sake: "spoons" are made from "golden fishes," and "forks" from "tongues of reptiles." The second stanza describes a selection process implicit in producing artistic impression:

He made fragments of people: breasts
in the midst of a girl's stride,
a head burrowed in love,
an arm swimming — fingers heaved
to nose barricades of water.

(*Ibid.*)

In representing "fragments" such as "breasts / in the midst of a girl's stride" and "a head burrowed in love," Ondaatje's view of art not only becomes one of selection but of expressionistic exag-

geration. The tableau in the final stanza of the section describes a figure comparable to Buddha or Coleridge's Kubla Khan. Ironically, a romantic conception combines with or provides a point of departure for Ondaatje's expressionistic and often surrealistic techniques:

His squat form, the rippled arms
of seaweeded hair,
the fingers black, bent from moulding
silver,
poured all his strength
into the bare reflection of eyes.

(*Ibid.*)

Although "the fingers black" and "bent" suggest that the artist's expression is influenced by perverting experience and that he is "bent" in the effort of creation, the "silver" of his art concentrated in the "bare reflection" of his eyes implies a transcending of his own barren perversion through this artistic process of "moulding silver."

In the sixth section (76), Tara's development from girl to woman parallels the development of society. As an awkward girl "ungainly as trees," she is entranced by Peter's creation of "golden spiders" and "silver frogs, with opal glares." As in "Spider Blues," the "golden spiders" are an image for the artist who spins his web of creation. Through a traditional association of the frog with metamorphosis, the "silver frogs with opal glares" suggest transformation in which attributes of the moon or nature are purified by the "silver" of the civilized arts.¹³

When Tara outgrows Peter's control, and as his resentment also grows, we find a parallel to the modern artist's alienation from a social reality which has grown fat and soft or shapeless with an increasing complexity that can no longer be contained in conventional or, seemingly, any other forms.¹⁴ In a surreal description of this period of literal and figurative adolescence, Ondaatje, how-

ever, describes a splendid autonomy of the girl's body, which reflects his essentially Heraclitean attitude to a chaotic but rich and self-sufficient universe:

And as she grew, her body
burned its awkwardness.
The full bones roamed
in brown warm skin.
The ridge in her back broadened,
her dress hid seas of thighs,
arms trailed to adjust hair that paused
like a long bird at her shoulder;
and vast brown breasts
restless at each gesture
clung to her body like new sea beasts.

(76)

A dramatization of the growing process within Tara's body has a surreal effect that complicates this portrait using images of Classical simplicity and economy. Impressionistic touches such as the image of the "long bird" for her hair and her breasts "like new sea beasts" in this context establish a relation between the selectivity of romantic impression and the expressive agency of selective distortion. Ondaatje achieves a unique idiom that reflects his interesting position as a post-modernist artist who must combine the techniques of his predecessors in his own way.

In the seventh section, in which Peter mistreats his only benefactor, Tara, Ondaatje introduces Christian imagery to dramatize the vindictiveness of the artist.¹⁵ In an implicit fishing metaphor complicated by a mention of the Cross, Peter baits Tara and ignominiously exposes her:

An arm held her, splayed
its fingers like a cross at her neck
till he could feel fear thrashing at her
throat . . .

(77)

Tearing off her skirt and lifting her brutally by "buttock and neck," which suggest her physical mass and vitality, Peter places her on a table (a secular form of the sacred altar) where he proceeds to

"mould" her with his "stub of tongue."¹⁶ Accordingly, Tara takes on a third significance as the female counterpart for the sacrificial bull:¹⁷

while his bent hands tore the sheet of skirt,
lifted her, buttock and neck to the table.
Then laying arm above her breasts
he shaped her body like a mould . . .

(*Ibid.*)

As in MacEwen's vision, we identify an inherently destructive element in the creative process, which perhaps accounts for the suggested spitefulness of this artist prototype. Peter thereupon vents his fifteen years of resentment on Tara, the number fifteen significantly associated with the erotic and diabolic:¹⁸

the stub of tongue sharp as a cat, cold,
dry as a cat, rasping neck and breasts
till he poured loathing of fifteen years on
her,
a vat of lush oil, staining
the large soft body like a whale.

(*Ibid.*)

The "stub of a tongue" which is "sharp" as a cat and "cold" again suggests the artist's distance from his work of art. Moreover a tactile metaphor of the cat's tongue "rasping" her neck and breasts together with the archetypal metaphor of the whale combine to fulfil the requirements of an experiential post-modern art that looks for and finds deep-seated psychological precedent in the human mind.

A suggestion of the crucifixion in this final scene aligns the sacrificial victim of the girl with the cow in the opening scene. Although Peter has caused the girl all this suffering, his guilt and sorrow identify him with his victim, even as the artist is identified with the subject matter of his art:

Then he lay there breathing at her neck
his face wet from her tears
that glued him to her pain.

(*Ibid.*)

Here is an almost ritual view of mourn-

ing in which the artist's "face" or identity is "glued" to the girl's neck through his tears of remorse. A certain redemption attends the artistic process even if it is not strictly therapeutic.

Because the dominant whale image (at the end of the penultimate stanza) not only connotes sexual containment but also represents the body and grave of the world, this image serves to direct meaning from the literal and allegorical levels of myth to an anagogical level. Accordingly, Ondaatje on a literal level provides us with a psychological drama of the beauty and the beast, on the allegorical level with a paradigm for the alienated artist in his society and, on an anagogical level, with a myth about the artist in his relations with reality at large.¹⁹ Here is a series of poems having incisive imagery that works on many levels through metaphoric incongruities. With a psychological force that draws us, "Peter" reflects the perennial concerns of the artist.

NOTES

- ¹ *The Dainty Monsters* (Toronto, 1967), pp. 71-77; rpt. in *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do* (Toronto, 1979), pp. 26-32.
- ² Sam Solecki in "Nets and Chaos: The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje" rpt. in *Brave New World* (Windsor, 1977) describes these analogues as a "metaphoric shorthand" to disorient the reader, pp. 25-27.
- ³ Stith Thompson distinguishes between the motif and the tale-type in the following manner: Whereas the motif refers to "the smallest element in a tale having power to persist in tradition" and may refer to single "actors," "items in the background of the action" or "single incidents," the tale-type is "a traditional tale that has an independent existence." *The Folktale* (New York, 1946), pp. 415-16.
- ⁴ On the whole, Ondaatje develops the convict Potter of *The Man with Seven Toes* as a more positive figure than Peter.
- ⁵ *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London, 1962), p. 223. Cirlot cites Papus' *Traité Méthodique de Science Occulte* concerning the number seven.

- ⁶ A freezing motif can be related to Ondaatje's interest in photography.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102. Regarding the fish as spiritual and phallic symbol, Cirlot cites Marius Schneider's *El Origin*.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229. Here Cirlot cites Marius Schneider's *La danza de espadas y la tarantela*.
- ⁹ The "hive" which implicates the bee of immortality (itself associated with the preservative honey) suggests a removal of the artist from society on a kind of glorified pedestal of dubious implication. (Cirlot cites Enel's *La Langue Sacrée* in *A Dictionary of Symbols*, pp. 22-23). In an interview with Jon Pearce, Ondaatje remarks on his dislike for this kind of artist's alienation — "it cuts you off essentially from the real world." "Moving to the Clear," *Twelve Voices* (Ottawa, 1980), p. 141.
- ¹⁰ The role of the "king" in MacEwen's poetry is best dramatized by "Nine Arcana of the Kings" of *The Armies of the Moon* which, in effect, provides a paradigm for her mythology.
- ¹¹ Arthur Cotterell describes Tara as "the energy of [bodhisattva's] essence," and points out her democratic qualities in Buddhist tradition: "she transcends social distinctions and offers a personal relationship to her devotees unmatched by any other single deity." *A Dictionary of World Mythology* (New York, 1979), pp. 82-84.
- ¹² In "Elizabeth: a slight ache," we encounter a related rice image in reference to "the blood brown men" who represent raw nature.
- ¹³ Cirlot refers to Marius Schneider's *El Origin musical de los animales — simbolos on la mitologia y la escultura antiguas*: since the frog is a lunar animal and because it represents a transition from earth to water, it is a symbol of metamorphosis.
- ¹⁴ A likeness between the words "terra" (earth) and "Tara" perhaps becomes significant.
- ¹⁵ Like Peter, Theseus maltreats his benefactor, Ariadne. After taking her away from King Minos, he abandons her on the way to Athens. Paul Del examines the story from the psychological point of view of the idealist who mistakes the meaning of life because of personal deficiencies. *Symbolism in Greek Mythology*, p. 164.
- ¹⁶ Peter's lifting Tara by the "buttock" has sexual implications, and his hoisting her by the "neck" implies a violent and poten-

tially destructive tendency in the creative process.

- ¹⁷ The cow of the initial scene prefigures Tara's eventual sacrifice. Although in *The Man with Seven Toes* the artist becomes the sacrificial figure, the artist here "crucifies" his subject-matter as represented in Tara.
- ¹⁸ *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 244. Cirlot cites Oswald Wirth's *La Tarot des Imagiers du Moyen Age* concerning the number fifteen.
- ¹⁹ Hypothetically, Frye's tropological level can be identified in relation to the moral problem of creative-destructiveness. *The Great Code* (Toronto, 1982), pp. 221-33.

GILLIAN HARDING-RUSSELL

THE RIVAL BARDS

Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* & Victorian Poetry

THE VICTORIAN PROTOTYPE of the bearded, patriarchal bard, Alfred Lord Tennyson, becomes Addie Jordan's powerful ally and talisman in *Lives of Girls and Women*.¹ "He shall hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force, a little closer than his dog, a little dearer than his horse," she warns her daughter Del of her liaison with Garnet French, taking as her text Tennyson's orotund monologue of 1842, "Locksley Hall." Addie's adoption of the *nom de plume* "Princess Ida" clearly reveals her allegiance to the Victorian laureate and his works. Her daughter Del, however, rejects her mother's recipe for independence (scholarship and celibacy) and, in effect, also rejects her mother's Tennysonian thought. Instead, we often find her quoting Tennyson's contemporary, Robert Browning. This association — Addie and Tennyson, Del and Browning — reveals that Alice Munro has dealt with a clash between mother and daughter, tradition and innovation, by associating it with the earlier clash of sensibilities

between the two rival bards of the Victorian age, Tennyson and Browning.

Munro's suggestive use of Victorian poetry is not limited to *Lives of Girls and Women*, though it does appear to be limited to her work of the early nineteen seventies. In the title story from *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), Char's former boyfriend, Blaikie Noble, quotes from Tennyson's "Sir Galahad," "My strength is as the strength of ten . . . Because my heart is pure."² Although Blaikie may envision himself as a faultless Galahad (Et first sees him, after many years, dressed completely in white), his continuing interest in Char qualifies him to play Lancelot to the aptly named Arthur, Char's husband.

Tennyson's poetry functions even more sharply as an ironic counterpoint in "The Spanish Lady." The narrator, in the midst of her bitter recriminations against her former friend Margaret, recalls earlier, happy times: "she bought me a copy of *The Princess*, from which we recited to each other as we walked down the street: *Tears; idle tears, I know not what they mean . . .* We were often giddy, like high school girls . . . I used to go home worn out from talking, from laughing, and say to Hugh, 'It's ridiculous. I haven't had a friend like this in years'" (SIBMTTY, p. 143). One is reminded, in fact, of the friendship of Ida and Psyche, as described by Ida's father, Gama, in *The Princess*:

When first she came, all flushed you said
to me
Now had you got a friend of your own age,
Now could you share your thoughts . . .
. . . she you walked with, she
You talked with, whole nights long, up in
the tower³

As in Munro's story, however, close female friendships are frustrated in *The Princess*; Lady Blanche resents the Princess' closeness with Lady Psyche and even this closeness is destroyed when

Psyche's pity for the male invaders temporarily earns her Ida's scorn and enmity.

The importance of this Tennysonian motif in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* becomes clear near the end of the last story, "The Ottawa Valley." The narrator's mother, who is suffering from the early symptoms of Parkinson's Disease, quotes (inaccurately) the opening lines of "Morte D'Arthur": "And all day long the noise of battle rolled" (SIBMTTY, p. 196). In Tennyson's poetic studies of heroism Munro thus finds an analogue to the stoicism of her mother figure.

Heroism and stoicism are precisely the qualities which draw Addie Jordan to Tennyson's *The Princess*. In *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), this medley of narrative and song written by Tennyson in 1847 becomes an important part of a more extended use of Victorian poetry than Munro would attempt in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*.

Addie is, of course, the "Princess" of Munro's story, and her vision is strikingly similar to Princess Ida's dream of female independence. Both women, for instance, deal with threatening elements of their experience by excluding them. The most obvious example is Ida's formation of a female Academy whose rules include the following: "Not for three years to correspond with home; / Not for three years to cross the liberties; / Not for three years to speak with any men" (II, ll. 56-58). Addie Jordan, too, deals largely in prescription and exclusion. Although to a young Del the ordered, practical lives of Aunts Elspeth and Grace represent an "indestructible" force to be reckoned with, Addie merely pushes "them out of her way, as if they were cobwebs. I know better than that," confides Del (LGW, p. 31). Similarly, Addie's answer to the problem of reconciling female ambition and sexual needs is to denigrate the lat-

ter. "Don't be distracted," she warns her daughter, "Once you make that mistake of being — distracted, over a man, your life will never be your own" (LGW, p. 147). As Munro once remarked in an interview, Addie's view is "touchingly oversimplified . . . she totally disregards sexual passion. It's just something you forget about and it will go away."⁴

Wrong-headed as this exclusivity may be, on the part of both Princess Ida and Addie, both women derive great power from it. Addie, for instance, places great faith in the power of encyclopedias to enrich the lives of Jubilee inhabitants; she even tries to instill this intellectual mania in Del, by having her rhyme off long lists of names, facts, and dates. Princess Ida, too, is a veritable intellectual warrior, a "woman conqueror" who values not physical strength but spiritual stamina. "To look on noble forms," she argues, "Makes noble through the sensuous organism / That which is higher" (II, ll. 73-74).

The power of the mind which both women share is not merely directed towards discouraging sexuality, however; both bring a thoroughgoing scepticism to the physical world as a whole. In "Heirs of the Living Body," Addie's devout wish for organ transplant as an alternative to the present concept of death is a legacy of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*: "Well, first off, what is a person? A large percent water. Just plain water . . . We call it Uncle Craig, or your father, or me. But it's just these combinations . . ." (LGW, p. 40). (Del's response is a humorous yet vehement proof of her non-rational tendencies: "I'll get carsick . . . I'll vomit.") The Princess, too, is a thorough-going sceptic; she opens one conversation with the Prince with the wry observation, "There sinks the nebulous star we call the Sun, / If that hypothesis of theirs be sound" (IV, ll. 1-2).

As rationalists and sceptics, both women also share the eighteenth century's fervent belief in the future, in the possibility of ideal social management in a new utopia. Addie appropriately begins her already-mentioned speech to Del with a glimpse into that bright future: "There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women" (LGW, p. 146). Moreover, this section, entitled "Lives of Girls and Women," opens with Addie's vision of a futuristic society, a day when "the snow will all be collected in machines and — dissipated. Or people will be living under transparent domes, with a controlled temperature" (LGW, p. 119). Princess Ida, too, finds herself far more at ease in the future than in the present. "All things serve their time / Toward that great year of equal might and rights," she declares to the Prince (iv, ll. 55-56). Indeed, much of her effort in *The Princess* is devoted to eradicating the past, just as Addie might envision sweeping away the bothersome snow of Huron County. "Let the past be past; let be / Their cancelled Babels" (iv, ll. 58-59), she pleads, unaware of the deep contradictions in her plea. (The first lesson which the three disguised men attend at the Academy is a sweeping reassessment of women's role in history.)

Neither Addie nor Ida can sweep away or dissipate the past, and for this reason one finds in both works an emphasis on ancient history, particularly that of Egypt. The Princess "breathes full East" in much of her discourse, as the Prince points out (iii, l. 215). The Prince's love song, for instance, reminds Ida of "the time / When we made bricks in Egypt" (iv, ll. 109-10) and later she refers to "this Egypt-plague of men!" (v, l. 417). In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Addie, in particular, is continually associated with Egyptian imagery. In "Princess Ida," her childhood tormentor, her brother Bill, visits the Jordan family, attended by the

vapid and vacuous Aunt Nile, clad in green (even to her fingernails, much to Del's delight). And after the news of Bill's impending death is disclosed, we see Ada straining to remember the name of an Egyptian god with four letters for her crossword, and we hear that "the Wawanash River overflowed its banks" (LGW, p. 76). Like the Princess, Addie senses that the past can neither serve as an object of scorn and bitterness, nor be disregarded; like the Nile River, it overflows, subtly transforming for good or for ill the neat boundaries of our lives.

Another motif related to this concern with time and posterity in both works is the motif of the child. Addie momentarily interrupts her advice to Del with the reflection. "You will want to have children, though" (LGW, p. 147), to which Del scathingly responds, "That was how much she knew me." Addie is clearly in sympathy with Tennyson's concept of the child in *The Princess*. Princess Ida inveighs against the innocence of the child which society has inculcated into women: "they had but been, she thought, / As children; they must lose the child, assume / The woman" (i, ll. 135-37). Near the end of the poem, however, Tennyson transforms his feminist into a child worshipper; Ida keeps Aglaia, Psyche's child, so that "the child shall grow / To prize the authentic mother of her mind" (v, ll. 422-23). Addie Jordan, too, nurses the idea that the child will prize and emulate "the authentic mother of her mind"; while Del is out at night with Garnet, Addie muses over her daughter's university calendars ("Tell you what *I* would take . . .," LGW, p. 192).

Both Munro's and Tennyson's princesses fail; their fervent idealism must eventually be domesticated, subsumed by the male-dominated world. As the Prince notes, in what is surely *intended* as a comforting reflection, woman must "set

herself to man, / Like perfect music unto noble words" (vii, ll. 269-70). Ida's domestication begins with a literal "fall"; when the disguised Cyril sings a bawdy song, the female company is thrown into such disarray that Ida falls into the river. Similarly, Addie Jordan repeatedly "falls" or submits; after her furious defence of scientific rationalism in "Heirs of the Living Body," she is sternly reproved by her husband, who points out that one cannot very well discuss organ-transplant reincarnation at a Jubilee funeral. Del is frightened by her mother's swift capitulation — this is what the slump of her back showed... I wanted to shout at them to stop and turn back into their separate, final, unsupported selves" (LGW, p. 41). Later, Del realizes that this pattern of assertion and submission applies to Addie's whole life: "In the beginning of her story was dark captivity, suffering, then daring and defiance and escape. Struggle, disappointment, more struggle... Had all her stories, after all, to end up with just her, the way she was now, just my mother in Jubilee?" (LGW, p. 67).

Del learns that the stories of lives of girls and women may, after all, have alternative, affirmative endings, for she creates one of those endings for herself: "Now at last without fantasies or self-deception, cut off from the mistakes and confusion of the past, grave and simple, carrying a small suitcase, getting on a bus, like girls in movies leaving home, convents, lovers, I supposed I would get started on my real life" (LGW, p. 201). Before Del can start that "real life," though, she must first reject the unreal Tennysonian image of the female. This she does in "Baptizing," in a scene which is a complete reversal of the river scene in *The Princess*. Whereas Princess Ida falls into the water, Del enters it willingly and fights to emerge from it free and unharmed. Later, when she is wait-

ing hopelessly for Garnet, she calls to mind a line from Tennyson: "*He cometh not, she said.*" Del's immediate response leaves us in no doubt as to her attitude towards the submissive, waiting Tennysonian heroine: "From 'Mariana,' one of the silliest poems I had ever read" (LGW, p. 200). Del will obviously not be a prime candidate for a moated grange. Nevertheless, up to this time she has been acting like Mariana: "He did not come on Monday. I waited, classically, behind the curtains in our front room" (LGW, p. 200). Even the last detail recalls Tennyson's poem: "She drew her casement-curtain by / and glanced athwart the glooming flats" (ll. 19-20).

The relationship with Garnet has, Del realizes with some amazement, nearly put her into the mould of the passive Tennysonian heroine. In *The Princess*, the wrathful father of the Prince characterizes male-female relationships as a particularly vicious form of blood sport: "Man is the hunter; woman is his game: ... We hunt them for the beauty of their skins, / They love us for it, and we ride them down" (v, ll. 147-50). Garnet has become precisely this type of amorous hunter; when Del visits the French farm, she sees the list of Garnet's former girlfriends, "each with an X after it" — a sign which Garnet defends as a "military secret" (LGW, p. 187). Del's name he adds with his knife to the bottom of the list.

Another sign that Del has become a Mariana figure during her relationship with Garnet is her increasing passivity. Both Del and Mariana are enveloped by a fatal dreaminess: the moated grange is a "dreamy house" wherein the voices and footsteps of the past still echo. Del, too, becomes a waking dreamer; when she writes her final examination she moves "languidly, exaggerating a slight discomfort" (LGW, p. 190). Indeed, Del seems in an entranced state not unlike that of

Tennyson's "Lotos Eaters." "I have often felt, in the middle of the day," she confesses, "as if I would have to close my eyes and drop where I was and go to sleep" (LGW, p. 192).

When Del does finally escape from Lotos-land in "Baptizing," she reassumes her "old devious ironic isolated self," and, in so doing, she "repossess[es] the world" (LGW, p. 199). Her old self, as we have seen in earlier sections of *Lives of Girls and Women*, is neither passive nor slumbrous. Rather, it seems closer to the image of the ever-questing Tennyson male hero — "Ulysses," for whom "all experience is an arch wherethrough / Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades / For ever and for ever when I move" (ll. 19-21). Thus, Del counters her mother's Tennysonian vision of the passive female with the image of the active, ever-questing Tennysonian male:

I felt that it was not so different from all the other advice handed out to women, to girls, advice that assumed being female made you damageable . . . whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same. (LGW, p. 147)

Del turns directly from the words of "Mariana" to the words of the newspaper job advertisements. The other words to which she increasingly turns in "Baptizing" are found in the poetry of Robert Browning. For example, Del informs us that "for comfort I would say to myself the line from the poem about 'mistresses with great, smooth, marbly limbs'" — Browning's "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church," from *Men and Women* (1855). In particular, Del reacts to the word "mistress" ("a full-skirted word, with some ceremony about it" LGW, p. 153) — an appropriate reaction, given the fact that the poem itself is about a bishop's sensual

apprehension of life. Furthermore, the poem juxtaposes the two strands of experience which Del has struggled to reconcile throughout *Lives of Girls and Women*: spirituality and sensuality. In "The Age of Faith," she is drawn to the Anglican church because of its sensual and theatrical qualities. The smell of the church, the sound of the archaic forms of words, all convince Del that "If I could not quite get a scent of God then at least I could get the scent of His old times of power . . ." (LGW, p. 83). The Bishop's reactions to his church are similarly sensual; he relishes the thought of being able, in his elaborate tomb, to

hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense-
smoke!¹⁵

"Andrea del Sarto," also from *Men and Women*, provides an equally revealing commentary on Del's relationship with Garnet. In her entranced, delirious state, Del leaves her school work behind to go out with Garnet, but the haunting lines from "Andrea" remain with her: "A common greyness silvers everything, / All in a twilight, you and I alike" (LGW, p. 180). Del's concentration on those two lines is ironic, since alone, out of context, they suggest a romantic union, togetherness. Of course, in the context of Browning's poem, we see that the union between Andrea and Lucrezia is a sham — a desperate attempt on his part to play the role of the devoted husband, while Lucrezia's lover waits ominously outside:

it seems
As if — forgive now — should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use, . . .
I might get up tomorrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever.

(ll. 12-16, 18-19)

Del and Garnet's union is another such delusion; Del admits later that she had intended to keep him "sewed up in his golden lover's skin forever" (LGW, p. 197). And for Del, as for Andrea, this delusion is potentially harmful to her creativity; Garnet's hatred of "people using big words, . . . trying to tie things together" (LGW, p. 183) is just as anti-pathetic to art as is Lucrezia's careless smearing of one of Andrea's unfinished canvasses with her dress.

Nevertheless, both artist-lovers will, to a certain extent, their subjugation to their mates. As Andrea muses,

In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
Yet the will's somewhat — somewhat, too,
the power —

And thus we half-men struggle.
(ll. 127-30)

Del, too, shows signs of being a "half-woman"; although she realizes that Garnet "rearranged" her, "took just what he needed to suit himself" (LGW, p. 183), she adds, "I did that with him." Garnet's attempt to submerge Del is actually an objectification of Del's own submerging of her "old, devious self." Only when she chooses to assert herself (unlike Andrea, whose last despairing words are "Because there's still Lucrezia — as I choose"), can she cease to be a half-woman and become a whole woman, a whole artist.

* * *

Del's rejection of her mother and of the Tennysonian heroines Mariana and Princess Ida is a rejection of the belief that woman can be, at best, a half-woman in a world of men. How appropriate and meaningful it is, that Del and her creator, Alice Munro, should enrich their studies of the "lives of girls and women" with the work of a nineteenth-century forebear, Robert Browning, the sensitive dramatist of the lives of *Men and Women*.

NOTES

- ¹ Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (Scarborough: Signet, 1971; 1974), p. 147. All further references to this edition are in the text, abbreviated as LGW.
- ² Alice Munro, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You: Thirteen Stories* (1974; 1975), p. 3. All further references to this edition are in the text, abbreviated as SIBMTTY.
- ³ Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Princess," in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 825, vi, ll. 233-35, 237-38. All further references to Tennyson's poetry are to this edition.
- ⁴ Geoff Hancock, "An Interview with Alice Munro," *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, No. 43 (1983), 103.
- ⁵ Robert Browning, "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church," in *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, Cambridge Ed., Intro. by G. Robert Stange (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1974), p. 349, ll. 81-84. All further references to Browning's poetry are to this edition.

LORRAINE M. YORK

MILTON ACORN (1923-1986)

IF YOU WILL AGREE that Milton Acorn was a socialist poet, you will know that he would not want to appear mysterious. Yet when his poems began to appear in magazines such as *The Canadian Forum* in the late fifties, readers were cautious, or at least puzzled. There was that name, that surname, and that first name. And there was that address. For a while at the beginning of his writing career Milton Acorn had the same address as Alfred W. Purdy. Earle Birney was one among many people who suspected that Milton Acorn was a pen name for Al Purdy. As it turned out, such suspicion could be seen as a compliment to both poets, thought they might each balk at that notion.

No, Milton Acorn was not mysterious, and had no desire to be mysterious. He

was convinced of his role as a public poet, as a bard-like figure to be identified with his land and his people, with his native Prince Edward Island first and last, with an independent and progressive Canada, and with the workers and unemployed. In his first poem he called PEI "a red tongue," and in his most famous poem he told us that he had tasted his blood.

Public he was. He was poor and he was handicapped. He was unemployed as far as the corporations were concerned. But he was public. He was always in the newspapers, so much so that when he died the *Globe and Mail* printed two obituaries in the same edition and put his picture on the front page. In Toronto the police broke up his reading with Al Purdy in a back lane behind posh shops on Bloor Street. Earlier cops on horseback dispersed a crowd listening to him in Queen's Park. On the west coast the U.S. customs officials prevented his visiting a woman in Seattle. The paparazzi flashed at him in public safety buildings and at a famous Toronto bar. When he went to the Governor General's house to pick up his award he did not appear in a dull grey suit.

"I shout love," he shouted in the sixties, at the noisiest year of the Vietnam decade and the most public period of his career. Yet in his early poems and in his last works he showed one of the most delicate ears in our poetry, a tuning-in not only to all our speech rhythms, but to the latest poetics in New World literature. His sources and attentions were not only literary. He responded to many voices. He dedicated his books to Max Ferguson, LeRoi Jones, and Dorothy Livesay.

Acorn was at his best when his great ear was connected to his socially committed heart, as in "Detail of a Cityscape," a poem in which the opening question is not just a matter of rhetoric:

Have you noticed
how the cripple
struggles
onto the bus?

From where I sit
a hand,
white-knuckled
on the rail
is all I see;

and then the parts,
a head, an aimless
cane flopping,
hooked to a wrist,
levering elbows,
the poor twist
of a torso,
finally those disobedient
feet.

Once on, he lurches
onto the unrailed bench
next to the driver
... the most uncomfortable seat;

because if he tried for another
the surge of the bus starting
would upend him.

Raymond Souster and Margaret Avison have written in their compassionate ways about such passengers in this lifetime, in that cityscape. Acorn managed to join such select company with an eye for the necessary detail of the love he rightly ascribed to his attention, and with an ear that knew how much invention was just enough.

I have been praising Acorn's verses in review after review since 1961, trying to bring a balance to the response that has concentrated on his image and his politics and ignored the fact of his fine craftsmanship. Al and Eurithe Purdy have attested to the inferiority of Acorn's skills as a carpenter, but when the Maritime carpenter sold his tools in order to survive as a poet, he embarked on a career in which he would make unfaltering objects of great beauty and use. Apprentices who try to get by with subjective smudges of words might do well to listen to the man's words: "Remember that poetry, like carpentry, is a

craft. Learn every technical thing about it you can."

That does not mean to write without social intent. Acorn said that he wanted every poem to have at least one line that would arouse the ire of some oppressor. Too often shallow readers assume that a poet has to drop his art in order to make his political message stronger, or the opposite, that a political poem should not stop to consider matters of form. That is a pitiable error of our time. Milton Acorn may sometimes have shouted his love, but he did so in lines that followed one another with no danger of embarrassing themselves. Twenty years after "I Shout Love" was written it can be read with admiration for its sureness, which is a quality you are not likely to find in most of the furniture you bought that long ago.

Now Milton Acorn is dead, they say. He died in Charlottetown, the small city he was born in during the first decade of the Russian revolution and the first year of Mussolini's regime. He will not be writing any more poems for people, but he has left instructions for anyone else who wants to do so. I am glad I finally dedicated a book of poems to him and sent them to him there on his island, in the last year of his life. He will not be reading any more poems for people; I am sure that he knew that.

But everywhere in his country he is still here. Milton, thou art living at this hour. Here is the end of a poem written in June 1971:

I'll be a statue to myself. While I live
let that suffice.
But if I die (for which I have no plans)
You can raise one more if you like
Of bronze, granite, carborundum, diamond
or ice.
Don't forget the cigar. Keep it burning
Preferably as a beacon for mariners:
As for that number two statue — make it
hollow.

Put a little doll inside, gyrating thru
motions, poses,
shapes like every version of the
question mark
in every script.
That'll be me at my real age . . . Nine years.

GEORGE BOWERING

FRANÇOIS HERTEL (1905-1985)

LA MORT DE FRANÇOIS Hertel a beaucoup frappé. Elle marque la fin d'une époque de transition dont il fut l'un des pères-fondateurs. Lorsque Hertel fit paraître son premier recueil, *Les voix de mon rêve* (1934), il était un jeune Régent jésuite, de qui l'Ordre espérait une carrière littéraire au service de la religion. Né en 1905 à la Rivière-Ouelle (la même année que Borduas) Rodolphe Dubé avait fait ses lettres classiques au Séminaire de Trois-Rivières. Etudes non pas brillantes, mais fortement individualisées, et profondes, accompagnées d'immenses lectures. Jusqu'à la fin de sa vie, Hertel restera attaché à Virgile. Il n'est pas nécessaire de regarder bien loin autour de soi pour se rendre compte que cette époque de culture est révolue. Hertel a parsemé son oeuvre de bribes d'enfance, de souvenirs, d'aveux. Sa mère l'a marqué; intelligente, écrivain à ses heures, elle lui permit de se démarquer de ses camarades, d'assumer très tôt la force et l'unicité de sa personnalité. Hertel a souffert toute sa vie d'être en marge et pourtant s'est toujours enorgueilli de sa singularité. Il n'a jamais révélé pourquoi il avait choisi de devenir jésuite. Il avait vingt ans. Croyait-il en Dieu? Comme tout le monde, sans doute. Dieu, sous forme affirmative, négative, interrogative, est partout dans son oeuvre. Plus tard, Hertel laissera planer le doute sur l'intensité, sur l'immortalité de l'âme, à Paris jouera les disciples de Re-

nan. Il est probable que ce problème restera insoluble.

Ce dialogue entre la croyance en Dieu et son rejet est l'une des composantes essentielles de l'âme canadienne-française de l'époque hertélienne. Il fait partie de l'évolution interne de notre esprit collectif. Si l'on en croit son propre témoignage, il semble que Hertel en ait été conscient dès le début de sa carrière ecclésiastique. Soumis à des pressions sociologiques très fortes, il privilégia une partie de sa nature et décida de consacrer sa vie à l'écriture et à la formation de la jeunesse. Il ne manqua jamais à cette parole; jusqu'à la fin, il écrivit, sans jamais perdre ce ton légèrement didactique qui lui était resté de ses monologues obligés devant des adolescents.

En dépit des ennuis administratifs qui jalonnent sa carrière de jésuite, Hertel fut un admirable prêtre, savant, versé dans les Ecritures et la philosophie thomiste, cette grande Ecole de méditation et de réalisme, charitable, ouvert à tous, attaché aux règles de l'Ordre, admirateur de saint Ignace. Moi qui l'ai beaucoup pratiqué, je ne l'ai jamais entendu élever la voix contre cette famille spirituelle que furent, pour lui, les Jésuites. On oublie trop souvent que les Jésuites sont des éducateurs. Impossible pour Hertel de les concevoir, détachés de leurs élèves. Lui-même ne fut pas un grand professeur tant qu'un éveilleur. Il n'était pas le seul. C'est sous l'influence des jésuites du Collège Sainte-Marie que prit forme le groupe de la *Relève*, ce balancier de la mauvaise conscience bourgeoise d'avant-guerre. Hertel alla plus loin que ses confrères en attaquant de front l'hégémonie du thomisme. Le personalisme de Mounier et de la revue *Esprit*, issu de la pensée chrétienne, cherchait à adapter une vision catholique du monde à la réalité politique contemporaine. Sans condamner expressément Mounier, l'Eglise n'incitait personne à

le suivre, et moins que quiconque les jésuites canadiens. Hertel tenta (*Pour un ordre personnaliste*) d'effectuer la synthèse du personalisme et de la doctrine thomiste. C'est là son apport le plus remarquable au développement de la philosophie au Québec. Qu'en reste-t-il? Le personalisme n'a pas survécu à Mounier, ni l'ordre personnaliste à Hertel.

Il n'en demeure pas moins que cette tentative de faire éclater la sclérose idéologique du Québec d'avant-guerre donna à la personnalité de Hertel un relief qui attira les regards; Hertel en fut d'autant plus ravi qu'il souhaitait se frotter à l'action et qu'il n'avait rien du pur penseur. Ses idées ne manquèrent jamais d'originalité. Ainsi, nationaliste, il proposait, par l'amalgame du nord de l'Ontario et de celui du Québec, la création d'une seconde province à majorité francophone. On conçoit que cette idée n'ait pas eu l'heur de plaire. A Paris, il tâta de l'indépendantisme. Par fidélité à son passé, à la doctrine groulxienne, qui avait bercé sa jeune maturité, à des amitiés politiques, il fit marche arrière. L'âge l'y aida. Comme beaucoup d'intellectuels, il se voulait en prise directe sur la réalité politique, mais sous forme de guide. Certains de ses anciens élèves accédèrent au pouvoir. Il assista à l'ascension de leurs diverses étoiles, comme à leur chute, avec ébahissement, admiration et réserves.

Son influence porta surtout sur la formation du goût littéraire. Il aima Claudel jusqu'à l'imiter; il fit lire à ses élèves Bernanos et Dostoïewski, Keyserling et Thomas Mann, Cocteau et Alphonse de Chateaubriant. Ses étudiants de 1930 à 1945 avaient besoin de cet éclectisme. Il enseigna l'amour de la liberté personnelle et du risque, le goût de la discipline intérieure. Il ne supporta jamais la familiarité. Hertel aspirait, chez les autres comme pour lui-même, à l'épanouissement de tout l'être. Il se trouvait ainsi

en contradiction avec la doctrine du repliement sur soi, de la recherche intérieure, qui sous-tendait la pensée québécoise de son temps. Seul l'abbé Groulx offrait alors une vision pluraliste des choses; mais il était historien (du reste, persécuté lui aussi, que ses amis devaient protéger des foudres ecclésiastiques) dont l'oeuvre n'avait aucune résonance théologique.

L'oeuvre de Hertel, par contre, frôle constamment le sacré. Ceci est naturel si l'on songe qu'il était prêtre, qu'il appartenait à l'élite dirigeante de la nation, et qu'en tant qu'écrivain, il assumait totalement cette double appartenance. Sa poésie est essentiellement métaphysique, tournée vers l'explication de l'homme, de l'univers, des rapports avec le divin. On pourrait être plus spécifique et dire qu'elle est un dialogue entre l'homme cosmique et le Dieu Jésus. La personnalité de Jésus a, de toute évidence, marqué Hertel; non seulement Dieu, mais frère et ami, dernier recours. Cet élargissement de l'univers physique à une réalité surnaturelle directement présente constitue l'aspect le plus personnel de sa poésie. Son ton dérive de ce rapport, une sorte de frémissement qui lui vient du vocabulaire abstrait au service d'une réalité à la fois indiscutable et transcendente. Cette poésie (*Axe et parallaxes*, *Cosmos*, *Strophes et catastrophes*) a surpris par ses thèmes et l'abondance de son lyrisme. Hertel abandonna avec fracas la prosodie classique pour suivre Claudel dans ses recherches respiratoires. Le vers libre hertélien, rocaillieux, farci de références à la *Somme théologique*, est fait pour être lu devant un auditoire à l'esprit formé aux références thomistes; presque un exercice d'école qui devait rejouir de jeunes théologiens assemblés. Mais Hertel est poète. Une voix se fait donc entendre, qui dépasse l'exercice d'écriture et de piété. Soudain, on accède à la poésie, celle du coeur amoureux,

comme lorsque Hertel demande au Christ en route vers Golgotha de poser sur lui, au passage, son pied ensanglanté. Ces audaces d'amour ne sont pas rares chez Hertel. Elles expliquent que certains le relisent avec ferveur.

Son oeuvre de prose se compose d'essais et de nouvelles. Il inventa les personnages d'Anatole Laplante et de Charles Lepic, qui regardent le monde avec un sourire narquois, récrivent l'histoire, prêchent le relativisme, se moquent un peu de tout. Hertel aimait "blaguer." Aussi peu conventionnel que possible, il clama en poésie une foi en Dieu que notre société janséniste aimait taire; il chercha, par la réflexion philosophique, à situer l'homme d'ici dans le monde nord-américain; par la description du comportement d'individus anti-bourgeois, il tenta de démystifier les certitudes historiques et sociales du milieu montréalais d'avant-guerre. Son style est sec, nerveux; il pétarade au milieu d'une sorte de laisser-aller qui parfois surprend et que Hertel associait sans doute à la notion de naturel. Osons le dire. Il y a chez lui un débraillé, assez rare dans ses premières oeuvres, qu'on retrouve plus souvent dans son oeuvre parisienne, choquant dans les derniers ouvrages. La main du maître faiblit et ne tient plus parfaitement la plume.

Son action dans le milieu montréalais dépassa l'orbite littéraire. Il prit fait et cause pour l'art moderne. Sans aimer Borduas (ses disciples, moins encore) il se porta à la défense de l'automatisme. Il admira Pellan, participa aux luttes idéologiques qui devaient entraîner la transformation du duplessisme et laisser le champ libre au parti libéral (révolution dite tranquille). Ce manque de préparation intellectuelle des Québécois, et leur faiblesse, seront des thèmes récurrents des monologues de Hertel, à Paris, 23 rue Blanche. Sa personnalité aux facettes non seulement multiples

mais encore violemment contrastées lui mit à dos, dès 1942, les administrateurs de son Ordre. On en vint à jouer franc jeu et Hertel, condamné à l'exil dans une province jésuite américaine, choisit de se retirer. Il le fit selon les règles et resta fidèle à la parole donnée; réduit à l'état laïque, il resta célibataire, sans doute chaste, en dépit des bravades et des piroquettes pour la galerie. Il y avait en lui du comédien et les anecdotes hertéliennes abondent. Mais il ne serait venu à personne de lui manquer de respect. Il figurait dès l'abord le prêtre, l'être d'abstraction. Il y eut à ses côtés, à Paris, pendant quelques années, une femme de grande distinction d'esprit et de manières. Or, cette présence ne faisait qu'accentuer le caractère monacal de Hertel. Il en acquit une réglementation policée de sa vie; après le départ d'Annie, Hertel redevint le célibataire endurci, peu soucieux du décor, des apparences, de la propreté, de l'ordre.

Il choisit, dès 1946, de vivre en France. Il loua de Henri Petit, une, puis deux, belles maisons à Vézelay. A Paris, il changea souvent de logis et finit par s'installer rue Blanche. Il voyagea de par le monde, revint souvent à Montréal, logeant chez des amis. Peu à peu, on l'oublia. L'histoire intellectuelle se faisait sans lui, qui avait préparé les voies du changement et des déconvenues. Il en voulait à ses contemporains. A Paris, il dirigea une maison d'édition, des revues, s'intéressa à la radiesthésie. Il y écrivit beaucoup, sous forme de souvenirs hachés menu et d'apostrophes lyriques. Il vieillit, devint infirme, entouré de livres, à la fin lisant Pierre Benoit avec engouement. Réduit à n'être plus que l'ombre de lui-même, il accepta que des amis le ramenassent au bercail. C'est donc à Montréal, ville tant aimée, que mourut la vieille brebis, le 4 octobre 1985.

JEAN ETHIER-BLAIS

MARGARET LAURENCE 1926-1987

MARGARET LAURENCE was my friend. She died on January 5, 1987, and I miss her. It's not that we knew each other well. We met, I think, only twice — once in Vancouver, and once at a conference in Ontario, where we spent a swift afternoon in amiable anecdote — and we corresponded only occasionally. But she was *there*: there in imagination, there to reach, there as encouragement. She always wrote encouraging letters. It was one of her ways of reaching out to others, which is why she became friend to so many. Even strangers came to know her personally. She responded to requests with kindness and courtesy, read others' work with sympathy and appreciation, *shared* in her community. Dave Godfrey said once, when he was asked whom he wrote for, that he wrote for Margaret Laurence. Though at the time he had never met her, she was already an image, a conduit to understanding. "She is unforgettable," wrote Marian Engel, "because she is *us*." Through her, as her African journal says of foreign travel, we came to know something more about that strangest of countries, ourselves.

It was by no means a passive, pallid knowledge that connected her with others. Margaret Laurence lived with a fierce desire for the future, a desire *for* the future, a desire that the future not just inherit the past but actively live to fulfil its own potential. Mistakes were something she recognized as human, and sometimes even enjoyed — but stupidity and bias were anathema. Impediments to understanding, they were the real enemies of the future; they prevented people from making informed choices, prevented people from recognizing what moral behaviour really was, prevented them from valuing the consequences that their own

actions would have on others. The stupid and the biased, whatever their declared allegiance to community, always live alone, and Margaret Laurence fought their brand of isolation passionately. She opposed racism, and championed the rights of women; she opposed bigotry, and sympathized with those whom social establishments had disenfranchised. Her essays and stories are full of insights into the selfishness that motivates intolerance, and the hope and desperation that alike sometimes mask as idiosyncrasy. Learning the edges of one's own limitations is not an easy task, but it's what Margaret Laurence asked of all her readers. Hers was a moral desire for the world, fed by a glimpse of an unselfish, true community in which persons, not positions, might thrive.

The broad outline of her life is familiar to readers of her books. Born Jean Margaret Wemyss in Neepawa, Manitoba, in 1926, she was early orphaned (throughout her life she was concerned with tales of roots and origins and home). She was deeply influenced by her Scots-Canadian heritage, her maternal grandfather's sense of order, and the electrifying narratives of the Old Testament: all of which she absorbed and resisted in equal measure, making them her own. Brought up by Margaret Simpson Wemyss (her aunt and stepmother, who figures prominently in the personal manuscript she was completing in the last months of her life), she went on to Winnipeg's United College in 1944. Married to an engineer, Jack Laurence (from 1947 until their separation in 1962), she lived for differing periods of time in Somaliland, the Gold Coast, Vancouver, and England, raising two children, and from 1953 on, publishing regularly. In 1974 she returned permanently to Canada, to live in Lakefield, Ontario; for a term, she was Chancellor of nearby Trent University in Peterborough. Her works were

translated into several languages. She won an enthusiastic readership in France, Norway, Germany, and Italy as well as at home, and she was the recipient of many honours, both civil and academic.

The settings of her stories reflect her travels: from the Somali folktales with which she began her public career to the Vancouver of Stacey MacAindra's *The Fire-Dwellers*; from the Ghana of *The Tomorrow-Tamer* to the "Manawaka" Manitoba locale of Hagar's *The Stone Angel*, Vanessa's *A Bird in the House*, and Rachel's *A Jest of God*; from the Nigeria of her friend Chinua Achebe (whom she praised in *Long Drums and Cannons*, and who in turn honoured her understanding of Africa) to the England and Ontario of Morag Gunn's *The Diviners*, she wrote of what she knew. But these works are not in that strictest of senses autobiographical. What she knew extended beyond personal experience. Africa taught her to value ancestors as a way of reaching past them to the future. That's what the Manawaka Cycle then set out to do. In one direction it stretches from Hagar Shipley's childhood to Piquette Tonnerre's youth; in another it reaches from the town dump and the railway tracks and the burned-out Métis settlement to the offices of academe, the salons of propriety, and the many-storied castles-in-the-air — from all of which are dreams and disasters born.

An adept at the craft of words, Margaret Laurence never separated literature from the empirical world of class, gender, place, and age. The Manawaka Cycle focuses on people; it records how separate characters turn into a people; it flows, as *The Diviners* has it, both backwards and forwards at once, shaping words out of silence into rhythms of recognition. The way she wrote altered how Canadian writers responded to words. Through her, Canadian cadences became a language of art, rooted in place, yet shared. She

proffered alternatives both to received formulas of historical value and to received equations between substance and speech. Canadian readers recognized themselves in her works; others have found there an intricate record of human relationships and the artistry of formal design. These are not exclusive reactions; they are complementary testaments to the continuing power of an ethical art.

That, as a community, we share a moral responsibility for the future was Margaret Laurence's constant theme. She dramatized it in a variety of ways, probing the lives of women, articulating the voices of tale-tellers and diviners. It is a theme she addressed directly in a speech called "My Final Hour," which she gave at Trent University and later published in *Canadian Literature* 100. There is no secret of life, she said, "or any wisdom except the passionate plea of caring." "Cultivate the art of patience," she said. But learn. Learn actively. Avoid the deadly sin of despair. Learn compassion. Remember you are unique, and in so remembering, learn to honour others. "Know that your commitment is above all to life itself." These words — honour, caring, commitment, compassion — spell out what she held to be of value. They are qualities she would never have claimed to possess — only to be seeking to possess, in order to share — but she did possess them. They are part of the reason we collectively called her friend, and why we remember her.

W. H. NEW



ON THE VERGE

**** PIERRE BERTON, *Vimy*. McClelland & Stewart, \$24.95. Why do we still read the *Iliad*, that bloody story of an expedition in prehistory against an ancient city that has long been an Anatolian dustheap? For some of the same reasons as, I suggest, will justify our reading Pierre Berton's *Vimy*. Of course, Homer was a great poet, while Berton is of the gang of Herodotus, a competent and occasionally eloquent prose narrator; but most of us have to read the poetry in translation, which tends to cancel out the matter of literary quality. And in other matters I find Homer's verse epic, and Berton's creditable attempt at a prose epic, surprisingly alike in their impact. They tell us of the pride and futility of war. The best warriors of Greece went out for a decade to humble a trading city, and a good section of Canada's youth marched up an inconsiderable but highly fortified ridge in France to their deaths. The survivors captured the ridge, but the generals' unpreparedness negated their victory. The battle showed that Canadian improvisers could be better at modern warfare than spit-and-polish British. Scenes of appealing cruelty balanced scenes of heroism and the great comradeship that comes from peril shared. These are things we should all know of, and Berton tells them well, avoiding the excessive impasto of picturesque detail that mars some of his earlier chronicles. There is a pride in human courage and ingenuity and a horror at the uses to which both are put in war, and we are led firmly to the question Berton poses in his last sentence. "Was it worth it? The answer, of course, is *no*." G.W.

**** MAURICE LEMIRE, gen. ed., *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec*. Tome IV, 1960-1969. Fides, \$60.00. This magnificent bio-biblio-critical series is one of the most valuable reference works ever to be published on francophone Québec writings. The editors list all works published in the period covered by the volume, and for most they have assembled a separate scholarly essay. These vary in length, in accord with the importance the editors (and current critical estimate) attach to the work in question. Brief biographical and bibliographical notes — and memoirs, relevant illustrations of paintings, posters, advertising handbills, and cover designs — complete the coverage. Such a work is not without its theoretical quarrels, not least those which would

question the principles of its evaluative hierarchy. But this series does not pretend to close off critical debate. Rather, it opens up possibilities. In its detailed attention to matters of text, it clarifies some of the contexts of publishing history, and openly suggests some directions for further enquiry.

W.N.

**** ROBERT MCCRUM et al., *The Story of English*. Viking/BBC Pubns., \$43.95. This handsome publication is the companion volume to the successful PBS television series on the origins and current character of the English language. The illustrations are splendid. But even finer is the commonsense clarity with which the authors address issues of sound and structure, solecisms and standards, wherever English is spoken. England and the U.S. are still, by the terms of this book, the "two homelands" of the language — an unnecessary dualism, to my mind — but the attention to detail is a great virtue, and the range of examples from more than these two societies should do much to extend an appreciation of the language's real dimensions. One petty footnote: Canadians with good ears, the authors write, can pick out other Canadians on the other side of crowded rooms. That being so, it puzzles me that, as here, others should still think we uniformly rhyme "boat" with "about."

W.N.

*** COLIN NICHOLSON and PETER EASINGWOOD, eds., *Canadian Story and History 1885-1985*. Edinburgh University, \$5.50. A collection of papers given at the 10th annual conference of the British Association for Canadian Studies, this work focuses on several overlapping themes: the roles of history in literature, the structures of fiction in historical change, the differences between event-as-fact and event-as-belief. Riel and Macdonald figure largely (in essays on Wiebe and Pratt, for example); other papers deal instructively with Ontario pioneer myths and the modelling role of Ireland in Quebec's cultural history. Especially stimulating is Robert Kroetsch's introductory address. It takes up a familiar theme, but does it well. It's a meditation on Canada's "postmodern" identity as "borderland," on the (oral) unity of (dialogic) disunity, on the (antiheroic) cultural resonance of "traces, lies, misreadings, concealments, fragments," on the celebratory possibilities of marginality. "The unnamings alters the naming," Kroetsch writes. "The local pride speaks, the oral tradition speaks its tentative nature, its freedom from the authorized text."

W.N.

** RON GRAHAM, *One-Eyed Kings*. Collins, \$24.95. Ron Graham is the ghost who mostly wrote Jean Chrétien's memoirs, *Straight from the Heart*, which was partly a spinoff from the research Graham did for the *Saturday Night* articles that formed the basis for the present book, *One-Eyed Kings*, a study of Canada's four most recent prime ministers. Graham's epigraph is the tag: "In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king," which he attributes to H. G. Wells. In fact it is an old English folk saying that Wells picked up to give him a plot for a story, and the implications from the Wellsian story are oddly different from those of Graham's book. Graham suggests that political leaders, though they never see their world complete, see and therefore know more of it than ordinary people. Wells ironically suggests that to be one-eyed in a country of the blind may be a disadvantage, because people blind from birth know their way about their world without sight and are perfectly adapted to it, while the one-eyed man blunders about it with half a useless sense. This Wellsian conclusion is certainly not Graham's intent. He takes his men seriously as leaders; their very position, he suggests, particularly in our information-oriented age, gives them broader areas of knowledge than most ordinary citizens. That provides each with his one eye. The other eye is marred by limitations of feeling (Trudeau) or intelligence (Mulroney) with Turner having little of either and Clark wandering about as the good man who lost his way. It is a big verbose book, written in the aggravating new well-laudered collective style of the *Saturday Nighters*; there is little bite to it and only the fading *wuffwuff* of a bark.

g.w.

** OLIVER GOLDSMITH, *Autobiography*, edited by Wilfred E. Myatt. 2nd edition. Lancelot Press, \$6.95. The reputation of the Canadian Oliver Goldsmith has always been a curious and fragile one. Apart from a few trivial lyrics, he wrote a single poem, *The Rising Village*, a kind of faint and distant echo of *The Deserted Village* by his famous great-uncle and namesake, and he has found his way into the histories of Canadian writing and into Canadian Literature courses mainly by the accident of *The Rising Village* being the first poem published in Canada. Robert Hayman, of course, preceded him by a couple of centuries with the first English poems written in Canada (and was in fact the better poet). Otherwise, Goldsmith lived the life of an exemplary civil servant, and his only other known writing was a scanty autobiog-

raphy, which in the present edition is hidden like a silver dime in a Christmas pudding, a mere 25 pages of text embedded in a mass of notes and other impediments that bring the total length to 174 pages. It is a monstrous piece of swollen bookmaking to introduce us to a jejune narrative whose dullness reflects the personal insignificance of a man whom a literary accident and a famous family name raised to an importance far greater than his works deserved.

G.W.

* RICHARD VAN DER BEETS, *The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Narrative*. University Press of America, \$7.25. Perhaps this expensive little booklet (\$7.25 for 43 pages if one counts out footnotes and blank leaves) is most interesting as an example of the inveterate inability of some academic critics to read a text for what it is, and their compulsion always to seek hidden motives. In fact the whole essay — which counts as American such Canadian captives as John Tanner and John R. Jewett — is organized on the presupposition of intents that over-ride the primary one of telling a tale. The first three chapters deal with the captivity narrative as “religious expression,” as “propaganda,” and as “penny dreadful,” an exploitation of public interest in sensationalism. The fact that the captive may really think he has an interesting story passes Professor Van Der Beets by, so that there is no chapter on the narrative as “experience,” while what one would have thought the main secondary interest of such writings, their value as documents, is equally neglected, and there is no chapter on the narrative as “history” or even “autobiography.” I suppose the last chapter, on the narrative as “archetype” does make a slight bow to its role as a sub-literary genre, though how many captives actually saw themselves, even subconsciously, as “archetypal initiates,” going through “Separation,” “Transformation,” and “Return,” is doubtful. With few exceptions they were unsophisticated people with little didactic intent and little knowledge of literary devices. They had had strange, unusual experiences and some felt impelled to tell about them, though some told reluctantly. Their accounts should be read primarily for what they were meant to be: truelife tales and perhaps warnings.

G.W.

* WILLIAM SCARTH MOORSOM, *Letters from Nova Scotia*, ed. Marjory Whitelaw. Oberon Press, \$25.00. There is an initial deception in this volume, for in fact it is not wholly by William Scarth Moorsom. He is only one of the letter writers, diarists, and travellers whose observations on Nova Scotia in the century before Confederation have been excerpted and put together by Marjory Whitelaw in this nostalgic volume. It introduces one to many curious examples and insights relating to life in the Atlantic province during this period; I picked up quite a number of interesting trifles of knowledge as I was reading it. But there is, apart from Marjory Whitelaw’s introduction (and her bridging passages between the items by Lord Dalhousie and Sir George Head and the Rev. James MacGregor and a dozen others, including the unduly credited and rather dull Captain Moorsom), nothing in the volume that has not already seen the light of print. As far as I can see every item has been published before, even if as long ago as 1750. This makes all the more presumptuous the publisher’s statement on the copyright page that “no part of this book may be reproduced by any means,” etc. In fact, of course, the greater part of the book is in the public domain, and has long been so, and anyone can reprint with impunity everything except Whitelaw’s bits and pieces. I am all for guarding strictly the rights of living or recently dead authors, but publishers cannot be allowed to step in and cavalierly claim rights over material long out of copyright. Oberon and others, please take note and claim only *what is due* to you and your authors!

G.W.

REPRINTS

Among recent paperback reprints are several from Macmillan, including Neil Bissoondath’s *Digging Up the Mountains* and Morley Callaghan’s *Our Lady of the Snows*. From Totem Press came three books that variously derive from the new European presence in Canada: George Jonas’s thriller *Final Decree* (\$7.95); Josef Skvorecky’s stories of growing up during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, *The Swell Season* (\$6.95); and George Faludy’s autobiographical account of contending with fascism and communism in control of Hungary, *My Happy Days in Hell* (\$9.95).

W.N.

LAST PAGE

SUDDENLY, the short story is everywhere. After years of neglecting the genre, the critical industry has rediscovered it, and there are histories, analyses, anthologies, collections, editions, and short guides abounding. Also a few theories. And a good (if perhaps overly taxonomic) climate in which new short story writers might get their work into print. Readers are ready.

Recent books across the editorial desk here range from a two-volume edition of *The French Fabliau* (Bibliothèque National ms. No. 837) by Raymond Eichmann and John Duval (Garland, Vol. 1: \$40.00, Vol. 2: \$30.00), to *New Directions 49* (New Directions, \$19.50) and the *Prize Stories, O. Henry Awards 1986* (Doubleday, \$24.95). There is, of course, some question as to whether fabliaux (Bédier's "Contes a rire en vers") are short stories at all, but neither mediaeval writers nor very contemporary ones seem much worried about sticking to critical definitions of genre. (Geoff Hancock's new anthology, *Moving Off The Map: from "story" to "fiction,"* Black Moss, \$12.95, argues that newest writers in Canada — there are 23 here, from Frances Itani and Ray Smith to William Goede, Aritha Van Herk, Rohinton Mistry, and bp Nichol — are spurning "realism" in favour of the paradoxical fictions of "ourselves" that more truly represent contemporary Canada: such stories are "transcultural," full of "mirrors" and "labyrinths," fantasies, and in Neruda's words "fabrications, myths, contradictions, and mortal games.") Neither contemporary writing nor medieval writing, moreover, is much afraid of drawing morals. The fabliaux — this edition supplies French versions of 28 works by Guillaume de Machaut, Chrétien de Troyes, Boccaccio, and others, with 37 translations and useful notes on the language, remain the more direct; one tale closes (its octosyllabic rhyming form colouring the tone of the remarks somewhat): "por ce ne doit nul aastir / de chose q'il ne puet fornir, / por ce est droiz qui mal porchace / qu'a la fine mau li face."

Voice, in other words, modifies statement — a point which alters the apparent "realism" that continues (*pace* theory) to characterize contemporary writings. The quest for the "new" — observable in recent Australian and New Zealand titles, Frank Moorhouse's *The State of the Art* (Penguin, (\$9.95) and Michael Morrissey's *The New Fiction* (Lindon Publishing, NZ\$17.95) is often a quest for

formal disjunction; however, one repeatedly finds a counterbalance in literary practice.

Hence Murray Bail's *The Drover's Wife and Other Stories* (University of Queensland, A\$7.95) is full of verbal play and intertextual games, while Graeme Lay's *Dear Mr Cairney* (Mallinson Rendel, NZ\$14.95) proceeds through glimpses of understanding acquired in "real life" — or at least in formally mimetic circumstances; Keri Hulme's stories are full of elliptical voices, Philip Wilson's *South Pacific Street* stories (Pilgrims South, NZ \$14.95) full of conversational closure.

Moorhouse's intent (as the pun in his title makes clear) is to show how fiction comments on or reveals "the art of living in Australia" — and his section titles ("Marriage, Parenthood, Ancestors" or "Low Life") convey something of his expectations. But we misread if we do not at the same time hear the ironic voice that says "Low Life," or comparably (in the New Zealand volume) hear the sardonic allusions to a particular cultural experience in titles (and stories) like "Climbing Rangitoto / Descending the Guggenheim" or "Jack Kerouac Sat Down Beside the Wanganui River and Wept" or even "Snake." Morrissey's valuable, extra-long (74-page) introduction talks about the "strategies" of silence (in Wystan Curnow's work, for instance) that are themselves speech; silence, moreover, is merely one of the strategies for dealing with "crises," for shifting fiction out of its contentment with lyrical falsification of experience and its equation of reality with the "mildly miserable." Morrissey challenges the sociocultural base he takes to be axiomatic in a term like "Commonwealth Literature," and argues that literature must be read through its formal history instead — read as "postmodernist" in particular.

Another of Frank Moorhouse's categories, however, reveals one of the problems implicit in the "new" nomenclature; it's called "Games, Fantasies, Lyricism," and it's trying to find a way of bringing together at least three kinds of disjuncture under one roof. All three bear upon notions of power (power *played* or power *denied: presence, or absence*) — hence for all their postmodernism, they are not divorced from a solid base. But that some stories should close in linguistic self-congratulation while others call for inferential understanding of the inadequacy of language means that there remain instructive differences which the one "category" cannot absolutely contain. This distinction, moreover, also (and perhaps unknowingly) guides several perspectives to-

wards value in literature. The *New Directions* anthology rediscovers B. S. Johnson's work some years after his death; the O. Henry anthology gives its first prize to a new story by Alice Walker. The Johnson is full of self-referentiality (language arranged as concrete medium); the Walker proceeds by voice (society overheard in the implications of what is said, or left unsaid and still overheard). Both are fragmentary. One deals in mirrors, the other in echoes.

Midnight Mass (Peter Owen, n.p.) brings together a selection of Paul Bowles' superb stories, including several of his quietly violent Moroccan fables. To place beside it the selection of Jane Bowles' letters *Out in the World* (Paget, \$32.00; pa. \$20.00), ed. Millicent Dillon, is to open up a quite different vantage point on both story and person. Jane Bowles' letters to her husband — especially during his absence in Tangier — resound with anger and pain. Moreover, while the letters in sequence create a narrative out of Jane Bowles' life, they also tell smaller, implied, "inside" narratives in the growing depression/resistance-to-statement that joins style to life. The last letter closes: "I'll finish this off [*word crossed out*]. If I wanted to spend more time [*unclear crossed out*] time [*if crossed out*] I would let you know — about any" — but there is no closure in the text. The closures all lie in the implied life.

Indirection was of course the characteristic mode of those early twentieth-century writers Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf, whose experiments in ellipsis revolutionized English-language short story form. That it was a slow revolution says something about readers' willingness to take familiar literary forms as normative absolutes. Closure and adventure were the century's early norms. Woolf and Mansfield — as is evidenced most recently in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$16.95) or the Virago Modern Classics *The Aloe*, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$14.95) — challenged what those norms said about women's place in society, and they challenged through language, using silences and breaks in the frames of convention to resist containment. "Stories" took place in the spaces the reader came to understand about people, not in any sequence of events. Statements were suspect, and therefore set on moving grounds. In contrast, Tennessee Williams' *Collected Stories*, with introduction by Gore Vidal (New Directions, \$19.95) — even the contrast in titles between this volume and

that of the collected Woolf spells out a different perspective towards the limits of genre — relies throughout on the resonant force of statement. His, too, are stories of voice (like Anderson's and Callaghan's): "Talking about Salvation I think there's a good deal of truth in the statement . . .," "Billy Spangler was a very moral guy . . ." But any challenges to authority here have to do with the lateral rearrangement of the order, notwithstanding fundamental questioning of the adequacy of language to convey personal experience in the first place. As is indicated by *Women's Work: Contemporary Short Stories by New Zealand Women*, ed. Marion McLeod and Lydia Wevers (Oxford, NZ\$19.95), gender does not restrict literary mode or the range of unease. But it does shape experience. These writers (Joy Cowley, Janet Frame, Jean Watson, Keri Hulme) ask readers to listen past the way they have been trained to hear the world, and hear it anew.

Harold Orel's excellent *The Victorian Short Story* (Cambridge Univ. Press, \$29.95) not only calls attention to the wealth of British short fiction in the 19th century but also asks why it has been given so little respect. In answer he examines the impact of oral tales (in Ireland and the West Country) and traces the impact on literary convention of Imperial dreams and moral aspirations. More particularly, Orel provides a cogent, lucid account of the way various economic and legal practices (the Stamp Act, for one) shaped papers into journals and provided an opportunity for short fiction (in all its protean guises) to be born.

Among Twayne's recent publications is a series of related works: six mini-histories of national practice in the short story genre: *The Latin American Short Story*, ed. Margaret Sayers Peden; *The Irish Short Story*, ed. James F. Kilroy; *The English Short Story 1880-1945*, ed. Joseph M. Flora; *The English Short Story 1945-1980*, ed. Dennis Vannatta; *The American Short Story Before 1850* by Eugene Current-Garcia; *The American Short Story 1900-1945*, ed. Philip Stevick (\$27.00 each). All but one are collections of survey essays, together with notes and selective checklists of short story criticism. Readers will argue here and there with various judgments, and be frustrated (as the authors will have been) at the limits that space imposes on commentary, but these books *altogether* constitute a substantial and useful contribution to current knowledge about the genre. That said, there are surprising gaps (Current-Garcia, for example, concentrates on Irving, Hawthorne,

Poe, Simms, and frontier humourists; but while he provides interesting accounts of the emergence of American story-writing from fictional practices made familiar through Defoe, he pays no attention at all to writing by women). Less surprisingly, there are provocative ideas and tangible strengths. Joanne Trautmann Banks, for example (in Flora's book), after a largely thematic description of works by Woolf and Mansfield, instructively probes the validity of trying to compare the two bodies of writing. Mary Rohrberger (in Stevick's book) tries to rescue the term "regionalism" from American critical disrepute. Of all the editors, moreover, it is Stevick himself whose introductory essay most repays rereading. The standard editorial practice here is to survey selectively what the subsequent essays collectively suggest. Stevick does more. He provides an absorbing account of many of the currents of thought and the daily details of social experience, between 1900 and 1945, that had a bearing on American story-writing — referring to everything from mass magazine circulation figures to readings of critical theory. The problem with "realism," he notes, is that it has been read as a *positive* rather than as *dialectical* term: whereas, unlike "positives," it invites opposition. Such opposition, since 1945, has of course come in many forms — from inside literary practice more than from critical response. The current wave of enthusiasm for the genre is but one sign of the vitality of such processes of literary exchange.

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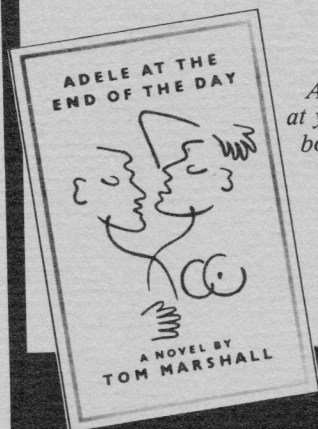
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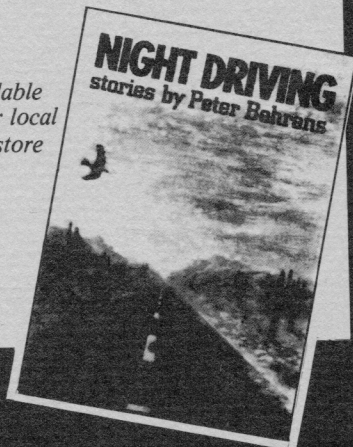
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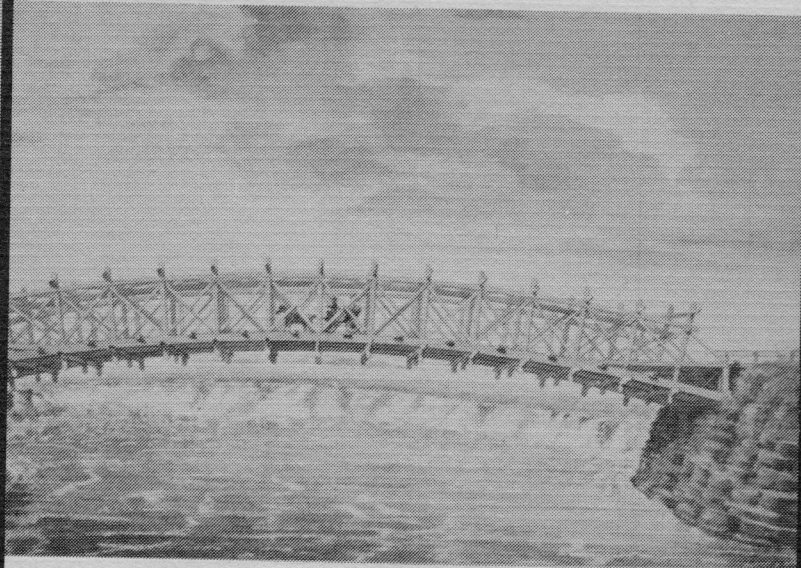


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