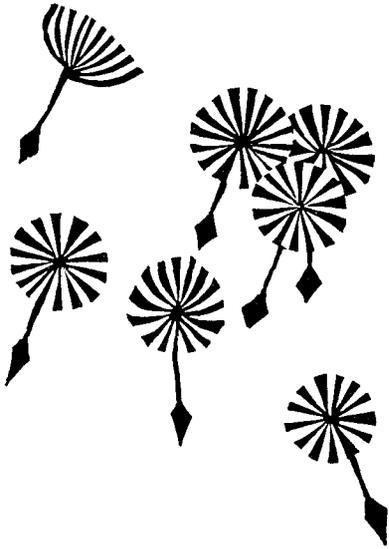


\$7.50 per copy

# CANADIAN LITERATURE N<sup>o</sup>. 115

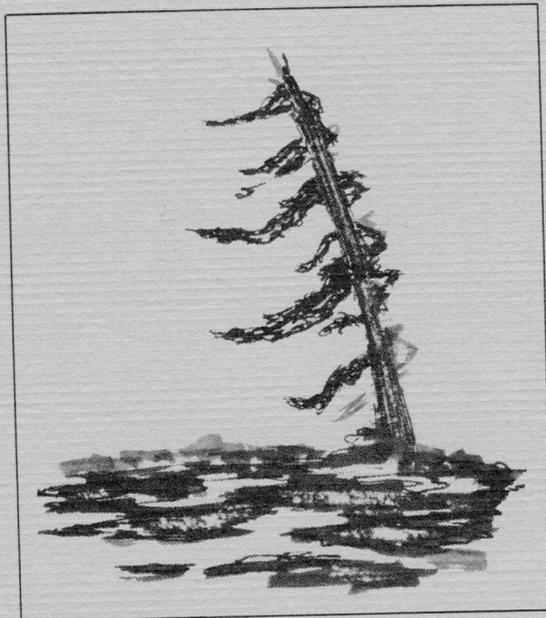
*Winter, 1987*



POETS' WORDS

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

Wilfrid Laurier University Press



**William  
Wilfred  
Campbell**

**Selected Poetry  
and Essays**

**Laurel Boone, editor**

This is a representative collection of the writings of a neglected Canadian author, William Wilfred Campbell (1858-1918).

Among the 112 poems in *William Wilfred Campbell: Selected Poetry and Essays* are the familiar "Indian Summer" and "How One Winter Came in the Lake Region," along with many less well-known love poems, mystical poems, dramatic and narrative poems, war poems, patriotic songs, and occasional poems. Some twenty manuscript pieces are published here for the first time.

The notorious "Mermaid Inn" essay in which Campbell refers to the mythical nature of the cross is included, and so is the letter of self-justification that Campbell wrote — but never sent — to the editor of the *Globe*. Here, too, are speeches, essays published in *The Week* and the *Ottawa Evening Journal*, and significant sections from Campbell's unfinished treatise on evolution, "The Tragedy of Man."

By the time Campbell died on New Year's Day 1918, shifting values had begun to turn critical opinion against his work. Now *William Wilfred Campbell: Selected Poetry and Essays* will enable Canadians to appreciate Campbell's art and to recognize his place in the development of Canadian thought.

Fall 1987 / 272 pp. est. / Cloth \$22.95 (\$28.50 U.S.) tentative / ISBN 0-88920-960-X  
Order from: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3C5

## contents

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER

# CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTÉRATURE CANADIENNE  
NUMBER 115, WINTER 1987

*A Quarterly of Criticism  
and Review*

EDITOR: W. H. New

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:  
L. R. Ricou

ASSISTANT EDITOR:  
Eva-Marie Kröller

BUSINESS MANAGER:  
Beverly Westbrook

PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRIS  
PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Second Class Mail registration  
number 1375

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is  
assisted by the University of B.C. and  
the S.S.H.R.C.C.

*Canadian Literature* is indexed in the  
*Canadian Periodical Index* and is  
available in microfilm from  
University Microfilm International,  
300 North Zeeb Road,  
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106.

Some back issues available.

*Unsolicited manuscripts will not be  
returned unless accompanied by  
stamped, addressed envelopes.*

Address subscriptions to  
Circulation Manager, *Canadian  
Literature*, 2029 West Mall,  
University of British Columbia,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5

SUBSCRIPTION \$20 INDIVIDUAL; \$25  
INSTITUTION; PLUS \$5 POSTAGE  
OUTSIDE CANADA

ISSN 0008-4360

Editorial: Otherworlds 3

### ARTICLES

SMARO KAMBOURELI

Stealing the Text: George Bowering's  
"Kerrisdale Elegies" and Dennis Cooley's  
"Bloody Jack" 9

DIANA M. A. RELKE

Demeter's Daughter: Marjorie Pickthall  
& the Quest for Poetic Identity 28

SUSAN GLICKMAN

"Proceeding Before the Amorous  
Invisible": Phyllis Webb and the Ghazal 48

ALEX KIZUK

Religion, Place, & Self in Early  
Twentieth-Century Canada: Robert  
Norwood's Poetry 66

MARGERY FEE

Stephen Scobie: Biographical 81

JACK F. STEWART

Image and Mood: Recent Poems by  
Michael Bullock 107

DAVID SOLWAY

The End of Poetry 127

### POEMS

BY YVONNE TRAINER (6, 27, 64), PADDY  
MCCALLUM (24), PAT JASPER (43), RALPH  
GUSTAFSON (45), DERK WYNAND (47, 126),  
LACHLAN MURRAY (61, 123), ROBERT KENDALL  
(63), ROBERT GIBBS (65, 102), ALAN R. WILSON  
(78), MICHAEL DARLING (104), DALE ZIEROTH  
(105, 122, 124), MICHAEL BULLOCK (106),  
R. HILLIS (125)

## BOOKS IN REVIEW

BY PAUL HJARTARSON (135), FRANCES W. KAYE (138), PHILIP LANTHIER (140), THELMA MCCORMACK (142), MICHAEL PETERMAN (144), SAM SOLECKI (146), BRUCE WHITEMAN (148), CORAL ANN HOWELLS (150), ANDREA LEBOWITZ (152), ELIZABETH WATERSTON (155), PAUL TIESSEN (157), BEN JONES (160), ALLEN E. HYE (162), PAUL G. SOCKEN (164, 193), ADRIENNE KERTZER (165), JOHN OWER (167), NEIL B. BISHOP (169), ANTHONY RASPA (172), JANE MOSS (175), MARGARET JENSEN (176), GIOVANNI BONANNO (178), MARGUERITE ANDERSEN (182), STANLEY S. ATHERTON (184), RICHARD BEVIS (186), MARGARET DOYLE (188), PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH (190), WILLIAM LATTA (191), DIANA BRYDON (194), ALAN SHUCARD (196), ANDREW TAYLOR (197), KATHLEEN TUDOR (199), EVA TIHANYI (200), F. W. WATT (202), LINDA ROGERS (204), MIRIAM WADDINGTON (205), BERT ALMON (206), MARGARET BELCHER (208), LAUREL BOONE (209), C. BOUYGUES (211), ROBERTA BUCHANAN (213), RODERICK W. HARVEY (214), DAVID DOWLING (216), MARGERY FEE (218), JAMES GELLERT (220), RONALD HATCH (223), LINDA HUTCHEON (225), JACQUES JULIEN (227), ROBERT G. LAWRENCE (229), ARTHUR ADAMSON (230), LOUISE MCKINNEY (232), ANN MESSENGER (234), JAMES NOONAN (235), DANIEL L. OVERMYER (238), ROBERT THACKER (239), GERALD THOMAS (242), LEON SURETTE (245), LESLIE ARMOUR (246), ANN LEGER ANDERSON (249), MARK BENSON (251), RICHARD CAVELL (253), CARROL F. COATES (255), SUSAN RUDY DORSCHT (257), JAMES P. GILROY (260), CLIFFORD G. HOLLAND (261), LAURENCE HUTCHMAN (263), LORNA IRVINE (264), HELMUT KALLMAN (267), C. KANAGANAYAKAM (267), HENRY KREISEL (272), LINDA LAMONT-STEWART (275), MARJORY LANG (277), BARBARA LECKIE (278), RANDALL MAGGS (280), GEORGE WOODCOCK (290)



## OPINIONS & NOTES

JOHN OWER

The Story of an Affinity: Lampman's "The Frogs" and Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters"

## OTHERWORLDS

VIRAGO TRAVELLERS has republished the 1852 edition of Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, with a lively introduction by Margaret Atwood. It's the introduction and the context that reshape the book here. Atwood reflects on her personal connection with Moodie (Classic, Shadow) — also on Mrs. Moodie as history, on women in nineteenth-century Canada, and on the travel-literature conventions which Mrs. Moodie emulated: the ordeal of the journey, the sketch of setting and person, the nascent plot, the "self-perceived lunacy." To the list of parallels Atwood suggests (Traill, Langton, Jameson, all observing Ontario), one might add another context still: that of the settlement journal — which in Western Canada and Labrador, for example — Susan Allison, Elizabeth Goudie — was published years later. This additional filter reshapes the easy distinction between *then* and *now*, and reminds us that "pioneers" not only extend definitions of space but also alter our expectations of attitude and time.

Of review books that have lately arrived on the editorial desk, several take up this proposition, or at least seek to change the filters through which we glimpse the past. They range from anthology to history, biography to critical theory. Alan Ross's *London Magazine 1961-1985*, for example (Chatto & Windus), reads almost as a Who's Who of three generations of writers (R. K. Narayan to Christopher Hope, Malcolm Lowry to Paul Theroux) and reminds us of the constant quality the *London Magazine* has sought to sustain. Eliza Fay's *Original Letters from India (1719-1815)*, ed. E. M. Forster, with a new introduction by M. M. Kaye (Hogarth), is a reminder of a different sense of Empire — one in which London still asserts its supremacy, but in which Calcutta and Mysore ensnare. Literally, for Eliza Fay — who with her persistently incompetent husband was imprisoned on arrival in one of the princely states. But metaphorically as well. These letters (shades of Arabella Fermor, hints of Mrs. Moodie to come) are doughty, witty expressions of the self-confident British woman, and of her fascination with the otherworlds which she can perceive but never quite understand. A book like Naveen Patnaik's *A Second Paradise* (Doubleday) is more striking for its visual record — offering a glimpse of Indian courtly life (through art and architecture, reproduced here in rich full colour plates), and of its rituals of

opulence and power, to which few travellers of Mrs. Fay's time would have had close access.

In Glynne Wickham's *A History of the Theatre* (Cambridge) by contrast, the Empire figures scarcely at all. Except inferentially. A well-illustrated guide to development in European drama from the Greeks to the Expressionists, the book comments on theatrical design, dramatic presumptions, and changing modes of critical approach; it does not shrink from discussions of the politics and economics of theatrical eminence, but it also does not address the politics of omission. That is, when received taste asserts its "universal" standard, it implicitly consigns "other" activities — those which do not fit a category — into a historical dustbin. Hence, here, there are comments on eighteenth-century opera, but no mention of Mrs. Brooke, William Shield, and the popularity of *Rosina*. Sarah Bernhardt is here, but no mention of the significance of her tours abroad. "America" is mentioned repeatedly in that expansive British gesture towards the western hemisphere; but there isn't even a hint that Canada exists as a separate culture, or that there were lively theatrical traditions growing in *all* the colonies. Plainly, they did not impinge on London. Such cavils are, in some degree, beside the point, for they ask a different question from those which Wickham addresses in detail. They call, moreover — inevitably — for another book.

David Mackay's *In the Wake of Cook* (Victoria University Press, N.Z.) probes the economics of eighteenth-century empire in just such an "alternative" way. Subtitled "Exploration, Science and Empire," the book talks of the "rediscoveries" of the world made possible by advances in telescope and other navigational instruments. But basic to European expansion was commodity control: the manipulation of trade in furs, cotton, coffee, tea, pepper, sugar, silk, and slaves (and consequently of food for slaves, which led to various expeditions transplanting breadfruit and other crops from one territory to another). The scientific advances that sustained imperial expression had many less than admirable consequences. But with the whole world as a laboratory, scientists by the end of that century were also on the edge of the integrative theories that in the century to come would sustain a belief both in taxonomic and political order.

Other books offer different glimpses past the conventional paradigms of received history. The papers from a 1983 conference of Australian aboriginal writers, for example (*Aboriginal Writing Today*, ed. J. Davis and B. Hodge, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies), hints at the oral dimensions of native Australian literature, and at the Fanonian politics of writing an aboriginal literature in "white forms." (The continuing *Handbook of North American Indians* series from the Smithsonian Institution — vols. 8-11 are now available — probes similar issues, though more formally, and in contexts involving the analysis of artifact, mythologies, and living patterns.) "An Emigrant Mechanic's" *Settlers and Convicts* (reprinted from the 1847 edition by Melbourne University Press,

and attributed here to Alexander Harris) is a narrative observation of the “Objectionable and mischievous conduct” of certain classes of Australian. Implicitly judgmental, and as marked by the nineteenth-century travel sketch conventions as is Mrs. Moodie’s journal, it translates the perspectives of the “rebels” through the eyes of orderly desire. What constitutes “rebellion” depends, that is, on the angle of political commitment. On ethnicity, gender, class, power, speech.

Katherine Middleton Murry’s “unknown life” of her father, *Beloved Quixote* (Souvenir Press), is a loving testament, a reclamation of John Middleton Murry from the critical enclosure (“husband to Katherine Mansfield”) to which literary history has generally consigned him. *Ocean of Story* (Viking) recovers some 35 uncollected stories by Christina Stead, reminding us of the degree to which reputations still rest in booklength publications, and of the disservice this critical shortcut does to writers who work in shorter forms and journals. By contrast two volumes from larger series (vol. 5 of *A History of Australia* and vol. 9 of *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, both from Melbourne University Press) suggest a massive effort to deal with detail, but resist being assessed individually. In these cases it’s the accomplishment of the whole that matters. Finally, Rolston-Bain (of Windsor, Ontario) has published a treasure: vol. B-8, Colección “Documenta Novae Hispaniae,” ed. David Marley, is a facsimile Spanish/French edition of the 1763 Treaty of Paris. It’s a potent reminder of the role of the Spanish (too long neglected) in European-Canadian history. It’s also a nicely phrased diplomatic dialogue of an unrepentant political standoff, between “El Rei Christianísimo” and “el Rei de la Gran-Bretaña,” unquestionably polite, and indisputably registering a mutual disdain.

But is this a “final” boundary after all? There are innerworlds, innerfilms, for which still other writers seek expression, and they, too, reconstitute the way we perceive. A. J. Hassall, writing of Randolph Stow’s extraordinary books in *Strange Country* (University of Queensland Press) speaks of the many worlds “peopled by visitants, . . . strangers and afraid, in landscapes which are alien, and yet which reflect that strangeness they also find when they look inwards. . . .” Van Ikin’s historical collection of *Australian Science Fiction* (Academy Chicago) begins in monsters and stellar invasions and ends in the economics of shadows, pursuing a parallel quest for meaning beyond the definitions of the tangible. It’s a context of sorts in which pleasurably to read Umberto Eco’s *Travels in Hyperreality* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), a collection of essays on waxworks and holograms and some of the ideas they suggest: the idea of idealism, the absolution (and absolutism) of falsehood, the American craving for opulence, the approximate realities of museum artifacts. Americans live not for fantasy, Eco argues, but for a trip to Fantasyland; one sign of the current fascination with the past is the often unthinking millenarianism that governs contemporary politics; the “inconceivable” happens every day, therefore what explains the passive deter-

mination among so many people to define themselves apart from experience? These are lively, provocative essays, on subjects that range from Islam to *Superman* to Marshall McLuhan. To what end? "Sometimes you speak," Eco writes, "because you feel the moral obligation to say something, not because you have the 'scientific' certainty that you are saying it in an unassailable way." Yes, indeed.

W.N.

## LETTERS TO MARY

*Yvonne Trainer*

I.

Mary you are the one who writes first  
though I know you curse me  
because I promised to  
How quickly I open the envelope  
sealed with the extra scotch tape  
My hands sticky with excitement  
or is it from the nights I clung to  
the doorhandle the dash the armrest  
while you passed every car on the highway  
after some guy  
who dented your fender  
or gave you the finger  
or yelled at you out the window It is evening

You write to ask what I'm doing  
You write to ask if I'm writing poetry  
You write to say you've taken up hang-gliding  
just for the exercise

I walk corridors  
The rooms magnified mailboxes  
Remembering the happy faces  
the upside down sad faces  
you painted on the wall  
Bottles you kept on the sill  
Footsteps you inked in red on the dull ceiling  
above the door out the window It is dark  
I scuttle hallways





# STEALING THE TEXT

## *George Bowering's "Kerrisdale Elegies" and Dennis Cooley's "Bloody Jack"*

*Smaro Kamboureli*

Transformer l'oeuvre en chose, muette donc et qui se tait en parlant parce qu'elle se passe de signature, cela ne se peut qu'à inscrire la signature *dans le texte*, ce qui revient à signer deux fois en ne signant plus.

The process of transforming a work into a thing — mute, therefore, and silent when speaking, because dispensing with the signature — can only be brought about by inscribing the signature *in the text*, which amounts to signing twice in the process of not signing any more.

JACQUES DERRIDA, *Signéponge = Signsponge*<sup>1</sup>

**B**OTH GEORGE BOWERING'S *Kerrisdale Elegies* and Dennis Cooley's *Bloody Jack*,<sup>2</sup> like most contemporary long poems, resist generic definition. Bowering's long poem is not simply an elegy: it is an elegy imitating another elegy, specifically Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. To use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, it is a "double-voiced" poem,<sup>3</sup> a poem which is generically located on the edge of quotation and discourse, thus blurring the difference between mimesis and originality. Similarly, *Bloody Jack* defines itself as a "book," but it is not a book of monologic discourse. It is a collage of genres such as the oral poem of the folk tradition, the ballad, the elegy, lyrics with their musical scores and the concrete poem, a collage which threatens to destroy the poem's frame as a book.

The long poem's resistance to definition has much to do with the dialogic interaction that informs its discourse. Inclusiveness is one of the generative principles that locates the long poem within a web of genres. The reader is invited to recognize a "new" genre of impure origins, a discursive formation which results from an ongoing dialogue of genres. The generic intertextuality of the long poem parodies the singularity of traditional genre definitions. The simultaneous presence of various genres and their heterogeneous interrelationships mark what Bakhtin would call the "polyphonic"<sup>4</sup> nature of the long poem. As a polyphonic structure, the long poem "novelizes"<sup>5</sup> our traditional concepts of genre as well as the specific genres deployed in it. Through their novelization these genres, according to Bakh-

tin, “become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the ‘novelistic’ layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and [. . .] a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality.”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the ultimate carnivalesque element in the long poem is its double intent to be seen as a “new” genre, that is a hybrid of genres, and to resist any attempt toward precise definition.

George Bowering’s *Kerrisdale Elegies* and Dennis Cooley’s *Bloody Jack* exemplify some of the most significant concerns of the long poem as a “new” genre. In my discussion of them I will focus on the transgressive functions of authorial signature in relation to the genres these poems employ. I take signature to relate to the operations between proper names and common nouns, between words and things.<sup>7</sup> The author’s proper name permeates her or his text as it participates in the process of signification that composes the text. The author is written into the text as s/he writes it. Signature is employed as a sign that plays with and against the arbitrariness of signifier and signified, a sign that oscillates between the author’s presence and absence in the text. Signing is also the enabling act that accounts for the author’s use of, and departure from, traditional genres. Bowering’s and Cooley’s writing is both an imitation of existing genres and texts and a transgression of their principles. This parallel writing act is accomplished by interrupting the continuity that validates genre, by apostrophizing what they imitate. I will show, then, how their authorial signatures locate referentiality within the field of textuality.

GIVEN THE LONG POEM’S RESISTANCE to definition, there is a certain appropriateness that the covers of both *Kerrisdale Elegies* and *Bloody Jack* are facial images creating illusions of proximity. In *Kerrisdale Elegies* the cover image is the face of the author wearing dark glasses. The ragged edges of its frame simulate the double texture of a torn photograph, the texture of glossy and rough paper (a manuscript page of writing?). The torn top of the photograph exceeds its margin threatening to erase Bowering’s name: the author’s visage is foregrounded; his name is held in disbelief. The reader is faced with the double bind of signature, the naming of an absent presence.

Cooley wanted a “stylized icon” of himself on the cover of his book,<sup>8</sup> but his publishers did not go along with that. What we see is an indistinct face — the “pale spectacle” of historical Krafchenko taken from a newspaper photograph, a dissolved identity becoming an anonymous icon. It is a face that is more of an outline than a concrete image in which “we can read / inklings of” the author,<sup>9</sup> the surface of a palimpsest where both character and poet blend into each other.

A face in a stage of collapsing, receding into the poem, “a book by Dennis Cooley.”

While both authors hold a pose, their long poems sign themselves on the covers as specific instances of different genres: that of the elegy and that of the book. Yet, as is the case in many long poems, the readily identifiable genres of the elegy and the book are not the sole parameters designating the generic character of *Kerrisdale Elegies* and *Bloody Jack*. The reader can take for granted only a number of elements when dealing with these poems. Two books (two faces): two long poems (“an encyclopedia of genres”<sup>10</sup>): one reader (the viewer). The reader of these two poems finds herself caught in the perennial triangle of the story of desire. Each face presents me with the “organ” I need in order to see it, to touch it; they give me the “eye” and the “ear” through which I can read them.<sup>11</sup> These facial images, the textual masks of the poets, initiate a series of paradoxes between themselves and their referentiality. Beginning with their parodic self-portraits on the covers, Bowering and Cooley imitate the tropes of the genres they employ but at the same time they practise a mimesis that unwrites the style of these tropes. The intertextuality of the generic interplay in the two poems points to an erotics of reading: the poets as faithful or adulterous readers — reading, misreading, plagiarizing.<sup>12</sup> What reconciles the heterogeneous activities within these long poems is the intertextuality of the authors’ signatures. If these authors’ fixed images fail to seduce me, the translation of the authorial image into signature does not.

The authorial signature in *Kerrisdale Elegies* and *Bloody Jack*, which begins to assert itself on the covers, supplements the dialogue of genres in these long poems. The signature does not only authorize the deployment of diverse genres; it thematizes genre while presenting signing as yet another form of writing. “*How can one cite a signature?*” Jacques Derrida asks. “*The signature spreads over everything, but is stripped off or makes itself take off [ . . . ]*.”<sup>13</sup> Through the authorial signature writing becomes rewriting, autographing, a constant revising (reviewing) of the discursive field of the long poem. It allows digressions; it changes the direction of our study, as Gregory L. Ulmer says, between “the author-text relation” thus “allowing contamination between the inside and outside.”<sup>14</sup> The authorial signature, in other words, disseminates in the text not only the author’s presence but his act of writing and what it entails.

This multiple signing enables Bowering and Cooley to play hide-and-seek with their readers. They make brief appearances: the poet as flesh, as desire incarnate, as the one who enters where I as a reader, to “misquote” Bowering, “have been but can never enter” (3.43). The reader is invited to share a slice of life, those fragments that become poetry. The authorial signature foregrounds the presence of the reader in the text while, at the same time, putting this presence under erasure. I’m there, in the text, but at the same time I’m constantly put on hold.



the other Italian locations he refers to; he is a baseball fan and has written about baseball before both in his poetry and in his fiction; there are allusions to some of his favourite poets such as Shelley, H.D., Robin Blaser, and Jack Spicer<sup>15</sup> as well as references to his *A Short Sad Book*. The signature is no longer the author's proper name but has become a metonymy. As Derrida observes, "[t]he *rebus* signature, the metonymic or anagrammatic signature, these are the condition of possibility and impossibility. The *double bind* of a signature event. As if the thing (or the common name of the thing), ought to absorb the proper, to drink it and to retain it in order to keep it. But, in the same stroke, by keeping, drinking, and absorbing it, it is as if the thing (or its name) lost or soiled the proper name."<sup>16</sup> The signature as common name writes the poet into his text while also marking his departure from it, becoming thus a countersignature. The writer's departure — his decomposition that erases the strictures of the dialectic presence/absence — is one of the markers of the elegiac tone of the poem.

God, there goes another breath,  
and I go with it,  
I was further from my grave  
two stanzas back, I'm human.  
Will the universe  
notice my unattached molecules drifting thru?  
Will the dead poets notice our lines appearing among them,  
or are their ears filled with their own music? (2.26-27)

When the author-in-the-text asserts he is dead, when his friends' arms reach toward him to embrace only air, when his lines appear written over and in-between the lines of a dead poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, it is his signature that survives this death incurred in language, that posthumously, postwriterly, keeps him absorbed as a non-proper name in the text.

The translation of Bowering's signature into countersignature is the first marker that designates *Kerrisdale Elegies* as a counterfeit of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. And it is not only the title of Bowering's poem that points to Rilke's *Duino Elegies*. A comparison of Bowering's text to any English translation of Rilke's *Elegies* will testify that Bowering's long poem is a palimpsest, his own text superimposed on Rilke's text. It doesn't really matter what specific translations Bowering used.<sup>17</sup> What matters is the ways in which Rilke is re-cited, countersigned, in the site of Bowering's text. Here is an example from the fourth elegy:

Rilke  
Even when fully intent on one thing,  
we feel another's costly tug. Hostility  
is second nature to us. Having promised  
one another distance, hunting, and home,  
don't lovers always cross each other's boundaries?<sup>18</sup>



than it is, giving in exchange. Parallaxis then signifies the range of forces that build up tradition, the dynamics that gravitate one text toward another and which determine the extent of influence, namely the interdependence of texts as well as the autonomy of individual texts. The parallaxic movement is accomplished through transference by alteration and variation, a transference based on sameness as well as difference. The semantics of parallaxis, as opposed to that of intertextuality, delineates, I believe, the dialogue between texts and genres with greater precision, while its particular semantic configurations evoke the diversity of the dialogic play at work. It indicates an exchange (expropriation), the otherness of text, the shifting of text in alternating contexts, a shift and change which often involve corruption of origins, deviation from an original/originary point.

Bowering's deviations from Rilke's text do not erase the original; they alter it while maintaining the "crossing spools" that affirm not only the sameness that binds the two poems but also Bowering's writing steps that make his own text differ from Rilke's. The parallaxis that informs Bowering's writing act produces a text of marginal differences, a text of difference. For if *Kerrisdale Elegies* is a "translation," it is an annotated "translation," the annotations being Bowering's appropriation of the marginal space and the space between the lines of *Duino Elegies*.

The infidelities that the reader notices in Bowering's "translation" of *Duino Elegies* operate exactly on the level of parallaxis: he remains faithful to the fundamental structure, imagery and ideas of *Duino Elegies* by stealing and appropriating them in his own text through re-writing. One could explain, of course, this appropriation by pointing out that Bowering relocates *Duino Elegies* in Vancouver; yet the changes incurred by this relocation do not account for *Kerrisdale Elegies* composition. For Bowering alters (adulterates) the form, the language and many of Rilke's allusions. Linos, for instance, to whom Rilke refers in the end of the first elegy, is translated in *Kerrisdale Elegies* as Marilyn Monroe. Bowering's parallaxis maintains the mythological allusion but translates it in contemporary terms. From the myth about a pagan figure we move to the stardom of Hollywood, to Marilyn who is, as Bowering says, "the stuff our words are made from" (1.20). Linos in Rilke's poem is a double signature: it signifies a mournful song; it is also the name of a young man whose life assumes three mythic configurations, two of them related to Apollo — Apollo as Linos' father avenging the death of his son, Apollo as the god of song punishing Linos for transgressing his human limits as singer.<sup>22</sup> Both signatures of Linos identify the genre of the poem as elegy and raise questions regarding the nature of origins and transgression. Marilyn Monroe's life has similarly evolved into a myth that is still being re-written.

Bowering's parallaxis here becomes a form of parallelism, the setting side by side of two texts, thus further enunciating the degree of sameness and difference

between *Kerrisdale Elegies* and *Duino Elegies*. His writing act is an act of mimesis; mimesis, however, in Gérard Genette's sense of forgery: "la forgerie est l'imitation en régime sérieux, dont la fonction dominante est la poursuite ou l'extension d'un accomplissement littéraire préexistant."<sup>23</sup> During this mimetic act as "forgery," Bowering also imitates (writes into the text) the writing process he is engaged in. The poet as trespasser is, again, the common name as signature, but this time it is a signature that thematizes the question of genre in this long poem. But if plagiarizing Rilke's text is an aesthetic si(g)n that stigmatizes *Kerrisdale Elegies* with the double signatures of Rilke and Bowering, it is a si(g)n that Bowering is far from ignoring. "[B]ut love / makes intruders," he says, "I am not I here, / but the burglar / of your past." Bowering's apostrophe is to the figure of the lover, but, given the erotics of intertextuality in his poem, his apostrophe may also be directed toward Rilke. Love effaces the writing poet as origin, as the single maker of the text; it presents the poet as the parallax of his own self, as a "burglar" who cannot extract himself from the tradition. He is "playing house with" (1.12) the textuality of writing. "[T]hrowing" his proper "name away" (1.18), writing himself over (making love to) Rilke's text, the poet as lover and thief emerges from within the text of another poet in the carnivalesque paradise of his own text: "Upstairs with my toys — a pen, some lined paper, / my books open around me" (4.58). Bowering's signature and countersignature present his long poem as the hiatus of text as source and text as the parallactic other of that source.

The same principle of mimesis as forgery operates in Dennis Cooley's poem.

*you have my word*

periodically

they think  
 they have me  
 where they want me  
 that theyve got me  
 typed [. . .]  
 lines laid out  
 [. . .]

but i dont  
 pause dont even  
 hesitate where they  
 make the signs  
 [. . .]  
 [. . .] i live in the gaps beneath that  
 believe in the invisible gasps under print  
 i learn to hold my breath  
 hold by breath

in envelopes of air  
 refuse to be taken in  
 i am guerrilla of brackets  
 you cant see me on the page  
 whited out in your eyes

[. . .]

if you dont keep watch  
 i will surface under your faces

[. . .]

from the edges where you  
 would gloss me over  
 write me out of existence  
 i will shout  
 to you hard  
 of hearing

[. . .]

that is why  
 to find me  
 you must read be  
 tween the lines (16-8)

“You have my word,” the poet says, hiding behind his words, talking himself out of the text, inside the text, bracketing his presence, making the reader an accomplice of this war between presence and absence. You have my word, the poet says, and he breaks his promise, he breaks away from the reader’s hold, as he translates his words into plural meaning, warding off definition. And he surfaces under my face: he translates his act of writing into the reading act, reading under his own face, under my nose, delaying the performance of my own reading act by stealing my privilege as reader, by inscribing my reading in his text.

Dennis Cooley’s transgression of his writing role breaks the laws that control aesthetic decorum. He’s “*laying down the law*” (52) that there are no limits for the writing and reading acts alike. It is a law signed by him in script, “yes truly Dennis Cooley” (146), countersigned by his main character, the Ukrainian outlaw Krafchenko, signed repeatedly by the poet’s own inventions of himself. “For the law as it stands neither you nor I have any responsibility” (49). This lawless law informs the design of the whole book. *Bloody Jack* could be described as a documentary poem about a Ukrainian bandit, persecuted by the Winnipeg police force and loved by the Winnipeg community in the 1910’s. Cooley gives his primary sources in the beginning of the poem. Yet he supersedes the documents at hand and meanders through a web of genres, and of authentic and forged documents. One of his epigraphs is by Julia Kristeva talking about Menippean

satire which she defines as an “all-inclusive genre.”<sup>24</sup> This sums up the documentary nature of *Bloody Jack*. Far from being a document about a specific criminal — whom the public nevertheless saw as a Robin Hood figure thus parodying the law — *Bloody Jack* becomes a document of the generic interplay that characterizes the long poem. One might argue that *Bloody Jack* is about the poet’s dream of living in the margins: the lover and poet as outlaw.

The lawlessness that Cooley advocates is primarily realized by the encompassing genre of *Bloody Jack*, that of the book. And *Bloody Jack* is a book whose main intent is to foreground the material it is made of, that of language. “*Jack’s dictionary of cunning linguistics*” gives a clear sense of how Cooley uses language:

[. . .]  
 radical: in a hot bed of activity  
 [. . .]  
 marginal: involved in split decisions  
 [. . .]  
 thorough: doesn’t want to leave anything out  
 [. . .]  
 optimistic: believes s/he is making head way  
 [. . .]  
 reformed: gets a weight off his shoulders  
 [. . .]  
 divine: she brings down the world on his head  
 [. . .]  
 promiscuous: has a loose tongue  
 [. . .]  
 traditional: is above that sort of thing  
 [. . .] (118-19)

The body of language as the mat(t)er of the book is in constant dialogue with the author who fathers the book. The semantic distortions of the words, while affirming Cooley’s playfulness and the erotics of his writing, deconstruct the concept of definition itself. *Bloody Jack* is presented as a book both in an empirical and a generic sense, but it is a book that defines its bookness through parallax. If the book, as Maurice Blanchot says, is a “vehicle of knowledge [. . . that] receives and gathers a given determinate form of knowledge,”<sup>25</sup> then *Bloody Jack* as a book — dedicated “to Penny,” a fictional character and a muse/writing figure — becomes its parallaxic other, what Blanchot calls “the absence of the book.” “*The absence of the book* revokes all continuity of presence, just as it evades the questioning conveyed by the book. It is not the interiority of the book, nor its continuously evaded Meaning. Rather it is outside the book, though it is enclosed in it, not so much its exterior as a reference to an outside that does not concern the book.”<sup>26</sup> *Bloody Jack* foregrounds itself as an empirical book, complete with an “appendix.” This is its last paragraph:

Perhaps, dear reader, you would like to remove this appendix. Go ahead, just cut it out. You always wanted to be a doctor, here's your chance. Be careful to cut neatly so the body will not be mutilated and the scar will not be conspicuous enough to affect the resale value of the book or to ruin your practice. Perhaps, if you are lucky, you will nick Cooley's conscience, his mind there on the margins, in the gutter. Go ahead, take it out on him. (237)

The book as an empirical artifice seeks to undo its own physicality, talks about itself as if it were an "other," seeks to meet with its "absence." It is the author, however, or more precisely his signature that is implicated in the book's deathwish.

*Bloody Jack* in order to be sustained as a book needs its author's name. But the name of the author loses its authority as it becomes a deictic signifier on the book's cover designating the title: "a book by Dennis Cooley: *Bloody Jack*." The author does not present himself here: he is presented instead by the (his) writing act; he is positioned in the third person. Emile Benveniste says that "the 'third person' is not a 'person'; it is really the verbal form whose function is to express the *non-person*. [. . .] Indeed, it is always used when the person is not designated and especially in the expression called impersonal."<sup>27</sup> In this respect, the author remains absent as a person — his presence being further neutralized by the passive context of the third person, "a book *by* Dennis Cooley" — while his book appropriates his signature. The book and the author become each other's metonymies, two figures existing only through parallax. Parallax here evokes the *paralagon*, the going beyond logos, beyond homogeneity. The book reaches out beyond its margins and its physical body toward its absent other, whereas the author disappears as a person in order to reappear as a character with the same name, a character who both reflects and deflects the author. The destabilization of the author's presence is primarily signified by the single occurrence of his actual signature in the context of which the conventional "yours truly [. . .]" is inscribed in longhand in such a way that it can also be read as "yes truly [. . .]" (146). Signing as writing, while destabilizing language and its signification by virtue of the individual configurations of handwriting, becomes an affirmation of the I's positioning, "yes truly Dennis Cooley," a "yes," however, which deconstructs the logocentric positions of language and the self as well as the logocentricism of interpretation.

In "*high drama*," for example, a playwright with the name Dennis Cooley has a hard time making his characters/actors follow his script:

COOLEY ( *to you, dear reader* ) Why don't they make love?  
 ( *to them* ) Hay! What are you doing? ( *they look up,  
 discovered* ) I want you to make love. I'm pretty  
 disappointed in you characters, especially you  
 Krafchenko. [. . .]

KRAFCHENKO ( *recovered* ) Butt out buddy. It's none of  
 your business. ( *Kraf & Penny begin to kiss. Defiant,  
 then lost in it. Cooley looks angry & impatient.* )

COOLEY [. . .] According to the script, Kraf, you get yr  
 ass outa here. Then Penny is supposed to make a play for  
 me. I wrote it that way. A clear case of textual authority.  
 Of my authority. My authorization. [. . .] (222)

By dramatizing the relationship between signing and writing (penning), Cooley as a writer playing with language both affirms and deconstructs his authority. In another instance, in “*the obligatory long-awaited poem in which the hero / speaks from the grave thots thick with gumbo,*” it is Krafchenko himself who talks about the writer’s authority and who foregrounds the self-conscious use of genre:

yes yes well i spose cooley  
 was a grave robber all along  
 wasnt he

this comes from  
 knowing Foucault  
 I told him so myself

& I spose I wulnt even get a peep in here if cooley  
 wasnt interested in some kind of parody. [. . .] (231)

These references to Dennis Cooley as *playwright* and as poet still maintain the proper name of the author as person but they are not to be considered as autobiography. This illustrates what Ulmer calls autography, a form of writing which “transforms the proper name into a thing, into a rebus.”<sup>28</sup> Autography in *Bloody Jack* constitutes the author’s parallax, more specifically both the deconstruction and the dissemination of the authorial self. The author’s signature is the centre of the book’s puzzle, but it is a centre lying off-centre, refusing to be given a single configuration, a monologic interpretation. The signature in the text imitates the subject of the proper name, inscribing the author within his own inscription.

It is this same function of the signature, together with the multiple genres that Cooley uses and his excessive use of punning, that brings *Bloody Jack* as a book closer to its absent other. *Bloody Jack* falls apart, disorders itself, and pre(post)-scribes into its body the responses it anticipates to generate as a published book: “Dear Editor, I for one am not in the least amused by Dennis Cooley’s writings. And I know from talking to others that they have had it up to here with all this filthy language,” says a Mrs. Agnes Klassen (89). The book outdistances itself; it denounces its bookness by taking over its own margins. As Blanchot says, “[t]he book alone is important, as it is, far from genres, outside rubrics — prose, poetry, the novel, the first-person account — under which it refuses to be arranged and to which it denies the power to fix its place and to determine its form. A book no longer belongs to a genre.”<sup>29</sup> *Bloody Jack* as a book explodes its frame by displaying its anatomy. “Have you no sense of anatomy?” the “cunning linguist” asks (84). But the genreless genre of *Bloody Jack*, its deconstructed anatomy, offers

only intimations of its absent other. Blanchot remarks: "How long will it last — this lack that is sustained by the book and that expels the book from itself as book? Produce the book, then, so that it will detach itself, disengage itself as it scatters: this will not mean that you have produced *the absence of the book*."<sup>30</sup> Dennis Cooley does not produce "the absence of the book," but internalizes in his discourse the absence that he cannot write in. His signature as proper name and as the name behind his exaggerating use of puns countersigns this absence. *Bloody Jack* is its own parallax. Its content is, ultimately, what it cannot contain.

Both in Bowering's *Kerrisdale Elegies* and Cooley's *Bloody Jack*, the authorial signature validates the act of stealing, the appropriation of other texts and genres. Stealing in the open from another text or within the author's own text is to be seen as an act of denying originality, of merging the beginning of a poem with the beginning of poetry, of dissolving the frame of a book. It is the poet as thief, as criminal, who can immerse himself totally in writing, who can marginalize his own book. The admixture of diverse genres in the long poem is a double signal: it challenges the classic law of genre theory that argues for the purity of genre, and it recommends what Jacques Derrida calls "the limitless field of general textuality."<sup>31</sup> If this "general textuality" creates the impression of generic or formal chaos, it is the chaos of carnival. And it is the presence of the authorial signature, the proper name as frame of property and agent of interruptions, that validates these long poems as rites both affirming and questioning the tradition.

## NOTES

This essay was originally delivered at "Assessing the Eighties," Discussion Group of Canadian Literature in English, MLA, Chicago, December 1985. My thanks to Professor Arnold E. Davidson for inviting my contribution. My thanks also to Professors Dennis Cooley and J. Hillis Miller for their attentive readings.

<sup>1</sup> *Signéponge* = *Signsponge*, translated by Richard Rand (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984), 36, 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Kerrisdale Elegies* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1984); *Bloody Jack* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1984). Page references will appear immediately after the texts; the page references to Bowering's text will be preceded by the elegy number.

<sup>3</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, with an introduction by Wayne C. Booth (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 185.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. For studies of the Canadian long poem see *Open Letter*, Sixth Series, 2-3 (Summer-Fall, 1985), which gathers together the papers presented at "Longliners," a conference on the Canadian long poem, York Univ., May 1984.

<sup>5</sup> "Novelization" is Bakhtin's neologism put forward in "Epic and Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 5, 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> My debts here are to Derrida's "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated, with Additional Notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of

- Chicago Press, 1982), 307-30; his *Signéponge* = *Signsponge*; and the elaborations on his work by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Glas-Piece: A Compte Rendu," *Diacritics*, 7, 3 (Fall 1977), 22-43, and Gregory L. Ulmer, "Beyond Deconstruction: Derrida," *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985), 3-153.
- <sup>8</sup> Personal communication with Cooley, Winnipeg, 1985. My thanks for his permission to quote him.
- <sup>9</sup> The section "*this is me: a retort*," from which these references are taken, deals with the cover of the book. The ambiguity of the cover image is further accentuated in this poem by the referential subjects of the "I" and "you" which constantly shift from Cooley to Krafchenko.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination*, 65.
- <sup>11</sup> I am quoting from Maurice Blanchot's essay "Reading," in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, translated by Lydia Davis, edited, with an afterword, by P. Adams Sitney, with a preface by Geoffrey Hartman (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1981), 92.
- <sup>12</sup> See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985); Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982).
- <sup>13</sup> *Signéponge* = *Signsponge*, 150.
- <sup>14</sup> *Applied Grammatology*, 21, 63.
- <sup>15</sup> Spicer is particularly important because he "translated" Rilke's *Elegies* between 1950 and 1955; see his "Imaginary Elegies I-VI," in *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer*, edited and with a commentary by Robin Blaser (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 333-39. Bowering, who has shown his indebtedness to Spicer in his earlier long poem, *Allophanes* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1976), said that Spicer facilitated his "intrusion into the field of Rilke that had been staked out by many Rilke-loving friends, and to which I didn't feel real rights, being hesitant about Rilke . . . and not German" (letter to the author, January 1986). My thanks to Bowering for permission to quote him.
- <sup>16</sup> *Signéponge* = *Signsponge*, 64.
- <sup>17</sup> Bowering said that he "used basically 2 translations, and a bit of a third . . . Not David Young. Not Exner" (letter to the author), but he couldn't recall which ones. The translations I used are J. B. Leishman's and Stephen Spender's, *Rainer Maria Rilke: Prose and Poetry*, edited by Egon Schwarz, with a foreword by Howard Nemerov (New York: Continuum, 1984); Stephen Mitchell's *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, edited by Stephen Mitchell, with an introduction by Robert Hass (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 1984); and A. Poulin's, Jr., *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).
- <sup>18</sup> Translated by Poulin, 27.
- <sup>19</sup> In response to this statement, Bowering said that "I wasn't interested in erasing Rilke so much as rewriting him. I have a funny relationship with him; although he is probably the most popular source for my poet companions in Vancouver, I have never been quite ready to trust him, his feyness, his rhapsody; I realize that he is right, he is onto something, and that he is a pre-Spicerian demonstration of the poet inspired or inspirated; but I have always been uneasy. I had to respond to that doubled feeling somehow" (letter to the author). Bowering's uneasiness about Rilke is manifested in the poem in more than one way, but a discussion of

it falls outside the scope of this essay. But whereas Bowering lets Rilke's signature stand, he does not provide any clues for the poets' identity with regard to the French quotations in *Kerrisdale Elegies*. It is their language and tone that locate them within the context of French poetry. As Bowering said about them, "Re the French quotations: well, they seem to me to do something — make connections? make correction, comment? on the surrounding text. They operate, it feels to me, the way quotations operate re the rest of the text in *Allophanes*. It is not exactly collage, because it reads on like poetic text, along the alonging poetic text that is there. They make sure that the writer is not running away with the poem . . ." (letter to the author). The quotations are from: Baudelaire's "La Prière d'un pain" (1.17); François Villon, "Le Testament," *Oeuvres complètes* CXIX (2.30); Anne Hébert, "Le tombeau des rois" (4.61) (my thanks to Professor Stan Dragland for this reference); Apollinaire's "L'ermite" from *Alcools* (5.72); Michel Beaulieu, "rémission du corps enamouré," in *Visages* (6.83; my thanks to Bowering for this source); Mallarmé's "Petit air I" (7.99); Nerval's "Vers Dorés" (8.111); Laforgue's "Complainte de l'oubli des morts" (9.123); I have failed to trace the source of the last quotation (10.131). Since the completion of this essay Professor Dragland published the first study on *Kerrisdale Elegies*, "The Bees of the Invisible," *Brick*, 28 (Fall 1986), pp. 14-25.

<sup>20</sup> Hutcheon, 36.

<sup>21</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *Semeiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), *Le texte du roman: Approche sémiologique d'une structure discursive transformationnelle* (Paris, The Hague: Mouton, 1970), and *La révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), translated as *Revolution of Poetic Language* by Margaret Waller, with an introduction by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984); see also Michael Riffaterre, *Production du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), translated as *Text Production* by Terese Lyons (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983). For the history and development of the term intertextuality see Marc Angenot, "L' 'intertextualité': enquête sur l'émergence et la diffusion d'un champ notionnel," *Revue des Sciences Humaine*, LX, 189 (janvier, mars 1983), 121-35; and the special issue "L' intertextualité: intertexte, autotexte, intratexte" of *Texte*, 2 (1983), which includes Don Bruce's "Bibliographie annotée: écrits sur l' intertextualité," 217-58.

<sup>22</sup> See "Linus," *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949); rpt. 1968).

<sup>23</sup> *Palimpsestes*, 92.

<sup>24</sup> The epigraph is from Kristeva's *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, edited by Leon S. Roudiez, translated by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), 83.

<sup>25</sup> Blanchot, 146.

<sup>26</sup> Blanchot, 147.

<sup>27</sup> *Problems in General Linguistics*, translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Florida: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971), 198, 199.

<sup>28</sup> Ulmer, 132.

<sup>29</sup> From Blanchot's *Le livre à venir* (Paris: 1959), quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, "The Origins of Genres," translated by Richard M. Berrong, *New Literary History*, 8 (1977), 159.

<sup>30</sup> Blanchot, 149.

<sup>31</sup> "La Loi du genre / The Law of Genre," translated by Avita Ronell, *Glyph 7* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), 210.

# FOUR POEMS

*Paddy McCallum*

## GIFTS

Our gifts litter the years behind us  
and go bearing our own concerns.  
One Christmas  
you were reading translations from the Chinese  
and your gift came wrapped  
in the simplicity of stone.

I carried that heavy image all Spring  
until your birthday came  
and five mysteries broke into your house.  
You never forgave me. Even now  
all you send are poems  
wrapped in burning paper.

This is to let you know my gift is coming.

Prepare yourself for a thousand novels  
set at the dawn of time.  
They describe how shelves were invented  
to hold the artifacts of  
misunderstanding. And how each year  
the characters extend their home.

## CLOSE-UP MAGIC

Last night, under the dark sheet, I promised  
snow by morning. And there it was,  
a full three inches. You shook your head.  
I said repeatedly I'd fix your car  
and without so much as a glance the knocking  
stopped. You were amazed. I snapped  
my fingers and my first wife vanished  
taking with her disturbing emanations  
from a previous life. On Sundays

I make God exist by leaving the house  
 and on Mondays I cover cheques with  
 money we didn't possess on Friday night.  
 You line up at seven to catch my act.

For you I will produce the Ultimate Show  
 with nothing but a card-table, two  
 folding chairs and a tablecloth. Your heart  
 will vanish like the past to lie  
 with silt inside my pocket. That part  
 is easy. Keeping your interest,  
 making your body rise, shackling you  
 in water where you breathe alive,  
 these things get harder as the years go by.  
 I have performed naked, shaved my head.  
 What I cannot control is substance:  
 the dove moving to betray its purpose  
 beneath the sliding cloth.

## THE LOST SON

Often  
 when I'm lonely for my son  
 I go out among the wet flowers  
 and paw the muddy grass  
 and taste its sulfur.

Or I climb the beach from  
 tower to tower  
 but he is gone, perhaps  
 he is gone into  
 the water. My toes  
 kick the salt-packed  
 logs set free from boom  
 and blade and fire. They  
 are history. Memory  
 is a child.

And when I find my son  
 and lift him in my mouth  
 and lay him in his mother's lap  
 am I not then free?

They devour each other  
and gaze at me.

I go outside for dusk  
for quiet.

The mule deer vanish  
with apples to the forest.

## THE POETRY OF GEORGE JEHOSHAPHAT MOUNTAIN (1789-1863)

Forms of the long canoe-hymn. Narratives  
of narratives of wild conversion,  
though of rivers there was little  
he could bring his tired Assembly,  
having secured his birchbark poems  
to the Mission dock so firmly  
he failed to make them hear the heart  
of his dog as it swam its nineteenth spring  
to greet him. Landscapes  
quivered in their eyes Elysian.

So when the ice broke he loaded supplies  
and headed West again to preach. Bears  
became sheep. The singular state  
of the trapper his own soul's fate.

Songs, he said, and the days sang slowly by.

At certain points the river shallowed  
redeeming eels from bedrock, trout  
like the fallen pieces of sky he lived on.

Deer watched with the eyes of saints  
as remnant Huron found protection  
in his wet arms, knee-deep. The sun  
when they rose was sheer white.

His years stretched stanzaic Missions  
 along the thirsty riverbanks. Failed epics.  
 His lines rhapsodic, pure, shorter  
 than praise, slighter than images,  
 a glimpse of fields where the richest soil  
 runs its perfect furrows to the sun.  
 Songs all evening. Prayers at dawn.  
 Trails cut by the flames of His gown.

## FOR THE RECORD

*Yvonne Trainer*

Embarrassment is the teacher  
 when his prize student  
 cannot remember her lines  
 in front of the visiting poet

There are excuses:  
 the poem doesn't rhyme  
 it's not a good poem  
 anyway

The kid's nervous eyes  
 flickering like electricity  
 hands twisted wires  
 word lost in caved mouth

Nobody can explain

memory:

signs naming  
 branches of rivers crossed each morning  
 forgotten

things we record when we learn to write  
 the reason for learning to write.

# DEMETER'S DAUGHTER

## *Marjorie Pickthall & the Quest for Poetic Identity*

*Diana M. A. Relke*

**M**ARJORIE PICKTHALL sold her first manuscript to the *Toronto Globe* in 1899, when she was 15 years old.\* Her career ended abruptly in 1922, when, at the age of 39, she died in Vancouver of complications following surgery. Perhaps no other Canadian poet has enjoyed such enormous fashionable success followed by such total eclipse. Canadian critics of the early twentieth century "seized on her poems and stories as works of distinction,"<sup>1</sup> and some even hailed her as a genius and seer. "More than any other poet of this century," wrote E. K. Brown in 1943, "she was the object of a cult. . . . Unacademic critics boldly placed her among the few, the immortal names."<sup>2</sup> Brown might also have noted that unreserved praise was lavished on Pickthall by scholarly critics as well. She was admired and encouraged by Pelham Edgar who, at the time of her death, wrote: "Her talent was strong and pure and tender, and her feeling for beauty was not more remarkable than her unrivalled gift for expressing it."<sup>3</sup> Archibald MacMechan wrote: "Her death means the silencing of the truest, sweetest singing voice ever heard in Canada."<sup>4</sup> Within 18 months of her death no less than ten articles — all overloaded with superlatives — were published in journals and magazines such as *The Canadian Bookman*, *Dalhousie Review*, and *Saturday Night*. In his biography, *Marjorie Pickthall: A Book of Remembrance*, Lorne Pierce includes ten tributes paid in verse to the memory of Marjorie Pickthall by companion poets; Pierce himself writes rhapsodically of her "Colour, Cadence, Contour and Craftsmanship."<sup>5</sup>

Modern literary historians have taken the opposite view. Pickthall's poetry is often regarded as "proof" of the bankruptcy of the Canadian poetic imagination during the first two decades of this century. For example, in 1957, when Lorne Pierce did her the disservice of publishing a selection of some of her most derivative verse, much of it written when she was little more than an adolescent, Desmond Pacey responded: "If one approached the book seeking a new revelation

\* The author gratefully acknowledges the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its assistance.

of Miss Pickthall's genius one would be disappointed."<sup>6</sup> For Pacey, this edition of her work only served to confirm his earlier opinion that Pickthall had fulfilled her artistic potential with the publication of her first volume of poems, and that her later work "sustained rather than enhanced her reputation."<sup>7</sup> And yet, as a closer examination of some of her poems will reveal, she did develop significantly as a poet over the course of her short career. What Pacey identified as the "essential hollowness" of her work gives way in the later poetry to considerable depth of insight and an increased sense of her identity as a woman and a poet trapped in the literary and gender conventions of her day. I would like to begin by exploring Pickthall's emergence as First Lady of Canadian letters because her attempt to come to terms with that role is part of the struggle for self-representation which she undertakes in her poetry. This will be followed by a comparison of two of her early poems with a group of later ones which, I believe, reveals a degree of originality not generally recognized in her work.

THE YEAR MARJORIE PICKTHALL came to the attention of the critical establishment, the Victorian Romantic tradition was already in need of fresh talent. By the turn of the century Lampman had died, Carman, Roberts, and D. C. Scott were settling into middle-age, Crawford, who had never really enjoyed the attention she deserved, was long dead, and her *Collected Poems*, edited by John Garvin, would not appear until 1905. Pauline Johnson, also middle-aged, was spending most of her time on tour in the West, and as a result her literary output had slowed down considerably; her collected poems, *Flint and Feather*, would not appear until 1912, a year before her death. William Henry Drummond, eight years Johnson's senior, and Tom MacInnes were enjoying success but their work was not in the mainstream of the established tradition. Senior poets imitating the "Confederation" group were filling the pages of newspapers and magazines with pleasing but mediocre verse: among these were Wilfred Campbell, Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, John Reade, Helena Coleman, F. G. Scott, Sarah Ann Curzon, Mrs. J. F. Harrison ("Seranus"), Agnes Maule Machar ("Fidelis"), and Agnes Ethelwyn Wetherald.

The role of deliverer of a literary tradition *in extremis* was thrust upon the unprepared and unsuspecting adolescent Pickthall; it was a fate she would come to loathe. She seemed an ideal candidate for the role. She was young; she was also directly in the mainstream of the already established Canadian tradition. Many of her models were the best of the nineteenth-century British poets, and she had great thematic affinity with D. C. Scott, successfully incorporated many Lampmanesque images, and recalled the best of Carman in the intense musicality of her verse. Furthermore, the Christian overtones of her poetry appealed to the clergy-

men and other church affiliates who constituted the core of the Canadian literary establishment. But what Marjorie Pickthall did best for the men who advanced her career, promoted her image, and published her books — powerful men such as Archibald MacMechan, Andrew MacPhail, and Lorne Pierce — was to postpone a little longer the day when they would have to face the fact that the Golden Age of Victorian Romantic poetry in Canada was over.

At the age of sixteen, Pickthall had no way of knowing what the literary establishment had in store for her, nor could she have been aware that in terms of life experience she was not yet equipped to meet the demands of a supposedly discerning reading public. Bound by the gender conventions of her day, she was denied the kind of experience necessary to her art. Many of her poems were created out of second-hand experience derived from a close study of the work of her many male models. Later in life she came to realize how fatal this was to her art. Indeed, as she wrote when she was 37 years old:

Called to a way too high for me, I lean  
 Out from my narrow window o'er the street,  
 And know the fields I cannot see are green,  
 And guess the songs I cannot hear are sweet.

Break up the vision round me, Lord, and thrust  
 Me from Thy side, unhoused without the bars,  
 For all my heart is hungry for the dust  
 And all my soul is weary of the stars.

I would seek out a little roof instead,  
 A little lamp to make my darkness brave.  
 "For though she heal a multitude," Love said,  
 "Herself she cannot save."<sup>8</sup>

Appropriately, she titled this poem "The Chosen." It is a successful poem because, unlike the fatally imitative work of earlier years, it expresses first-hand knowledge: it is an expression of Pickthall's experience of limited experience. In an attempt to meet the expectations of her readership in general and her mentors in particular, she studied the "fields" and "songs" of life as they appeared in the work of her literary forefathers, guessed at the greenness and sweetness of that life, and imitated it in her own verse. Trapped behind the "narrow window" of convention, she studied the freedom of male activity on the street below and recycled her observations as poetry. From her dizzying perch above the lesser poets of the day, she administered short-term healing to a dying tradition but had no remedy for her own ailing poetic: "I've got a kind of passionate distaste for my own work lately," she wrote to the poet Helena Coleman the year in which "The Chosen" was written.<sup>9</sup> She longed to be "unhoused without the bars" of the gender conventions and the literary expectations that entrapped her; like her speaker she felt

she was living in the “darkness” of her own ignorance of life. This is in keeping with the sentiment she had expressed two years earlier in a letter to her intimate friend, Helen Coleman, niece of Helena Coleman:

To me, the trying part is being a woman at all. I’ve come to the ultimate conclusion that I’m a misfit of the worst kind, in spite of a superficial femininity — Emotions with a foreknowledge of impermanence, a daring mind with only the tongue as outlet, a greed for experience plus a slavery to convention, — what the deuce are you to make of that? — as a woman? As a man, you could go ahead & stir things up *fine*.<sup>10</sup>

This statement seethes with anger at the gender conventions which entrapped her. By the time she wrote “The Chosen,” that rage had degenerated into fear and unhappiness. Lacking the male power to “stir things up *fine*,” the speaker in “The Chosen” calls upon the Source of all power. The God she invokes is the ultimate patriarch, the dispenser of power not only to the oppressive culture in which she lives but, more specifically, to her male models and mentors to whom Pickthall must be grateful for the dubious honour of being “The Chosen.” Given that by definition she has no access to that all-pervasive power, it is hardly surprising that she is “hungry for the dust” and “weary of the stars” of a meaningless celebrity.

**I**MITATION IS, OF COURSE, a valid starting-point for an apprentice poet but, ideally, by the time a poet has earned critical acclaim she has abandoned her dependence on her models and established a voice of her own. But in Pickthall’s case, critical recognition was premature and had the effect of postponing the day when she would begin to take the necessary risks involved in working out her own unique poetic. What proved so fatal to her early verse was her failure to understand “woman’s place” as dictated by the conventions of the tradition in which she worked. Because she cannot identify with the self-assertive “I AM” of the Romantic male poets whose work she imitated, it is not always possible to know where the poet stands in many of her early nature poems. For example, in “The Sleep-Seekers,” the poetic voice seems to shift location as the poem progresses:

Lift thou the latch whereon the wild rose clings,  
 Touch the green door to which the briar has grown.  
 If you seek sleep, she dwells not with these things, —  
 The prisoned wood, the voiceless reed, the stone.  
 But where the day yields to one star alone,  
 Softly Sleep cometh on her brown owl-wings,  
 Sliding above the marshes silently  
 To the dim beach between the black pines and the sea.

There; or in one leaf-shaken loveliness  
 Of birchen light and shadow, deep she dwells. . . .  
 [. . .]

Here shall we lift our lodge against the rain,  
 Walling it deep  
 With tamarac branches and the balsam fir,  
 Sweet even as sleep,  
 And aspen boughs continually astir  
 To make a silver-gleaming, —  
 Here shall we lift our lodge and find again  
 A little space for dreaming. (p. 51)

The “you” receives the invitation from the speaker to transcend the prison of normal consciousness — the “voiceless” state — and enter into the imaginative state of dreaming sleep. This poetic state is represented by the “dim beach” which is located “There” in nature. In the closing stanza, however, the perspective shifts: “There” suddenly becomes “Here,” “you” becomes “we,” and the sought-after state of consciousness is now a protective space deep within the womb of nature. Comparing these lines unfavourably with Archibald Lampman’s practice, R. E. Rashley writes that “Lifting our lodge breaks the communion with nature of Lampman, and turns the last line, which with him would have been a communication of mood, into a separation both from life and from nature.”<sup>11</sup> Rashley’s objections are understandable, for these lines do not conform to the conventional Romantic model, which images communion between the poet and a clearly differentiated landscape. What they do image is a speaker who is not fully differentiated from nature; communion between poet and nature is not possible where the poet is identified *with* nature. The invitation to enter nature is as much from nature itself as it is from the speaker. This poem is typical of Pickthall’s early work, where the poet is often absorbed by her own landscapes.

The failure of Pickthall’s early nature poetry can best be understood in terms of Margaret Homans’ theory of female poetic identity. Female literary experience — the experience of reading poetry written almost exclusively by men — is the subject of her *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*, a study of women poets in the Romantic tradition. Using psychoanalytic terms reminiscent of Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*, Homans explains what aspiring women poets must confront in their initial encounters with Romantic nature poetry:

. . . as the most powerful feminine figure in Romantic poetry, [Mother Nature] dominates the consciousness of women entering the tradition as newcomers. She was there before them, as the mother precedes the daughters. For the male poets of the Romantic period, the poets of the past and the figures of the poet represented in their works constitute a father figure against whom the younger poet, picturing himself as son, must define himself. If the figure of the powerful poet of the past is the father, in this family romance, then the mother is surely the Mother Nature represented as the object of that poet’s love.<sup>12</sup>

The paradigm of Romantic poetry images the interaction between human moods and natural phenomena as a universal marriage between man and nature — a coupling which depends upon identifying nature as both otherness and female, and subjectivity as male (p. 19). The poet images himself as initially the child of Mother Nature; maturity means the gradual development of consciousness resulting in the ultimate separation of his identity from that of the mother. He is transcendent; she is the agent of his transcendence. Fully differentiated from her, he now uses poetic language as a means of repossessing her.

The male poet's relationship to nature and his imaging of nature as female are clearly problematic for women poets. Women are also the children of Mother Nature, but as daughters they cannot achieve gender separation from her. This identification of woman with objectified nature denies the female poet subjectivity: "Without subjectivity," writes Homans, "women are incapable of self-representation, the fundamental of masculine creativity." Further, to be identified with nature is to be identified with unconsciousness, inarticulateness, and fatality. In order to achieve poetic identity, women "must cast off their image of themselves as objects, as the other, in the manner of daughters refusing to become what their mothers have been. The difficulty is that the image of Mother Nature is so appealing. The women poets do not want to dissociate themselves either from Nature or from nature even though they know they must" (p. 14).

But the identification of woman with landscape goes much farther back than the Romantic tradition in poetry. Classical mythology imaged this relationship in the story of Demeter and Persephone. However, as suggested in another of Pickthall's early poems, "Persephone Returning to Hades," enforced separation from Mother Nature is equally as self-annihilating as merger with her, for Persephone's descent into hell represents another kind of disappearance into (or beneath) the landscape. This is in keeping with what Grace Stewart has discovered in her examination of the Demeter-Persephone story as the myth of identity which has informed the female literary imagination for at least the last hundred years. Persephone as Stewart describes her in "Mother, Daughter, and the Birth of the Female Artist" embodies the identity dilemma experienced by women who struggle for self-representation in their writing:

Demeter, the strong woman who challenges patriarchal law, is offset by Persephone, the woman as victim. . . . Both the loss and the jubilant return [of Persephone] are tinged with sorrow and what the Greeks term *anagnorisis* (recognition, epiphanic comprehension of identity). However, the story does not directly reveal the emotions of the maiden. She stands mute, torn between male and female lovers, mother and husband, a pawn in their battle for control.<sup>13</sup>

This is the Persephone with whom women writers identify: a silenced victim of a fierce power struggle, a woman who is doomed to know herself only as an extension of the forces which jointly possess her. As in the literature Stewart



“[T]urned” and “slow change” evoke again the turning of the seasons, and the reluctance with which Persephone turns and changes is embodied in the rose that has forgotten death. The archaic diction — “ere,” “thence,” “cometh” — is less distracting here than elsewhere in Pickthall’s work, where it is often disastrous; the damage done here seems to get cancelled out by the way in which sound and image work to such good effect in “doors of hell,” “sullen wind,” and “Lethe’s level stream.”

The last two verses are remarkably effective in their evocation of Persephone’s deteriorating memory:

Why should I grieve when grief is overpast?  
 Why should I sorrow when I may forget?  
 The shepherds’ horns are crying about the folds,  
 The east is clear and yellow as daffodils,  
 Dread daffodils —

The brightest flower o’ the fields.  
 I gathered them in Enna, O, my lord.  
 Do the doors yawn and their dim warders wait?

What was this earth-born memory I would hold?  
 Almost I have forgotten. Lord, I see  
 Before, the vast gray suburbs of the dead;  
 Behind, the golden loneliness of the woods,  
 A stir of wandering birds, and in the brake  
 A small brown faun who follows me and weeps.

(ll. 26-29)

Interestingly, the tempo picks up as Persephone questions her state of mind. The cadences change and change again, suggesting the disruption of thought process. “Dread daffodils,” an allusion to the wonderous bloom of the narcissus which had enticed her to stray too far from Demeter — an error which resulted in her original abduction by Pluto — now signal the dreaded reunion with the god of death. The poem climaxes in “the vast gray suburbs of the dead,” the most chilling and powerful image in the poem. The last line is unfortunate: the weeping faun is too precious an image to end an otherwise quite powerful piece; the weakness of this line suggests a backing off, as if Pickthall is afraid of coming into poetic power.

Elsewhere in Pickthall’s nature poetry the merging of persona and landscape almost always confuses the issue; in “Persephone” it *is* the issue. The fatality and unconsciousness which women poets in the Romantic tradition must struggle against is, in the Demeter-Persephone myth, central to the plot. Further, this merging process in Pickthall’s poem is under tight, conscious control. But it is Persephone’s loss of memory which is the most terrifying aspect of the poem, for to lose one’s memory is to lose one’s identity, and it is this loss of identity which makes the poem a kind of signature piece for Pickthall as a poet.

**D**URING THE LAST EIGHT YEARS of her life, Pickthall wrote several nature lyrics and other short pieces which, while they differ in poetic intent — sometimes radically — reiterate on some level the process of losing her identity in the landscapes they depict. Some of these poems remain unfocused and vaguely recall her heavily derivative verse in which the voice of the model takes over and removes Pickthall from the poem. These poems are nevertheless instructive because they demonstrate the enormous difficulties confronting women poets in the Romantic tradition. But a few of these lyrics move beyond Pickthall's failure to establish poetic identity in terms of Romantic convention; they turn "woman's place" as defined by convention into a poetic fiction, or mask. That is to say, their poetic intent is to articulate the literary experience of being identified with Mother Nature — with inarticulateness and fatality.

"For all literary artists," write Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative 'I AM' cannot be uttered if the 'I' knows not what it is."<sup>15</sup> The "I" in Pickthall's "Inheritance" knows what it is in terms of the conventions which define it:

Desolate strange sleep and wild  
Came on me while yet a child;  
I, before I tasted tears,  
Knew the grief of all the years.

I, before I fronted pain,  
Felt creation writhe and strain,  
Sending ancient terror through  
My small pulses, sweet and new.

I, before I learned how time  
Robs all summers at their prime,  
I, few seasons gone from birth,  
Felt my body change to earth. (p. 147)

It would be difficult to deny the "I" in this poem; the word is repeated seven times. It is no coincidence that the thrice repeated phrase "I, before I" is a poetic rendering of "self-definition" before "self-assertion." What this poem is saying is that the poet, having found out how her self is defined, is now, for better or worse, asserting that self. It is, of course, a poetic or fictive self — the self as defined by the conventions of the tradition in which she has been trying to locate herself all her poetic life. But personal experience in the wider sense is also integrated here, for the poem, written within five years of Pickthall's death, looks back to the period in her life in which she became defined by the oppressive culture in which she was raised. This period was indeed a period — her first one — for this is a poem clearly inspired by the newly awakened memory of the poet's first menstruation. *Mensus* is a woman's "Inheritance" from her mother — and from Mother

Nature. “Desolate strange sleep and wild” is a powerful evocation of the altered state of consciousness which the onset of menses brings: with the sudden appearance of strange and unstaunchable blood comes dizzying insight into “the grief of all the years” which lie ahead: the tears to be tasted, the pain to be confronted as one’s biological destiny unfolds. In terms of the myth that structures Pickthall’s imagination, this poem reunites Persephone with Demeter; the memory lost in “Persephone Returning to Hades” is here restored. It is via this journey back through memory that the poet connects with an understanding of both her cultural and literary identity. These stanzas clearly articulate what it is to be female in patriarchal culture and a female poet in a patriarchal tradition: to be female is to be identified with nature, to feel one’s “body change to earth”; it is to be identified with fatality and decay, to learn that time is one’s greatest adversary. For time — to borrow horticultural terms used to describe the decaying effects of time upon woman — robs her of her “bloom” and “ripens” her to maturity. In short, time erodes her sexual attractiveness, her only power in patriarchal culture.

The most significant thing about “Inheritance” is that, like much of Emily Dickinson’s poetry, it is not primarily a landscape poem; communion with nature is not its poetic intention, although it is clearly informed by the poet’s experience of that convention. Its primary intention is to get in touch with the poetic self by focusing not on nature but directly on the “I.” Consequently the convention is thrown into something resembling photographic reverse field: the poet half of this poet/nature configuration comes to the forefront; the nature half recedes. The poet does not *lose* herself in nature but rather *finds* herself there. And finding herself there means reconnecting with her long matrilineal heritage; as the second verse implies, it is a terrifying experience. Who the speaker is derives from an “ancient” source — from the first woman ever to hand down this terrifying “Inheritance” to a daughter. Within the analytical framework in which we are operating here, that first woman is Mother Nature herself.

To mention “Inheritance” in the same breath with Emily Dickinson is to imply its success. And it is without doubt a successful poem. Enclosed within Pickthall’s canon and surrounded by failure after failure, it has never been recognized for the success it is. Not only does it integrate female experience and art and establish poetic identity, it is also technically excellent; it is better even than “Persephone Returning to Hades.” It contains no pathetic fallacy, no overripe diction, no archaic language, no awkward syntactical inversions. The presence of a strong poetic voice is directly related to the absence of these irritating affectations; when Pickthall’s poetic mask is securely in place, she has no need of them.

“**L**OVE UNFOUND” was written one year later than “Inheritance” but unlike that poem it focuses primarily on landscape and as a result risks

falling into the trap laid for the woman poet by Romantic convention. Nevertheless, the poem does seem to throw the convention into some kind of reverse field in that the convention does not exploit the poet, the poet exploits the convention. The poem is an intense search for a lost female ancestor and, as the title suggests, the search fails; in this way it dramatizes both the poet's literary experience and female experience in the larger sense:

She was earth before earth gave  
 Me a heart to miss her;  
 Stars and summers were her grave,  
 Any rains might kiss her;  
 Wild sweet ways love would not cross  
 Curbed in sorrels and green moss.

She's been dust a hundred springs;  
 Still her face comes glancing  
 Out of glimmering water-rings  
 Where the gnats are dancing;  
 Loosed is she in lilac flowers,  
 Lost in bird-songs and still hours.

If I'd lived when kings were great, —  
 Greater I than any, —  
 I'd have sold my olden state  
 For a silver penny,  
 Just to find her, just to keep,  
 Just to kiss her eyes asleep. (p. 126)

Although the poet avoids use of her characteristic affectations, the poem nevertheless has a fuzzy quality about it, which suggests that she is not fully conscious of what she is trying to say. The poem operates on several levels, not the least of which is the biographical: it is one of the many short lyrics in which she appears to be expressing the loss of her mother, Lizzie Pickthall. But text and subtext are not fully integrated; poetic intent is being sabotaged by unconscious intent. The experience of reading the poem is one of seeing double, of seeing two seemingly identical images out of focus with one another. The image that appears to be related to the subtext is the more interesting of the two. The poem is subtitled "*A Portrait*," but clearly the image of this dead female ancestor is not a painted portrait but a landscape painting. A hundred years after her disappearance from memory, traces of her image are still recognizable in the landscape which has absorbed her. Perhaps the glimpse of this foremother's image which the poet catches in the rippled pool is a reflection of the poet's own face. As the last stanza suggests, even if the poet could exchange her female powerlessness for the male power to change the world, she could still not reclaim her lost matrilineal heritage. Indeed, so irrevocably lost is the identity of this ancestor that it is beyond even the highest order of male power to recover it.

As poems like “Persephone” and “Love Unfound” suggest, Mother Nature’s womb is also a tomb, and for the female poet, identified as she is with non-transcendence and fatality, death is essentially a female space. This would seem to account for the fact that, as in the work of Christina Rossetti, Pickthall’s most distinctive voice emanates from the grave. Paradoxically, it is this most articulate voice which communicates her sense of herself as the silenced woman and the silenced poet:

I chose the place where I would rest  
 When death should come to claim me,  
 With the red-rose roots to wrap my breast  
 And a quiet stone to name me.

But I am laid on a northern steep  
 With the roaring tides below me,  
 And only the frosts to bind my sleep,  
 And only the winds to know me. (“Exile,” p. 77)

Unlike “The Sleep-Seekers,” in which the poetic voice seems to emanate from two places at once, there is no confusion about where the speaker stands — or rather lies — in “Exile.” The poem post-dates “Inheritance” by three years and can be seen as its companion piece. “Exile,” however, is not as strong as the earlier poem, as if the terror of self-discovery that informs “Inheritance” had worn off. What is significant about this poem is that it addresses the question of choice. This speaker’s words are an implicit reproach to those who have robbed her of the power of choice. Her request to be buried under a headstone which would identify her to future generations has fallen on deaf ears, for she lies in a remote and inaccessible place in an unmarked grave. In terms of Pickthall’s place in Canadian literary history, this erasure, or “Exile,” from civilization’s memory is hauntingly prophetic.

It is in keeping with the woman poet’s Romantic literary experience that only “the winds” — that is to say, nature — knows the speaker in “Exile.” This disappearance is reiterated in “Departure,” where only “the dreaming earth” knows the poem’s vanished female figure:

She went. She left no trace to find her  
 No word with wind or flower,  
 No rose, no rose let fall behind her  
 That lasted but an hour.

She went. She left no following voices,  
 No sign with star or stream,  
 Yet still the dreaming earth rejoices  
 It knew her from a dream. (p. 200)

This poem was written in 1915, two years prior to “Inheritance,” and it has a kind of “pre-conscious” feel to it. Given that the female figure it depicts is

tragically lost to human history and her identity erased through merger with nature, the word “rejoices” is somewhat incongruous; here, once again, is a poem slightly out of focus. But negation, made explicit through the sixfold repetition of the word “no,” makes it difficult to deny that the intention is to emphasize the unequivocal silencing of this female figure. Whatever murky depths of the unconscious it emanates from, the universal fear of poets — the fear of leaving “No word,” “no following voices” — is undeniably present in the poem.

**T**HE IMAGES OF FORGOTTEN WOMAN and inarticulate poet are strongest in “Theano,” which was written in the same year as “Inheritance”:

All you who spared lost loveliness a tear,  
 All you who gave some grief to beauty fled,  
 Go your ways singing. Grief is ended where  
 Theano laid her head.

She was so merry. Winter did her wrong.  
 She was so young. Spring proved to her unkind.  
 It loosed her like a bird without a song,  
 A flower upon the wind.

Here in the shadow and the heat I stray,  
 Spring’s hand in mine, her music round me flung,  
 Seeking the bird that fled me yesterday  
 With all her songs unsung. (p. 199)

Theano is one of those minor figures in classical mythology whose identity is so fragmented and scattered throughout the myths that it can be said of her that she has no identity at all. Not much more is known of her than what the poet says here in lines 5 and 6. Indeed, as this poem seems to suggest, Theano is such a shadowy figure that her life must go unsung, her death ungrieved; she is “loosed . . . like a bird without a song.” The poet sums up Theano’s life in four short, almost monosyllabic statements. It is all she can do, for it seems that spring has been as unkind to her as it was to Theano: the poet strays through “the shadow and the heat” in search of her lost muse; like Theano it has disappeared “With all her songs unsung.”

As the cryptic nature of “Theano” suggests, it is silence rather than speech which calls for interpretation. As the daughters of inarticulate Mother Nature, both Pickthall and her literary foremother, Christina Rossetti, struggled against the silence which was their female inheritance. Like other poets working within the female tradition, they developed their poetry as an art of silence where it has historically been treated as an art of speech.<sup>16</sup> Both Rossetti and Pickthall seem to accept death as a female space, but rather than be condemned to the eternal

silence which death implies, they turn silence into a female aesthetic. Their poetry stands as evidence of their refusal to accept nature (and, by implication, themselves) as inarticulate. For example, the dead female figure in Rossetti's poem "Rest" is enclosed in the grave and held in "Silence more musical than any song,"<sup>17</sup> and the dead persona in "Echo" invites her lover to return to her "in the speaking silence of a dream" (p. 314). Similarly, Marjorie Pickthall's strongest and clearest voice emanates from the unquiet grave of "The Wife":

Living, I had no might  
 To make you hear,  
 Now, in the inmost night,  
 I am so near  
 No whisper, falling light,  
 Divides us, dear.

Living, I had no claim  
 On your great hours.  
 Now the thin candle-flame,  
 The closing flowers,  
 Wed summer with my name, —  
 And these are ours.

Your shadow on the dust,  
 Strength, and a cry,  
 Delight, despair, mistrust, —  
 All these am I.  
 Dawn, and the far hills thrust  
 To a far sky.

Living, I had no skill  
 To stay your tread,  
 Now all that was my will  
 Silence has said.  
 We are one for good and ill  
 Since I am dead. (p. 201)

Surely the most silent woman in patriarchal culture is the betrayed wife. This wife's failure to make her unfaithful mate stop and listen to her complaints is really his powerful refusal to stop and hear them. Alive, she is the victim of this total censorship; dead, she is a powerful reproach. Merged with the summer, the dawn, the hills, and the sky, this dead woman has absorbed the power of nature's silent speech. Through the eloquent silence of death she can finally exert the force of her will. Her sinister silence will forever haunt his shadow, his strength, the sound of his own voice. The penultimate line mocks their empty marriage vow, "till death do us part," for only her death has the power to make them "one for good and ill." The narrowness of the grave, like the narrowness of her life, is reflected in the shape of the poem on the page. But unlike her empty marriage,

this poem is densely crowded with language. It is a solid upright coffin of a poem: nothing opposes the force of its vertical gravity; the eye is convinced it can stand.<sup>18</sup>

"The concept of Mother Nature," Homans explains, "is only a fiction among other fictions" (p. 200), and as the more successful of the poems examined here suggest, when Marjorie Pickthall recognized Romantic convention for what it is — merely convention and not literal truth — she was able to create poems of more merit than literary history has given her credit for. On some level of consciousness she came to terms with Persephone's identity dilemma. She discovered that separation from Mother Nature means loss of identity through death and that reunion means the absorption of identity by Mother Nature. By turning this unresolvable dilemma into a metaphor for "woman's place" in the poetic universe, she managed — paradoxically — to articulate her sense of herself as inarticulate, to transform female silence into song.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E. K. Brown, *On Canadian Poetry* (1943; rpt. Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1973), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Lorne Pierce, *Marjorie Pickthall: A Book of Remembrance* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1924), p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Pierce, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Pierce, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Desmond Pacey, "The Poems of Marjorie Pickthall" (1957), rpt. in *Essays in Canadian Criticism, 1938-1968* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1969), p. 146.

<sup>7</sup> Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada* (1952; rpt. Toronto: Ryerson, 1967), p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> *The Complete Poems of Marjorie Pickthall*, ed. by Arthur C. Pickthall (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1927), p. 143. All quotations from Pickthall's poetry are from this edition and further references to it appear by page number in the text. Dates of composition of Marjorie Pickthall's poems have been taken from the poet's handwritten manuscripts ("ms.") and autographed manuscripts ("ams."), which are held in the Marjorie Pickthall Collection, Victoria University (Box 1, Folders 1-12) and the Lorne Pierce Collection, Queen's University Archives (two manuscript books, Box 60, Folder 9; individual poems, Boxes 60-66). With the exception of "The Wife," all poems were first published in collections of Pickthall's verse. Dates of composition and place of earliest publication are as follows: "The Chosen," ms. 1917, *The Wood Carver's Wife and Later Poems* (Toronto: McClelland, 1922), p. 23; "The Sleep-Seekers," ms. 1905, *Little Songs* (Toronto: McClelland, 1925), p. 75; "Persephone Returning to Hades," ams. 1905, *Complete Poems*; "Inheritance," ms. 1917, *The Wood Carver's Wife*, p. 32; "Departure," ms. 1915, *Lamp of Poor Souls and Other Poems* (New York: Lane, 1916), p. 35; "Exile," ms. 1920, *Little Songs*, p. 35; "Theano," ms. 1917, *Complete Poems*; "Love Unfound," ms. 1918, *Complete Poems*; "The Wife," ms. 1920, *Smart Set* (June 1921), p. 13.

- <sup>9</sup> Letter to Helena Coleman, 12 June 1921, The Marjorie Pickthall Collection, Box 2, 21, E. J. Pratt Library, Victoria University.
- <sup>10</sup> Letter to Helen Coleman, 29 Dec. 1919, The Marjorie Pickthall Collection, Box 2, 20.
- <sup>11</sup> R. E. Rashley, *Poetry in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1958), p. 101.
- <sup>12</sup> Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980). All further references to this title appear in the text.
- <sup>13</sup> G. B. Stewart, "Mother, Daughter, and the Birth of the Female Artist," *Women's Studies* 6 (1979), 132.
- <sup>14</sup> In her *Literary Women* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), Ellen Moers maintains that "little" is the most overworked word in the female canon. According to Moers, this relates to the woman writer's sense of herself as small and insignificant because she is female (p. 244).
- <sup>15</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 17.
- <sup>16</sup> See Jeanne Kammer's theory of the strategies of silence in Emily Dickinson, Marianne Moore, and others ("The Art of Silence and the Forms of Women's Poetry," in *Shakespeare's Sisters*, ed. by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar [Bloomington and London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979], pp. 153-64). Kammer's theory is equally applicable to contemporaries of Dickinson and Moore, including Christina Rossetti and Marjorie Pickthall.
- <sup>17</sup> Christina Georgina Rossetti, *Poetical Works*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti (1904; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 325. All quotations from Rossetti's work are from this edition; further references appear by page number in the text.
- <sup>18</sup> My language is borrowed from Kammer; see her analysis of the visual impact of women's poetry, p. 162.

## MARCH: VERNAL EQUINOX

(for Maria)

Pat Jasper

Monday morning they will shave her head,  
pump sleep into her veins  
and wheel her into a white winter  
world she may never wake from.

Pump sleep into her veins . . .  
An hour ago I coasted to a stop —  
Oh, world she may never wake from . . .  
I doused the lights and sit here in the dark.

An hour ago I coasted to a stop —  
That's the place in the nightmare where you wake up:  
I doused the lights and sit here in the dark.  
An hour of cold hands and cold feet.

That's the place in the nightmare where you wake up:  
the door ajar, her in robe and slippers,  
an hour of cold hands and cold feet.  
Weak blue walls pulse at her temples.

The door ajar, her in robe and slippers —  
What words can carry that weight?  
Weak blue walls pulse at her temples.  
These could be her last two days alive.

What words can carry that weight?  
Good luck? If I don't see you again —  
(These could be her last two days alive!)  
thanks for the good times?

Good luck, if I don't see you again —  
(This long winter reluctant to let go)  
thanks for the good times.  
(Your spring nipped in the bud)

This long winter reluctant to let go,  
I want to reach out and hug you, Maria,  
your spring nipped in the bud.  
Please, whatever you do, don't die.

I want to reach out and hug you, Maria.  
Instead I unwrap these hothouse tulips.  
Please, whatever you do, don't die.  
I leave them on the doorstep blooming for all they're worth.

Instead I unwrap these hothouse tulips . . .  
Monday morning they will shave her head . . .  
I leave them on the doorstep blooming for all they're worth.  
They wheel her into a white winter world.

# A DOZEN MORE PROFOUND STANZAS

*Ralph Gustafson*

1.

Conditions are such that the world  
Is snow, white, everywhere,  
On red chimneys, on roof  
Ridges, and blue hills.  
It is a beautiful world, covered:

2.

The defection was barely noticeable —  
The gain of a perversity, the subtraction  
Of love. Yet community shifted,  
The imagining of things was affected,  
The grace of what is made.

3.

One must assume primal imagining.  
The obscenity of a corpse empty  
Is easy enough, nothing  
After corruption's success.  
Yet there must be a beginning.

4.

"The cow jumped over the moon,"  
One yelled in childhood asserting  
The certainty, the whole house,  
The doorway, the yard, the tree,  
Challenged forever and ever.

5.

Ruined temples descried  
That challenge, lotus pillars  
At Karnak, the silliness at Ephesus,  
Segesta and her marble,  
Wesley and barebones.

6.

The grave. An end to it. The Soviets  
Suppressing Uzbekistan.  
I watch the catkins fall,  
The walk is covered with them — and next  
Year's autumn leaves

7.

Which we won't be here to encounter.  
Brahms lay dying, cancer  
In him, and there was a massacre  
In a synagogue recently, in Turkey,  
I think, yet the flowers bloomed

8.

Like crazy in the garden that year  
Once the sheep manure  
Was spread early enough.  
Horticulture is a sermon,  
And instinct and neuro-aesthetics,

9.

Also reason — informed  
By love — and readings in various  
Languages, Elizabethan  
And the scrolls of Galilee.  
Personally, I like Faulkner

10.

And Edgar Rice Burroughs  
And anonymous pornography if decent.  
Which brings us back to love.  
Always we get back to love,  
The start and needed point.

11.

“The dish ran away with the spoon —”  
The old nursery rhyme  
Goes on. Imagination  
And footnotes, fact and poetry,  
Hey diddle diddle.

12.

So much for today. The impossible  
 And the actual. Snow falling  
 Like the last resurrection, never  
 Stopping, the rooftops white,  
 The walkway, the houses, the trees.

## VITAL DISTRACTIONS

*Derk Wynand*

Lime on the grass, then  
 water on the lime:

the lawn must become  
 greener, every other thing  
 permitting.

The same crow, I believe,  
 perches on the same  
 garage roof:

neither will grow blacker.

These thoughts, all at once  
 darker, keep turning  
 to the same thing.

What they hope  
 to avoid like that  
 I don't care to say  
 exactly.

Sure, I have a good idea.

In the garden, two women  
 I know well are preparing  
 the soil.

No need to guess  
 what they are saying  
 and not saying.

# "PROCEEDING BEFORE THE AMOROUS INVISIBLE"

*Phyllis Webb and the Ghazal*

*Susan Glickman*

**P**HYLLIS WEBB'S LATEST BOOK, *Water and Light*, brings together five sequences of "ghazals and anti-ghazals," including "Sunday Water," first published as an Island chapbook in 1982, and "I Daniel" from her Governor General's Award-winning selected poems, *The Vision Tree* (1982). At first, one may wonder what it was about the ghazal, a highly conventional oriental lyric, which attracted a poet like Webb. A little preliminary history of the ghazal, followed by a consideration of Webb's career before she discovered it, should make clear how fortuitous the meeting has been for the writer as well as her readers.

## *1. The Ghazal*

The most popular form of Urdu and Persian poetry, the ghazal traditionally consists of five or more couplets on a single rhyme: AA BA CA DA and so on. Although all ghazals follow the same rhyme-scheme, there are many different prosodic patterns to choose from; however, whichever metre is chosen is adhered to strictly for the length of the poem. A final convention is the insertion of the poet's pen-name in the closing couplet as a kind of signature.

A high degree of conventionality obtains also in the traditional characters, situations, and imagery of the ghazal. In its emphasis on poetic artifice and on the novel deployment of stock metaphors, the ghazal has much in common with the English sonnet; it also describes a similar world of courtly love. In the ghazal, the poet speaks as an unrequited lover, pining away in adoration of a Cruel Fair who wounds him with her eyes and ensnares him with her hair, sometimes even rejecting him for an unworthy rival. Webb illustrates this situation in the twelfth ghazal of "Sunday Water":

Drunken and amatory, illogical, stoned, mellifluous  
journey of the ten lines.

The singer sings one couplet or two  
over and over to the Beloved who reigns

On the throne of *accidie*, distant, alone,  
hearing, as if from a distance, a bell

and not this stringy instrument scraping away,  
whining about love's ultimate perfection.

Wait! Everything is waiting for a condition of grace:  
the string of the Sitar, this Gat, a distant bell,

even the Beloved in her bored flesh.

For a student of European literature, this situation is strikingly familiar. The correspondence in literary conventions is based on social reality for in medieval culture, whether Islamic or Christian, marriages were arranged, often from childhood — hence “romantic” love tended to be extramarital (and therefore genuinely “dangerous” and often hopeless). A wider range of erotic experience is acknowledged in the ghazal than in the sonnet: besides desire for an inaccessible married lady or *purdah* girl, we also find expressions of love for courtesans and young boys. The lack of grammatical gender in Persian makes possible a lack of specificity as to the Beloved's sex; in Urdu, the Beloved is conventionally masculine, so as to suggest many possibilities.<sup>1</sup>

The ambiguity of the Beloved's identity is related to his/her stereotypical behaviour: in both cultures, what the poet is addressing is the nature of his passion for an elusive ideal which *may* be embodied in a specific individual but need not be. This is the link between social reality and metaphysics; as Ralph Russell puts it, “the situations of earthly love . . . are taken over bodily . . . and applied to the experience of divine love, or mystic love.”<sup>2</sup> In Webb's ghazal even the Beloved is waiting for this “condition of grace,” she too is waiting for a signal that all this repetitive behaviour is actually in the service of something transcendent, that her “bored flesh” incarnates a transforming principle.

The humour in this characterization of the Beloved's flesh, like that of the poet's description of her incompetent instrument, is profoundly related to the self-consciousness of the courtly tradition in its treatment by later writers. Elizabethan sonneteers, like nineteenth-century ghazal writers, continued to explore the possibilities of these conventions even when they no longer corresponded to “reality,” because they recognized their symbolic content. So within the narrow compass of these forms we find both pathos and wit, traditional images and innovative developments of them, verbal brilliance and metrical conformity; the poet is at once committed *and* skeptical. In both traditions, writing within conventions while simultaneously transforming them is the great challenge.

We shall see how well Webb understands and appreciates this challenge, how her own career has consistently shown her testing the validity of poetic devices in just this way. For this reason alone, the ghazal clearly should appeal to her. But why the ghazal rather than the sonnet?

John Thompson, whose book *Stilt-Jack* introduced Webb to the form, insists that “the ghazal is immediately distinguishable from the classical, architectural,

rhetorically and logically shaped English sonnet.”<sup>3</sup> His description of the sonnet is rather eccentric; epithets like “classical, architectural” can more readily be applied to the Augustan closed couplet than to the sonnet which, however “rhetorical,” uses the structure of logic more as a self-dramatizing posture or an argumentative tactic in the battle between the sexes than as a form of public statement. English sonnets tend to become more and more logically unstable upon analysis — just as many ghazals include apostrophes and moral statements and feints of logic.

But to make a distinction is also to acknowledge a similarity, and it is mainly Thompson’s desire to keep us from classifying the ghazal as simply an Islamic sonnet that makes him overstate his case. What he wants us to recognize is the characteristic way a ghazal *moves* — by association and imaginative leaps rather than in linear, discursive fashion. This progress by implicit rather than explicit links is what makes the ghazal so appealing to modern writers like Thompson and Webb who hope to achieve “the poem of the act of the mind.” That is, what occurs in *some* sonnets — especially those of Shakespeare — is the way of *all* ghazals: a surface tension of rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, wordplay, and associative imagery holds together a structure discursively obscure. Connections are mainly thematic, not logical, and we are given a constellation of ideas, images, and feelings *around* a particular stance or in response to a particular event, itself not always clearly defined.<sup>4</sup>

Webb came to the ghazal via Thompson’s free-verse imitations, and the renditions of contemporary translators who prefer not to be too restricted by rhyme or metre.<sup>5</sup> What these works share is first, a loosening of the formal conventions of the ghazal and second, a fervent appreciation of its phenomenological accuracy as a mode of expression. Retaining the couplet structure is integral to the character of the ghazal not only as a formal signal (as fourteen lines identifies a sonnet, even in the absence of rhyme or iambic pentameter) but also because its deep structure is one of setting thought against thought, image against image, discontinuously. For in the traditional ghazal each couplet is self-contained both in grammar and meaning: in effect, each is designed as a self-sufficient poem which can be savoured on its own, however much it gains from its association with the other couplets of the ghazal. Sometimes two or more couplets may form a continuous sequence within a ghazal, but this is so unusual it is especially noted in the margin. Similarly, there are “linked” (*musalsal*) ghazals in which the sense runs on coherently for the whole poem, but they are few in number and “not typical examples of the genre.”<sup>6</sup> And even in a linked ghazal each couplet is still closed, designed to be appreciated as a finished expression.

Adrienne Rich explains clearly how the discontinuity of the ghazal provides an opportunity for a new kind of unity — one well-suited to the needs of a contemporary poet.

The marvellous thing about these ghazals (for me) is their capacity for both concentration and a gathering, cumulative effect. . . . I needed a way of dealing with a very complex and scattered material which was demanding a different kind of unity from that imposed on it by the isolated, single poem: In which certain experiences needed to find both their intensest rendering and to join with other experiences not logically or chronologically connected in an obvious way.<sup>7</sup>

So ultimately the ghazal, as perceived by contemporary poets coming to it in translation, represents an orderly couplet structure used, paradoxically, as a non-linear method of development; a way of opening up the range of the lyric poem while maintaining tight structural boundaries. This is the form as Webb uses it, and as it is used by many other contemporary writers including Jim Harrison, W. S. Merwin, and Adrienne Rich. In her ghazals Webb reveals that she is familiar with the oriental tradition and recognizes how different her versions are from their models; she acknowledges this by calling them “ghazals and anti-ghazals.” But cryptically, she doesn’t specify which poems are which; this suggests that she also recognizes how profoundly she has been influenced by the tradition and how, in making its conventions her own, she is paying tribute to its continuing authenticity.

## 2. *Webb’s Career*

It is not surprising to find Phyllis Webb going outside the mainstream of English poetry for inspiration since her whole career has been one of rigorous self-scrutiny and ceaseless experimentation. In many ways the ghazals, as oriental lyrics, are a natural progression from *The Naked Poems*, her 1965 volume of sapphic haiku.<sup>8</sup> In that book Webb created a larger narrative structure out of intense lyric moments by writing in suites, and then organizing these suites (five, like the five ghazal sequences of *Water and Light*) into a “story.” In this way the static form of each brief poem was transcended, and a different kind of unity was discovered than that of the single lyric. A minimalist vocabulary of images — not metaphors, but colours and objects — was replayed again and again, so as to accrue value merely by the fact of repetition.

Webb explained in a 1964 interview that what she was trying to come to terms with in the *Naked Poems* was

phrasing . . . the measure of the breath . . . to clarify my statements so that I could see what my basic rhythms were; how I *really* speak, how my feelings come out on the page. . . . The *Naked Poems* . . . are attempts to get away from a dramatic rhythm, from a kind of dramatic structure in the poem itself, *and* away from metaphor very often, so that they are very bare, very simple.<sup>9</sup>

Obviously this is a very different kind of intention than that behind the ghazals, with their reproduction of the rich chaos of the personal and historical moment through metaphorical abundance and a *refusal* to simplify, Nonetheless, in both

projects we are impressed by the poet's stylistic flexibility, her testing of limits. They are dynamic experiments to discover what her "true" voice is, setting self-conscious craftsmanship against the modern preference for open forms with their illusion of spontaneity.

From her earliest publications Webb has shown herself skeptical of the very poetics which she practises so elegantly. Although a loving maker of brief lyrics, Webb has never fully trusted the lyric's illusion of unity and control, of "emotion recollected in tranquillity." There has always been a nervous energy in her work questioning the very artifice which gives that work shape. This is often complemented by a summoning up of past masters to argue with them about the predicament they've passed on to her, exposing the assumptions and values associated with the poetic tools she's inherited. For example, the spirit of George Herbert is evoked in "The Shape of Prayer" (published in *Even Your Right Eye*, 1956, and reprinted in the 1964 *Selected Poems*). Though he is mentioned nowhere in the poem, it is impossible to read Webb's lyric without hearing it as a response to Herbert's sonnet "Prayer" — a bleak, modern corrective to his hard-fought-for faith that ultimately "something" is "understood" because someone is listening. Webb's version reduces Herbert's ecstatic catalogue of prayer's attributes to a single intellectually laboured-for definition of its "shape," that described by a pebble skipping on the water and then "drowning." Poetic strategy here is ethical in import, telling us that Webb's world offers her less evidence of divine presence than Herbert's did him. For the same reason, Webb rejects the sonnet form (God is not her beloved in this poem) and the chiming of cross-rhyme (with its connotations of order and stability).

Nevertheless she pays tribute to Herbert in the counterpointing of rhyme against line-length and stress-pattern; the form of her poem imitates his strenuous rhythm even as the content rejects his religious conclusion. We see the same process of evaluative parody much more explicitly in poems like "Marvell's Garden" (*Even Your Right Eye*), "Poems of Dublin" (*The Sea Is Also A Garden*), and "Rilke" (*Wilson's Bowl*). What these poems all confess is a simultaneous admiration of the achieved styles of past writers and a fear of being too easily influenced. Moreover the influence is perceived not only in the overt *content* of their poems but in the possibility that even using poetic devices associated with them will covertly imply their assumptions about the world. In "Poetics Against the Angel of Death" Webb enacts this drama of simultaneous attraction and repulsion with iambic pentameter as her adversary. Even metre is value-laden in Webb's poetics.

*Poetics Against the Angel of Death*

I am sorry to speak of death again  
(some say I'll have a long life)

but last night Wordsworth's "Prelude"  
 suddenly made sense — I mean the measure,  
 the elevated tone, the attitude  
 of private Man speaking to public men.  
 Last night I thought I would not wake again  
 but now with this June morning I run ragged to elude  
 The Great Iambic Pentameter  
 who is the Hound of Heaven in our stress  
 because I want to die  
 writing Haiku  
 or, better,  
 long lines, clean and syllabic as knotted bamboo. Yes!

The poem's success lies in its witty, imitative form, its explicit commentary on itself, and its expectation of a literate complicity with the reader. Most noteworthy is the poem's veering toward iambic pentameter as soon as Wordsworth is mentioned (lines 4-7 are all decasyllabic), then "running raggedly" to elude the metre which closes in again, finally regular by the *tenth* line of the poem. Equally obvious of course is the way the poem "dies" into lines the length of those in a Haiku, and then opens out for the final long line of affirmation.

None of this casual expertise makes us doubt the poem's sincerity; we recognize it also in the self-deprecating irony of the opening, in Webb's acknowledgment of her public image as a suicidal, "morbid" poet. For her, inability to write truly *would* be death; hence being overpowered by Wordsworth's elevated tone, being run to ground by Iambic Pentameter, *would* be falling asleep to never wake again. She suggests two alternatives for herself here as ways of "eluding" the continuing presence of Wordsworth in post-Romantic poetry that were to shape her career for the next twenty years.

The first of these, the Haiku orientation, was followed by the *Naked Poems* whose intimacy — that of a private woman speaking to her lover — was far from the public ambitions of Wordsworth. But even while writing these brief lyrics, Webb anticipated a return to a more extroverted and ornate form of expression in a series of long-lined poems on the life of Kropotkin.<sup>10</sup> One of the more notorious facts about Webb has been her failure to complete this projected work; many writers might take this as confirmation of the superstition that one should never talk about work-in-progress to anyone until it's done! Certainly the first of her two apologia prefacing *Wilson's Bowl* (the book in which many of the "Kropotkin" poems appeared) suggests that her ambitions had grown too unwieldy, "too grand and too designed," and public interest in the work may have contributed to this over-explicitness.

In connection with the second apology, for the dominance of male figures in the book, John Hulcoop offers a different explanation (the two are not mutually exclusive). As he says,

it seems reasonable to assume that Webb has abandoned her conscious pursuit of the long line because she has come to identify it as "male" and to associate it with an assertive, aggressive male domination.<sup>11</sup>

In support of this contention he quotes from Webb's remarks in her essay "On the Line" describing the long line in exactly those terms:

aggressive, with much "voice". Assertive at least. It comes from assurance (or hysteria) . . . big-mouthed Whitman, yawp, yawp, and Ginsberg — howling. Male.<sup>12</sup>

But in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel published in *Books in Canada* (November 1983) Webb explained her abandonment of the project straightforwardly as the result of disillusionment with the *ideological* content of the work. She said:

The Kropotkin Utopia enchanted me for a while until I saw that it was yet another male imaginative structure for a new society. It would probably *not* have changed male-female relationships.<sup>13</sup>

And in a private letter, Webb has declared that she was *never* disenchanted with the long line itself: "Completely opposite in fact — I want to expand and others to expand, though the short line has its uses of course."<sup>14</sup> The problem, therefore, was and remains the *ethos*, the rhetoric of assertion, Webb associates with the traditional use of the long line; the cultural context of the poetic technique. This is the predicament she addressed in her poem on Wordsworth and blank verse: the dilemma of a modern poet trying to write accurately of present experience in a language and with poetic conventions saturated with the values of the past. But now Webb has recognized a further dimension to the problem for any *female* poet: that past has been patriarchal.

Interestingly, Webb concedes in the *Books in Canada* interview that she never thought about these issues at the beginning of her career, when she was surrounded by "super-brilliant men" who, in her words, "allowed [her] in."<sup>15</sup> More recently, speaking at the League of Canadian Poets panel discussion of "The Female Voice in Canadian Poetry" (Regina 1984) she wondered whether her early acceptance by the predominantly male literary establishment had in some way inhibited her development as a poet, encouraging too great a reliance on masculine approval and the literary techniques which seemed to ensure it. So Webb's grappling with ancestral influence has assumed a new dimension for her since her experiments with private and public voices in the "Naked Poems" and the "Kropotkin Poems." This dimension is elucidated by the poems of *Wilson's Bowl*.

Ann Mandel describes *Wilson's Bowl* as

a leaving, only partly in the sense of 'offering' but more a 'leaving behind', or an attempt to do so, of dominating presences, presiding instructors, an effort at throwing away the names of the great, throwing off the rhythms, the music that

once enthralled. The poet struggles to throw off silence, but only if the words that then come are new words, her own language.<sup>16</sup>

She notes too the preponderance of “winged things — angels, gods, black birds, and envied chevaliers in many forms” as a motif in the book; most of Webb’s “dominating presences” are apprehended as spirits hovering over her.<sup>17</sup> Like Wordsworth in the poem we looked at earlier, they are presented ambivalently; angels of death or guardians? Webb’s not sure.

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Bloom borrows a figure from Blake to personify the artist’s “creative anxiety” as it becomes identified with a “precursor poet” whose accomplishments are felt to be a block to originality. This figure is the “Covering Cherub,” an illusion of the interference of past art with present creativity.<sup>18</sup> Whether or not Webb has read Bloom, she has arrived at the identical metaphor herself. She esteems these figures but at the same time, as she notes in “Socrates,” suspects that their “claritas / hid from shadows / it alone cast.” She wants to discover what is in the shadows, the female experience that has not been articulated; indeed, has scarcely been acknowledged.

According to Bloom, the presence of the Covering Cherub is a particular problem for “strong” poets who recognize their literary debts and therefore feel themselves engaged in a constant struggle against the influence of their mentors. He describes the revolt of the “ephebe” against the “precursor” as archetypally Oedipal, as though identity of *gender* — rather than of literary ambition — were necessary to account for the younger poet’s ambivalence toward the elder(s). But Webb too identifies the men who originally influenced her as “fathers”; in fact, she speculates that it was because she lost her biological father at an early age that she “gravitated to men, to fatherly figures.”<sup>19</sup> For Webb, too, men represented authority, and in the literary world only men had power, and were empowered to approve her work.

In the foreword to *Wilson’s Bowl* Webb confesses that

the domination of a male power culture in my educational and emotional formation [has been] so overpowering that I have, up to now, been denied access to inspiration from the female figures of my intellectual life, my heart, my imagination. The ‘Letters to Margaret Atwood’ are an exception; I was *asked* to write on the subject of women at that time.

“Letters to Margaret Atwood” concludes the “Portraits” section of the book, with its valedictions to Webb’s male muses. In it, the poet expresses the hope that some day a genuinely female aesthetic will be found, and affirms her faith that “the poems and paragraphs eventually proceed before the amorous invisible, governed by need and the form of its persuasions.” Again, ethos and aesthetic are one, as they are in the Romantic manifesto of Coleridge, whose desideratum for poetry — that it embody “form as proceeding” rather than “shape as super-induced” Webb seems to echo here. For Coleridge, “the latter is either the death

or the imprisonment of the thing — the former is its self-witnessing and self-effected sphere of agency.”<sup>20</sup> Ironically, his champion Wordsworth has become the deadly exponent of “shape” for Webb. As a Covering Cherub he is a “demon of continuity” whose

baleful charms imprisons the present in the past. . . . This is Milton’s ‘universe of death’ and with it poetry cannot live, for poetry must leap, it must locate itself in a discontinuous universe, and it must make that universe (as Blake did) if it cannot find one. Discontinuity is freedom.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. *Webb and the Ghazal*

Discontinuously, we arrive with Webb at the ghazal, a form which “allows the imagination to move by its own nature . . . the poem of contrasts, dreams, astonishing leaps.”<sup>22</sup> It should be clear by now why Webb should find the ghazal so congenial. It is formally challenging, yet unrestrictive. It comes from outside English literature and so, whatever associations and inhibitions it has within its own culture, it can have few for Webb or her Canadian readers. Moreover the movement by couplets provides a perfect mean between the extremes Webb posited for herself of either “writing Haiku” or “long lines, clean and syllabic as knotted bamboo.” Writing in couplets gives her units of expression which are the rhetorical equivalent of long lines within the ghazal as a whole. At the same time, each couplet may be a self-contained little poem, like a haiku.

One could go even further and say that Webb has discovered a kind of aesthetic androgyny in the ghazal, equivalent to its traditional ambiguity as to the gender of its subjects. For if long lines, to Webb, are “male,” and the couplets approximate long lines, the white spaces between the couplets resemble “those gasps, those inarticulate dashes” of Emily Dickinson’s which she cites as a “*subversive, Female*” alternative within the English tradition itself.<sup>23</sup>

I’d like to conclude by looking closely at one of Webb’s ghazals to see how she uses it to unite her public and private voices, her extroverted “male” concerns and her shadowy “female” ones. Webb tells us that she turned to the ghazal in order to open up:

I wanted something to subvert my own rational mind, to get more free flow of images a little wilder in content, to liberate my psyche a bit.<sup>24</sup>

Like Thompson and Rich, she sees the ghazal as an embodiment of “form as proceeding.” At the same time we will see that she has relinquished none of her technical expertise in the ghazal; the narrative and thematic movement of the poems may be more open but she still strives for tight relationships at the level of detail. Imagery, stress-pattern and rhythm, rhyme and sound effects are all highly controlled.

*Sunday Water, Ghazal 1*

I watch the pile of cards grow.  
 I semaphore for help (calling stone-dead John Thompson).  
 A mist in the harbour. Hydrangea blooms turn pink.  
 A game of badminton, *shuttlecock*, hitting at feathers.  
 My family is the circumstance I cannot dance with.  
 At Banff I danced in black, so crazy, the young man insisting.  
 Four or five couplets trying to dance  
 into Persia. Who dances in Persia now?  
 A magic carpet, a prayer mat, red.  
 A knocked off head of somebody on her broken knees.

It is clear why Webb made this poem not only the first in "Sunday Water," but also the first in *Water and Light* as a whole. It sets up the poet's situation, harbourside, in summer, learning to write ghazals. It adds a little local detail — people outside playing badminton, mist, hydrangeas soaking up moisture and changing colour. Then it contrasts this outwardly serene scene to the poet's inner conflict about her family, and flashes back to a seemingly unrelated memory of dancing at Banff. So far we are in the familiar world of twentieth-century lyric poetry; confessional and inconsequential. Except for the disturbing fact that John Thompson is dead, this is a fairly soft piece so far. But in the last two couplets everything shifts, and the death of Thompson, the poet's embarrassment at her inappropriate behaviour at Banff, the fact that she is trying to write ghazals, all come together to reveal their public and political implications. We are presented with the contrast of the muddleheaded poet, able to dance but unwilling, with a headless woman, fallen on broken knees. What the subject of the poem is revealed to be then, is Webb's ironic awareness of the impropriety of her borrowing a middle-eastern lyrical form to speak of her "predicament" as a poet in the West, in the light of what's going on simultaneously in the Middle-East. Her concerns seem lightweight, a mere "hitting at feathers," when Persia itself is dead, the magic carpet grounded, prayer ineffectual. The red of the prayer mat is contrasted to the pink of the hydrangea, the game of shuttlecock with the knocking-off of heads, and the death of John Thompson becomes a symbol of the loss of a link between the two worlds.

The shape of the ghazal is particularly appropriate for enacting this tension of opposites, the incompatibility of the worlds being emphasized by the self-sufficiency of each couplet. In later ghazals Webb was to experiment with enjambment, running the sense along from couplet to couplet and playing against the visual pattern and the pausing suggested by it. But here the traditional discontinuity of the ghazal is enlisted by Webb to recreate the experience of a divided mind. Both lines of the first couplet begin with "I," signalling the poet's

self-preoccupation; in contrast, both lines of the next couplet begin with the indefinite article “a,” taking us outside to the objective world. The third couplet is again personal — “*My family*” and “*At Banff I*” — but it turns the analytical viewpoint upon the self, exploring motives and behaviour. The reason for this scrutiny becomes clear with the abrupt, ironic transition from Persian poetry to Persian politics in the last two couplets. By the last couplet the perspective is “objective” once again, linked to the second couplet by the use of the indefinite article, but the tone is no longer detached. Rather than simple description, the items listed in the last couplet are value-laden because of the ironic contrast set up earlier, and because of the intrinsic horror of “A knocked off head of somebody on her broken knees.” The poem tells us that this is what is happening in Persia *now*, in contrast to the here and now of the speaker’s situation.

What the poem enacts, then, is a movement outwards, from self-absorption to a compassionate identification with the sufferings of others. And the reason for this transition is the poetic form itself, as a historical phenomenon. Robert Hass suggests that the form of a poem is “the shape of its understanding,” and reminds us that the way a poem orders its experience and leads us through it is a large part of what it is *about*.<sup>25</sup> We can see how the shape of the ghazal suits Webb’s intent in making us feel with her the simultaneity and the incompatibility of what she is feeling as a writer, as a daughter of her family, as a woman, as an observer of the local scene, and as a citizen of the world.

Rhythm and sound are equally attuned to meaning here. The repetition of sounds in “*semaphore for*” sets up an initial stutter indicating strong feelings. A sense of hopelessness is engendered by the spondees in “stone-dead John Thompson” — it is clear that no help will be forthcoming from that quarter. The flutter of dactyls in the second line of the second couplet links the frivolity of badminton with dancing at Banff in the third; this waltz rhythm continues into the fourth couplet for ironic contrast (“trying to dance / into Persia. Who dances in Persia now?”). Finally the last couplet links back to the first, with the heavy stresses in “A knocked off head” recalling John Thompson’s deadness.

Webb uses alliteration, rhyme and half-rhyme with similar finesse; within the ten lines of the ghazal she deploys a full range of poetic devices. Particularly effective is the use of short “a” sounds and rhyme in the third couplet as a unifying pattern in “family,” “circumstance,” “dance,” “Banff,” “danced,” “black,” and “man.” Clearly, for Webb the ghazal does not represent a rejection of the conventions of English poetry. While the apparent discontinuity of the ghazal form is what enables her to surprise us with the gap between what she sees around her and what she thinks of as she writes, coherence is maintained by the devices of sound and rhythm, which insist on relatedness. One might suggest that it is *because* the ghazal’s movement is essentially non-linear and associative, *because* of its thematic and narrative discontinuity, that Webb feels free to pull

out all the stops and play with sound and language as she does. She doesn't have to worry about the poem feeling too constricted and cerebral as she might if it were equally controlled in its propositional sense. Another ghazal sequence, "Frivolities," consists of poems which move almost entirely by verbal and visual associations; its very title tells us not to look too hard for "serious" content. So, one of the things the ghazal seems to have done for Webb is to have, briefly, solved her old dilemma about the nature and consequences of using poetic devices.

By borrowing a structure for her poems from another culture, Webb has been able to perform an act of translation by which finding becomes making and "shape as superinduced" becomes "form as proceeding." The character of the ghazal itself, with its tendency towards abstraction and its discontinuous structure, make it well suited to adaptation by a Western poet whose orientation has always been metaphysical both in theme and technique. Perhaps ironically, although Webb discovered in the ghazal a way of liberating herself from the patriarchal tradition of English literature and presenting more accurately her modern, female experience, she was able to do so only by adopting yet another "father," Ghalib. And so, the last poem in *Water and Light* bids farewell to this mentor as earlier poems did the others. Ghalib, the tutelary spirit of the poems, materializes as a sad man drinking himself to sleep, dreaming of "what was / what could have been possible." He is oblivious to the emblem Webb makes her own, "a small branch of cherry / blossoms, picked today, and it's only February." The unseasonal blossoms would seem to represent a miracle and yet Webb holds the cherry branch up as a flag, "dark pink in moonlight — / from the land of / only what is." That is, the poem closes embracing the present and the real and eschewing the luxury of nostalgia. The gap perceived in the opening ghazal of the book has not closed for Webb, but she leaves Ghalib tenderly, having learned what she can from him.

The ghazal represented one solution for Webb's on-going struggle with form. Inevitably, it was not *the* solution for Webb whose career has been one of continuous experiment; once she solves a problem, the solution itself becomes a problem if it threatens to become habitual and restrictive. This is the way any good poet works, but for Webb it is also one of the great topics of her poetry. Given the rich results of her attempts to solve her dilemma as she is forced, again and again, to confront it, one trusts that "the amorous invisible, governed by need" will find a new form for its persuasions.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 37-39, and Ralph Russell, "The Pursuit of the Urdu Ghazal," in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29.1 (1969-70), pp. 107-24 for further exploration of the idealization of illicit love in medieval society and literature. For the European context, the locus classicus is C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (N.Y.:

- Oxford Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 1-43. Lu Emily Pearson studies the transmission and evolution of courtly love conventions in English poetry in *Elizabethan Love Conventions* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1933).
- <sup>2</sup> Ralph Russell, "Ghalib's Urdu Verse," in *Ghalib: The Poet and his Age*, ed. Russell (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), p. 110. In the English tradition, the ascent from carnal lust to humble adoration of the Divine in its mortal and female incarnation comes from the fusion of Provençal eroticism and neo-platonic introspection in the "Dolce Stil Nuovo," as transplanted by Sir Thomas Wyatt. That Wyatt underplayed the metaphorical fusion of the Beloved with God in order to explore the psychological implications of masculine erotic experience didn't completely inhibit the development of this identification in English poetry; think of Spenser's *Amoretti*, for example. And the subconscious split between body and mind suggested by the need to "transcend" mere fleshly desire in order to make love spiritual is taken to outrageous limits, made to burlesque itself, in Shakespeare's sonnets with their division of love into chaste homosexual worship and misogynist lust.
- <sup>3</sup> John Thompson, Intro. to *Stilt Jack* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1978).
- <sup>4</sup> Many contemporary critics of Shakespeare's sonnets discover their unity in their imitation of "the richness, the density, the logical incompleteness of the mind." See Arthur Mizener's essay "The Structure of Figurative Language in Shakespeare's Sonnets" (from which the preceding quotation was taken) and the essays by C. L. Barber and Winifred Nowotny in *Discussions of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Barbara Herrnstein (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1964). Stephen Booth's phenomenological readings have been very influential in this regard, both in *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969) and in his 1977 Yale University edition of the sonnets.
- <sup>5</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, the co-translator and editor of the translations Webb cites in *Water and Light* suggests that
- formal devices such as rhymed couplets or closely scannable prosodic structures are, in contemporary English . . . restrictive rather than enlarging or intensifying devices. The organic unity of the ghazal, as translated into English, does not depend on formal rhymes. Inner rhymes, allusions, verbal associations, wit, and imagistic relations can quite adequately take over the functions performed by the formal end-rhymes in the original Urdu.
- Intro. to *Ghazals of Ghalib* (N.Y.: Columbia Univ. Press, 1971), p. xix.
- <sup>6</sup> See D. J. Matthews and C. Shackle, Intro. to *An Anthology of Classical Urdu Love Lyrics* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), p. 10.
- <sup>7</sup> Adrienne Rich, letter to Aijaz Ahmad, quoted in *Ghazals of Ghalib*, p. xxv.
- <sup>8</sup> John Hulcoop notes that *Sunday Water* "begs to be compared with her 1965 *Naked Poems*." See "'Bird song in the apparatus': Webb's New Selected Poems," *Essays in Canadian Writing* 30 (Winter 1984-85), p. 359.
- <sup>9</sup> Phyllis Webb, "Polishing Up the View," in *Talking*, ed. Gary Geddes (Montreal: Quadrant, 1982), pp. 46-47.
- <sup>10</sup> In her 1964 interview she picked up the adjective "knotted" from "Poetics Against the Angel of Death" to describe the long lines of the "dark . . . more heavily laden poems" she hoped to write as soon as *Naked Poems* was finished. See "Polishing Up the View," pp. 47-48.
- <sup>11</sup> John F. Hulcoop, "Bird song in the apparatus," p. 364.
- <sup>12</sup> Phyllis Webb, "On the Line," *Talking*, p. 68.

- <sup>13</sup> Eleanor Wachtel, "Intimations of Mortality. [The Splendid Isolation of Phyllis Webb]," *Books in Canada* 12.9 (November 1983), p. 13.
- <sup>14</sup> Letter to Susan Glickman, April 19, 1986.
- <sup>15</sup> Eleanor Wachtel, "Intimations of Mortality," pp. 13-14.
- <sup>16</sup> Ann Mandel, "The Poetry of Last Things," *Essays in Canadian Writing* 26 (Summer 1983), p. 89.
- <sup>17</sup> Mandel, "The Poetry of Last Things," p. 85.
- <sup>18</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 36, 24.
- <sup>19</sup> In the interview with Wachtel recorded in "Intimations of Mortality," p. 14.
- <sup>20</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "On Poesy or Art," in *Biographia Literaria*, Vol. II, ed. J. Shawcross (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 26. Throughout Coleridge's criticism there are discussions of "organic form" and the necessity of imitating *Natura naturans* in the creative act. The impact of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's challenge to Augustan notions of form, and its legacy in the pluralism of modern poetic styles is discussed at length by Donald Wesling in *The New Poetries: Poetic Form Since Coleridge and Wordsworth* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1985).
- <sup>21</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 39.
- <sup>22</sup> John Thompson, Intro. to *Stilt Jack*.
- <sup>23</sup> Phyllis Webb, "On the Line," p. 69.
- <sup>24</sup> Recorded by Eleanor Wachtel in "Intimations of Mortality," p. 14.
- <sup>25</sup> Robert Hass, "One Body: Some Notes on Form," *Antaeus* 30-31 (Spring 1978), p. 33.

## ANTIGONISH SUMMER

*Lachlan Murray*

Popcorn and music  
 the breeze  
 lifts the gasp of an accordion  
 to the one boy, twelve; the other thirteen  
 hidden within the body  
 of a towering maple  
 two hearts pale green, fluttering  
 in sympathy with the leaves

below, the muddied river  
 slow as August  
 the near-side trailer park  
 strings of lights  
 against the softening day,  
 the thick summer people  
 sunk in folding chairs

multi-coloured outside the conveyances  
krazy kamper and the like,  
a shoddily-boxed middle america,  
culture of men drinking  
disposable tins of beer  
grails they raise  
unto hairy bellies,  
talk of *nukeler spremcy*,  
each with a hand of cards  
and a wife  
mute within a cage  
of straw yellow hair

high up the two,  
cast in the role  
of interloper,  
by the prickling light notice  
only the skin of these people  
the same boiled red  
as the sinister lobster  
butter trickling in rivulets  
from the corner of more than one  
mouth

our two have only  
to lift their eyes  
across the water  
the familiar roofs  
guarded by trees  
like green mushrooms  
greet them  
the aliens washed away  
in an instant of the small town,  
electric smells  
of youth



## FROM THE BANK

*Robert Kendall*

Long ago a woman stood at the end  
of a wharf, holding  
the wind by the hand as it left  
the water for pine trees.  
His sadness is still in her eyes.  
It moistens the surface  
of breezes,  
streaking the window he  
returns to each night.  
The water stretched like the opening  
wings of a bird.

---

Cars pass him on the street,  
dragging the rain in their wheels.  
He looks into the faces of  
sounds that go by. Their eyes  
are always clear and hard. Yet  
a hole rises toward  
the tops of the buildings  
to search the skyline's closed fist.  
The wind needs a sound  
as it strokes his clothing. A sound  
like a woman's quiet weeping.

---

He sits in his kitchen naked  
and unshaven. The daylight lies  
unopened on the table,  
touching his arm.  
Traffic noises rise to his door  
and he sits there  
a long time, listening.  
The morning's surface feels as cold and  
solid against his skin as  
the marble of an institution.  
There was never anyone  
at the edge of that lake.

# THREE ROCKS JUTTING UP FROM SNOW

*Yvonne Trainer*

in the back yard  
gray rocks without meaning unlike the three rocks  
placed in white raked sand at the Japanese Gardens  
in Lethbridge My aunt and cousin are with me  
We go on a sunny windy day  
to see the five tiered Pagoda  
with ceremonial bell  
and island shaped like a turtle

Japanese girl in traditional kimono  
explaining "nothing in the garden  
must distract from meditation"  
I am only half-listening

Before entering the tea room  
we take off our shoes  
The Pagoda is made without nails  
The wood imported from Japan  
There are probably other things  
I should remember  
but mostly I remember my aunt in pink flowered dress  
exclaiming "I thought there'd be flowers in the garden at least!"

On that same day another aunt Great Aunt  
dying in hospital Hush of nurses  
vases of flowers on the night stand IV attached to her hand  
steady drip drip of liquid into her body tubes like vines reaching

A week later  
I sit with cousins  
stare at the open coffin the smiling face  
White coffin surrounded by flowers at a time when  
life becomes a joke Distracted I wonder How many nails  
to make a church? Where is the wood imported from? Lilies  
and yellow mums and roses other times other places

This morning three rocks without meaning jutting up from snow.

# WATCHING THE WATCHERS IN THE REPTILE HOUSE

*Robert Gibbs*

It's no small talk their eyes make with  
diamond-back rattlers and wrist-thick  
constrictors Voracious they are and popped  
these six from the colony Jacob's children

chatter as the next busload of schoolkids  
three wide from bearing kerchiefed and  
shawled three slouch-hatted and stooped from  
working acres of acres But it's

my eyes fed too full of iguanas and  
lizards blinking and unblinking in  
their false sunshine and all this  
coiled and sprawled and draped

serpentine musculature my eyes pulled  
back into their headbone niches that  
can't help watching all twelve of theirs  
sparked with out-of-school brightness Then

others pass stary-eyed sated from the  
monkey-house where they fed long enough on  
Mr. Gorilla sideways on his elbow legs  
crossed jauntily winking back and Miss

Orangutan peek-a-booing coyly from under her  
wash-tub fedora They circle by like those  
at a stand-up party who pause to speak  
while their eyes seek past yours the

beautiful that will make them beautiful  
So they stop a minute at the flick-tongued  
coral but their glances flicker on to what  
unspeakable sight might be next stuffed

like me with visions of hippos and baby hippos  
yet far less satisfied than those six whose  
gutterals up ahead around corners  
and corners sing back at us

# RELIGION, PLACE, & SELF IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CANADA

*Robert Norwood's Poetry*

*Alex Kizuk*

**I**N ROBERT NORWOOD'S DEVOTIONAL VERSE-TEXTS of the first decades of the century, a cleavage between priestly service and poetic practice appears as a slippery interface of the antemodern language of religious authority and a modern's need to legitimize individual experience. This cleavage runs clear through his work, at times almost invisible but at other times parted and resonating with the sound of recognizably human voices. These voices emanate not only from a religious source but profoundly from the inner life of place, plumbed by way of self-discovery. In his "Voice as Summons for Belief," Walter J. Ong argues that any discussion of Christianity and poetry "must at some point enter into the mystery of voice and words."<sup>1</sup> To believe in God is to look for a response from Him, and this response is identical to the 'I-thou world' of phenomenological and personalist philosophy. This world, Ong believes, has never been more highly developed in the consciousness "of the human race" than it is in our postmodern times.

According to Jean-François Lyotard, the Western world just isn't the same place it was twenty years ago. Lyotard defines the spreading epistemological gap that separates us from mid-century discourse as a process of delegitimation in which we no longer find it possible to share collectively a modern nostalgia for "the sublime," for "the whole and the one," the illusion of totally communicable experience. "It is our business," he concludes, "not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented." For the mid-century, however, well-wrought urns, verbal icons, and quasi-mythological fearful symmetries were enough for a consensus of taste in which readers of poetry found "solace in good forms," pleasure in individual fusions of tradition and talent. The poet's mind was an empty vessel filling continually with language, ideas, impressions, and memories. Similarly, an object of devotion was an already full container, explaining all and any response to its sublimity. Eliot insisted that "Religion and Literature" come together in criticism as contained and containing, as a process of legitimation in which "It is our business, as Christians, *as well as*

readers of literature, to know what we ought to like.” In the *Four Quartets* the contained chaos of the imagination fuses together in an alliance between faith and art which serves, as Lyotard would say, to supply society’s demand and nostalgia for “the lost narrative.”<sup>2</sup>

Today we think it is our business to ask why anything should be legitimate in the first place. Modern poets felt a need to legitimize their experience because they saw it as essentially different from anything that came before. Speaking from the site of that *other* epistemological gap in modern times — William James pointed out that when we attempt to approve what the definition of deity implies pragmatically and empirically, “we end by deeming that deity incredible.” Religions can no longer expect to appear self-approving, James suggests, since their ‘truth’ depends on how well they minister to sundry vital needs found reigning in any given time and place. Devotion is no longer an obligation; religious legitimacy dissolves before the Darwinian law of survival, and what we need to know now is the answer to this question: “Shall the seen world or the unseen world be our chief sphere of adaptation?”<sup>3</sup> James’s ‘delegitimation’ of the religious experience sets the stage for a modern discourse that must supply representations of the unseen world for verification in the Here and Now. It also poses a question that is fundamental to Robert Norwood’s poetic adventure.

In the year James began his Gifford Lectures, 1900, Santayana explained how — in terms anticipating Eliot — representations of the unseen world could be legitimized and how the lost narrative could be recovered.<sup>4</sup> Santayana simply defined poetry as the container of religion, “poetry become the guide of life,” poetry as essentially “an outward sign of that inward grace for which the soul is thirsting,” poetry as a “momentary harmony in the soul amid stagnation or conflict, — a glimpse of the divine and an incitation to a religious life.” The most sublime poets know that their highest mission is to prophesy, and this mission “contains the whole truth,” belonging as it does to “the sphere of significant imagination, of relevant fiction, of idealism become the interpretation of the reality it leaves behind.” This reliance on poetry as the vessel of “utmost purity and beneficence,” in which religion “surrenders its illusions and ceases to deceive,” eventually led to a modernist poetry of hollow vessels, sterile frameworks, and scaffoldings that could no longer mean, but only be.

Poetry in Canada has suffered as much as any other discourse from the modernist cul-de-sac, because from the turn of the century at least Canadian poets have been preoccupied with legitimizing their work as myth-oriented interpretations that leave human life and reality behind in their wake. Yet in the devotional poetry of Robert Winkworth Norwood (1874-1932) we find an example of early modern writing that succumbs to an overwhelming sense of *mis en oeuvre*, of working without rules in order to formulate rules for what will have been done, to use Lyotard’s tight-fitting language, that sense of slipping beneath the surface

and awakening to a cacophony of innumerable human voices. But how could this be? How could transitional writing from the early part of the century have anything to say to those making the transition to the postmodern condition? Perhaps the antemodern questioning of religion and the contemporary view of all knowledge as a language-game are really two sides of the same coin. In this essay I discuss the licit and illicit values that Robert Norwood assigned to the metal of this coin.

NORWOOD WAS A PRIEST deeply involved in ambitious machinations within the Anglican Church and profoundly devoted to his parishioners. The combination of his near-irresistible presence speaking in public, his seriousness, and concern for his charge guaranteed him a considerable audience among the religious. His contacts with Kenneth Leslie and Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, however, and Lionel Stevenson's appraisal of his works as having attained a new myth-making capacity in his narrative poem of the maritimes, *Bill Boram*, were not enough to convince readers of poetry in Canada that his verse was imaginatively significant enough to provide an alternative to the apparent chaos of their rapidly changing times. Too much of his reputation depended on his personal aura. He is remembered today as a member of the Song Fishermen and not entirely forgotten as a pulpit orator and the author of two religious verse dramas, but not by many. Shortly after his death, a large following of his parishioners from New York and Philadelphia attended the unveiling of a memorial bust of Dr. Norwood in a ceremony commemorating the centennial of the ultra-exclusive and prestigious St. Bartholomew's Church and the ministry of its sixth Rector.

He was born in New Ross, Nova Scotia, the son of the Reverend Joseph Norwood and educated at Coaticook Academy and Bishop's College in Quebec, King's College in Nova Scotia, and Columbia University. He failed to distinguish himself at university, particularly in mathematics, and avoided society because, as Albert Durrant Watson apologizes, he "was not financially able to dress appropriately for social functions, and, besides, he desired to read so as to perfect himself in *belles-lettres*." He was encouraged in poetry by his professor of English, C. G. D. Roberts, and given the freedom of Sir Charles's home and library. He was ordained in the same year in Halifax and was highly regarded by the Cape Breton parishioners of his first charge. He married Ethel McKeen while in Cape Breton and went on to larger parishes in Quebec, London, Ontario, and Philadelphia in 1917, at which time he became an American citizen. From 1925 to his sudden death in 1932, Norwood enjoyed affluence and prestige at St. Bartholomew's in New York City.<sup>5</sup>

Norwood's first book of poetry aside from *Driftwood* (1898), a student chapbook, was *His Lady of the Sonnets*, whose title poem is a sonnet sequence vaguely reminiscent of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. The book, published in Boston in 1915, was written along with his first verse play, *The Witch of Endor* (1916), during his ministry at Cronyn Memorial Church, London, Ontario. The biography and the publishing history tell us that Norwood's first allegiance was to his Church and that he saw his growing following in New York State as his poetry's audience. His reputation at home was enhanced for a time by his ability to attract American publishers. McClelland and Stewart handled local distribution for Sherman and French of Boston and George Doran of New York. His second religious closet-drama, *The Man of Kerioth* (1919), along with an undistinguished collection *The Piper and the Reed* (1917) and a sustained tribute to Browning in *The Modernists* (1918), were all written as verse-texts for his ministry in Philadelphia. Contemporary critics looked into these works and recognized the Mystical Love that had been taught Canadians by John Daniel Logan among others and, noting that Norwood and Marjorie Pickthall both chose to work with Biblical subjects, really had little else to say — except to mention his commitment and success in the field of pulpit oratory or to point out that the poet's great-grandfather married a full cousin of none other than Oliver Wendell Holmes. Aside from the chummy appreciations of his friends A. D. Watson and Elsie Pomeroy, and Logan's criticism in *Highways of Canadian Literature*, his work has gone unnoticed in Canada. This is regrettable since his *Issa* (1931), his last poetic work, is simply one of the most interesting book-length poems in Canadian literature.<sup>6</sup>

Watson saw in Norwood's verse a "masterful art and clear prophetic vision" where others noted an overly rhetorical flair, but many agreed that the main value of Norwood's verse was its sense of purpose in the transmission of his faith.<sup>7</sup> His rewritings of Biblical subjects and the theme of inspiring love worked to reinterpret modern life for Canadians in such a way as to instil a confidence in religious narrative that had been lost after Darwin and Higher Criticism. Norwood thought he should espouse the values of formal craftsmanship and prophetic aspiration as a poet, yet from the beginning he could not resist supplementing these with his own pulpit-rhetorical voice. It was this reliance on a specifically public voice that, I shall argue, caused his verse to shear away from the then-dominant values of poetry in Canada: that poetry ought to be an object of aesthetic beauty, that it should employ the prophetic mode, and that it should pursue the creation of a local mythology which the nineteenth-century Canadian long poem had begun. In his verse as in his ministry, Norwood strove, as he says in "Fellow Craftsman" from *His Lady of the Sonnets*, to bring "full confidence" to the lives of his parishioners in a co-ordinated Christian context that they "know / Thou and thy God can perfect everything!"<sup>8</sup>

The Lady of the thirty sonnets in the title sequence is a multiple figure among whose aspects are: Woman, Eve, "A dear Dream-Goddess," Diana, an immortal soul, innocence, a "hidden, lovely Eremite," a "goddess, robed in white," "Water turned to Wine," a "Dear Comrade," Helen of Troy, "white light," and Christ as love incarnate among other things. Similarly, the male persona comprises: Man, Adam, a dreamer in a paradisaical garden hung with precious metals and stones, Endymion, one who "knows / How you surpass the lily and the rose," the three wise men, a Roman slave, one of Charlemagne's servitors, Renaissance Italian nobles, and Plantagenet and Guelph robed in purple, and more. These two multiple figures are primarily an arrangement in which physical love is inexhaustibly deferred so that the poet has space enough and time to propose a rule of ethical conduct, which would seem somewhat compromising for a priest, and certainly not begotten by scripture. The major symbol of the sequence is a kiss that is capable of miracle, of "Transforming void and chaos" into the Kingdom of God on earth. The lovers "have lived before" through cycles of reincarnation. In each life the mystical kiss comes closer to perfection and atonement within the divine unity of God. Neither death nor sin, flesh nor malice can withstand the onslaught of this eternal supplementarity whose representation in the sonnets is meant to "Let Joy and constant Certainty appear." The poem is centred on an affirmation of emotion and physical love, but this centre at once drops away toward the primitive origins and a future sublimity of the kiss. The reader is thus offered a paradigm of kisses as a rule to live by.

*His Lady of the Sonnets* continues with a sequence of ten dizains, "Antony to Cleopatra, After Actium," in which the theme of love between man and woman as a mutual sacrifice akin to Christ's is further developed. Then follows "Paul to Timothy," a dramatic monologue (that later appears in *The Modernists* and to which I will return), which describes Paul's conversion to a faith in "One God, / One Law, one Hope, one Faith, and One Desire." "Dives in Torment," the next poem, is a dramatic piece set in seventy-four quatrains reminiscent of Wilfred Campbell's "Lazarus" and Francis Thompson. Here, Norwood unfolds the tenet that he is working toward: that the One Desire will have been the vehicle of salvation for all men who, like Lazarus in this poem, incorporate the divinity of the saviour. The book closes with a miscellany of songs and sonnets that reprise the themes of reincarnation, the perfection of the human spirit through history, and love's absolute authority.

In 1915 Norwood had set out to produce an annual book of verse-texts for the message of his ministry. His two verse-dramas expand on the theme of love as modern man's answer to a lack of confidence in traditional methods of achieving certainty in salvation. *The Witch of Endor* continues his rewriting of Bible-narratives. *The Man of Kerioth* teaches that it was Judas's impatience to know the Kingdom of God on earth before its appointed time that led to his betrayal.

The play in effect absolves Judas in that his impatience was due to love of Him, and thereby elevates human love above all uncertainty and alienation. "The Slow Emerger," in *Piper and the Reed*, asserts that man's "task of slow emergence from the clod" is to perfect himself through love in the present and to learn through the examples of history that "man must not chain a woman's soul," that "dear and tender fiction."<sup>9</sup> This book sentimentally pursues the theme that one must not bind society and society's voice, poetry, to conventional rules of behaviour and practice.

Of his eight books of verse, *The Modernists* is the most accessible to a modernist reading. The nineteen personae of these dramatic monologues range from "The Cave Man" to "Darwin" and the "Voice of the Twentieth Century." The book traces the evolution of human perfection through history in such a way as to make sense of life as his readers knew it in 1921. In this grand design the modern common man is a King. The Second Coming will have been our age of democratic humanitarianism in which Man becomes the sign and the instrument of the Word, the Will, and Law of God. The sign of this sign is the book's personal, unaffected voice, the voice of ordinary men articulating the inner truth and life of a righteous community held together by love.

*The Modernists* attempts to bring order to a jumble of abstract and contradictory images and motifs in discursive fashion, but it is in *Bill Boram* (1921) that Norwood strikes a truly original note, producing a fiction of confidence and certainty for his charge that surpasses his earlier rewritings of Classical and Biblical texts. As Stevenson says, the subject-matter "is so simple, dominated by a single entity — the ocean — and devoted to a single calling, that the poem, without seeming overburdened with detail, presents a synoptic view of the locality." The poem's prospect of a legitimate yet personal coherence is set in the Nova Scotia fishing villages that Norwood knew as a child and as a young priest in Cape Breton. Charles G. D. Roberts, his life-long friend, felt that its characters came intensely alive on the page and that it was a vividly objective dramatic narrative, despite the language Norwood chose to use, which was too vulgar for Roberts's taste. To John Daniel Logan, however, the poem as a whole lacked "imaginative truth and dramatic power" because Logan could not believe that the conversion of Bill Boram's love of sensuous beauty into a spiritual love was possible and appropriate to poetry.<sup>10</sup> Yet it is just this vulgar impossibility, this unrepresentable testing of 'legitimate' notions of religious and poetic truth, that Norwood found himself confronting in *Bill Boram*.

THE POEM COMBINES subjectivity and objectivity in the manner of the documentary poem of succeeding decades. It presents human voices,

moreover, as masks for an interior dialogue of I and thou. Such communication is only possible “in a world shared by our individual consciences so that by naming the objects in this world we can break through our solitude and communicate with one another.”<sup>11</sup> The voices of the poem, in naming the locality from which they spring, are like the voices of children who believe they know something as soon as they can name it. Out of the interiority that voice masks, therefore, emerges a further dialogue on the ways in which its personae make sense of their lives and locality. Norwood impales this I-thou narrative of place and self, however, upon the crucifix of a sincere and rigorously worked out treatise on the One Desire, guiding his readers toward an I-thou parallel by means of a lyrical and supplemental sermon that concludes predictably:

My story ends. The polar night is breaking.  
 What do you think, my friend, of bad Bill Boram?  
 To me this Northern sky with song is shaking —  
 The song of Christ: “O come, let us adore him!”

As a whole, the poem is a composition of example and lesson, but as Ong points out, “Faith moves toward knowledge and love of persons,” and persons cannot be known as objects.<sup>12</sup> The voice that manifests bad Bill Boram’s blasphemy, atheism, and drunkenness does not deny or resolve the essential incoherence of life in his place and time. On the contrary, it invites us to respond to that fathomless interiority in an act of faith.

Norwood’s strategy is to release his reader’s inner feelings of doubt and confusion, and then to guide these feelings toward compassion. His belief is that this act will instil full confidence in the reader. The narrative consigns all evil and sin in life to relative insignificance with the one exception of malice, personified by “The She Weasel.” Since malice is the only sin and since the scrap of tenderness in Bill’s personality must by its nature extinguish malice:

. . . With wealth  
 Of tenderness, amazing us, the thick  
 Hard hands of Borum paid in full the score  
 Writ down against him by the pen of God.

Bill’s conversion is a part of a providential design in which all men, rich and poor, sophisticated and rough, are evolving toward perfection, “Till Was and Will-Be had become I Am!” His character is similar to Paul’s in “Paul to Timothy,” a “prisoner of Jesus Christ” condemned to sacrifice his body for the faith, except that Bill is uncouth and uneducated. Bill’s saving grace, his love of flowers, is comparable to the Greek boy who sings a song of Sappho’s to Paul in his cell. Yet both boy and flowers must be sacrificed to the One Desire. Bill “disagrees wit’ pa’sons” whose souls are frozen by orthodoxy and trusts only in his stoutness of heart:

“. . . an’ these spars  
 A-tap’rin’ up’ard tells to me a sight  
 More’n most o’ men c’n tell. To hell wit’ creeds!  
 Yet, begod, them dam tubers gets my goat.  
 I’m strong for fightin’, an’ I likes the deeds  
 O’ deviltry; they is no man afloat  
 C’n lick Bill Boram, an’ I’m surey bad;  
 But somethin’ like a tuber’s inside me,  
 That tunnels up’ard, somethin’ that is glad  
 In darkness wors’n hell. What c’n it be?”

“Yer soul!”

“Oh, hell! they ain’t no soul.”

Yet he is redeemed despite himself because every man “is God’s Son,” and “his final need / Is always God.”

Norwood relies heavily on a new approach to language in this work in order to make the poem seem more immediately relevant to the ordinary man, an approach divested of decadent images of brilliance and the verbal tonalities of the prophetic voice. Yet the narrator, Tom Blaylock, a parson’s son, interrupts the narrative periodically to supply a running gloss and point up the lesson of the text. Tom explains that “they must live forever” who come to know that even the smallest forms of love are “at one with what goes up to God,” an imminent “mystical desire” whose name is Christ: “God’s ecstasy of pure creation, / He is the artist in the soul of things.” It is Bill, however, who has the last word — in these lines addressed to Bobby Fox, “the sage of the cove,” whose wisdom had “knocked to smithereens / Them fables that made the Bible a poor book”:

Bob, I found this at last: Things has their soul  
 Which hides from us, accordin’ to the law  
 O’ beauty, as a woman hides each breast,  
 But gives ’em freely to the lips she loves.

Working toward a simpler, more personal poetic ministry, Norwood found himself at sea amidst the souls of things in *Bill Boram*. The poem questions the language of religious authority and his received notions of what a poem ought to be, “verbal color and music” that contains the “power of spiritual vision and exaltation,” in Logan’s words. Yet it ends in comedy, with the community’s laughter far more convincing as an ending than Tom Blaylock’s solemn moralizing tagged onto the close. Unlike Pratt’s uproarious *The Witch’s Brew* (1925), *Bill Boram* is not an exercise in myth-making. The reader is simply invited to laugh along the poem’s voices, with the assurance that our laughter is one alternative to life’s contraries and the pain of evanescent meaning. Norwood was unable to develop this comic aspect in his later verse, however. *Mother and Son* (1925) records his personal search for consolation and sublimation following the

death of his only son. In two long poems, the companion-pieces "The Mother of Cain" and "The Mother of Christ," woman is no longer a loose arrangement of disparate elements held in staccato coherence by the force of an intellectual passion, but an enforced separation of modernity and tradition, doubt and certainty, the plain language of Cain and the stately language of the ode.<sup>13</sup> Norwood strove to heal this rupture in his poetic and in himself in *Issa* (1931), a spiritual autobiography of some eighteen-hundred lines, divided into seven cantos.

In *Issa*, Norwood uses his own life as an exemplum to teach the power of human love to bring order and meaning to a life such as his. The poem spins "Webbed images of life"

In such a dance of words  
That he who reads  
May feel the flight of birds  
Above new seeds  
Flung by the sower with a reckless hand  
Down the long furrows of his hopeful land.

Thousands of images of disparate things, fragments of the man's life, faith, and homeland, well up through the poet's voice in a dialogue between himself and Issa, or Christ, whose other unnamed names are the Word and the Son. As in the Old Testament or in the Eucharist, so here in this dialogue, objects are words and not the other way around:

For nothing 'neath my roof  
Lacked soul or self —  
The inkwell in the hoof  
High on the self.  
A broken peacock fan tacked to the wall,  
Trunk, hatbox, shot-flask, powder-horn, and all.

Memories of the localities in which he has lived and worked, of friends, relatives, and loved ones jostle against one another for their places in an ecstatic paradigm that includes ordinary things and a plethora of mythological and literary allusions. "Descend, you hierarchies, be made man!" cries Issa, and the speaker is so beside himself in passionate discourse with Christ that his body and the soul of his native land are become homonyms of Issa's words, blessed for sacrifice, "For high communion in this common cup." As in "His Lady of the Sonnets," the beloved other is a multiple figure whose fragments contain no totality but are rather a mobile revolving around "one law only — love!"

The poem demonstrates "How love makes of all life a sacrament" of "Earth's little things," and it enacts a loving rite of passage through which all must pass to the secret of Lord Issa in order to attain "their Godhood" or be lost in "outer darkness." Heaven and hell "have but one door." The poem is not an object but

an *event* of Holy Togetherness that occurs on the living, breathing threshold of language or voice, which alone can mediate and maintain the unrepresentable interiority of speakers' and listeners' sense of self, the divided I-thou psychology of man, "the sign / Of life to me — / Life, human and divine: / Duality."

For Norwood, Issa's secret is a divine mystery, a chaos that will never be contained until God and man are one. Yet the resemblance of this obscure appellation of Jesus to Isis suggests a cleavage of religious and poetic conception that is securely tied to human sexuality. The One Desire is clearly a sublimated passion, which, when we unfold it, appears to be created by at least three different contraries: "Duality / Of spirit in God's holy likeness made," the opposition between multitudinousness and the One Law, and the duality of poetry and redemptive silence. Honour and renown shall be due only to Christ when on his "glorious day" all songs will be quieted "and harps laid down." No book, church, or creed "Has value, where / Faith, like a broken reed" is ruined by dogma. The poem has a fissure running across the breadth of its metaphysics; its truth is broken within itself even as it is uttered. Poetry "Was heaven's last, highest, holiest gift to earth," but poets no less than saviours are made "Upon the thorns / Of life," and "However horrible the lonely night," they must obey "The goddess, she / Will tell you what to say." As we have seen, Norwood's goddess is no vessel or chalice of truth, no Gravesean White Goddess. She is indeed the sublimation of an extremely motile and acathetic desire capable of dotting upon anything from hatboxes to God.

This sublimation allows itself to be dispersed in the language of Charles G. D. Roberts's poetry of place. Norwood's reinscription of this language, however, privileges faith in the possibility of communication and response above all else. The I-thou condition of human life is stated in the poem's motto: "Wherever there are two, they are not without God, and wherever there is one alone, I say, I am with him. Raise the stone and there thou shalt find me, cleave the wood and there am I." The first lines make it clear, moreover, that Norwood's dialogue with Christ begins as in a dream, "Calling a name, / To waken on the world's most poignant sting — / The pain that starts with love remembering." The entire poem is Isis/Christ's answer to this call, an answer that the poem translates into words coined from the immiscible fragments of life. This language is no closed system of signifiers and signifieds. Its chief symbolic representation in the poem is a moment of beholding, "earth's most true interpreter — a tree":

I see a window where  
The curtained sky  
Is caught, is framed, and there  
A tree so high  
That all the morning's gray and gold and blue  
Between its web of branches filter through.

The tree does not articulate the light; it merely marks a point in space where the beholder's attention may be focused. In terms of today's philosophy of religion, the tree is a "living framework" or a "mode of understanding" and not an invariant structure imposed on reality. The moment of beholding permits perception to filter through 'licit' confines toward, as Thomas Munson says, "an outlook that is not simply intellectual but shot through with values, with a whole way of handling and feeling things."<sup>14</sup> It is fundamentally a religious moment of celebration in which "A stone, a plant, a tree, / Had soul and was most intimate with me," but it is also a moment of liberation that clears the "dull uncomprehending human gaze / That never knows invention or amaze." Similarly, the poem's language articulates nothing other than the site of a powerful current of pain and pleasure, yearning and hard-won confidence, or what Lyotard calls "the real sublime sentiment, which is in an intrinsic combination of pleasure and pain." The poem's pleasure derives from wonder that even "odds and ends of things" have "Soul, voice, significance," and it celebrates these "living words" despite "The hot, tear-tense / Thirst of my longing for a silent voice."

This is not the place for an extensive discussion of *Issa*, and I have wanted only to provide an introduction to this unusual early twentieth-century work, which somewhat resembles the *Prelude* as a study of local piety and the growth of a poet's mind, as well as Pound's *Cantos* in its syncretism and thematic architecture. I have also wanted to suggest that Norwood's poetry has been unwarrantedly neglected by Canadian critics. I have relied on the language of reader-response criticism in this essay because of the importance of the role that voice came to play in his poetic. Many writers today would probably agree with Lyotard when he says that the postmodern poet is in the position of a philosopher, but as Thomas Munson suggests, modern philosophy "came to birth in religion — a fact of utmost importance not only for a dialogue between philosophy and religion, but for the understanding of religion itself."<sup>15</sup> The relation between religion and philosophy had been hotly debated in Canadian intellectual circles at least into the 1950's, and poets as different as Avison, Klein, and Livesay — particularly in "The Colour of God's Face" or "The Second Language (Suite)" — have registered this dialogue in verse concerned with questions of place, voice, and self.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Walter J. Ong, "Religion as Summons for Belief," in *Literature and Belief: English Institute Essays*, ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 80, 90.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 81; T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature," in his *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 399.

- <sup>3</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Collins, 1971), pp. 324-25, 361-65.
- <sup>4</sup> George Santayana, *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (New York: Scribners, 1900), pp. 286-90.
- <sup>5</sup> Albert Durrant Watson, *Robert Norwood* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1923), p. 20. Elsie M. Pomeroy, a friend of the poet, wrote the biographical chapter "Robert Norwood" in *Leading Canadian Poets*, ed. W. P. Percival (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1948), pp. 158-67. Sir Charles G. D. Roberts mentions the changed citizenship in his introduction to *Issa*, "The Poetry of Robert Norwood," pp. ix-xiv (New York: Scribners, 1931), in which Roberts also claims that Norwood was "a great religious poet."
- <sup>6</sup> Norwood's published poetry: *His Lady of the Sonnets* (Boston: Sherman and French, 1915); *The Witch of Endor: A Tragedy* (1916), *The Piper and the Reed* (1917), *The Modernists* (1918), *The Man of Kerioth* (1919), *Bill Boram* (1921), and *Mother and Son* (1925) were all published by Doran in New York; *Issa* (New York: Scribners, 1931). There is a copy of *Driftwood* (1898) in the Logan Collection of Canadian Verse at Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. John Daniel Logan and Donald G. French, *Highways of Canadian Literature: A Synoptic Introduction to the Literary History of Canada (English) from 1790-1924* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924), pp. 211-12, 315-19. Logan sees Norwood as part of "The Second Renaissance in Canadian literature," comparable with Pickthall except that she wrote of "private experience," whereas Norwood's was a public voice of interpretation on the subjects of "Ideal Love" and the "divine function of Woman," pp. 288-90.
- <sup>7</sup> Watson, *Robert Norwood*, p. 24. V. B. Rhodenizer, in his *Handbook of Canadian Literature* (Ottawa: Graphic, 1930): "Whether he is writing in prose or in verse, his ultimate purpose is to interpret the universe in terms of Divine Love" (p. 237). Lorne Pierce's *Outline of Canadian Literature French and English* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1927) provides biographical details not found elsewhere, and considers Norwood chiefly as a dramatist of great compassion interpreting "the Biblical times and characters" (pp. 117-18).
- <sup>8</sup> "Fellow Craftsman," *Lady of the Sonnets*, p. 67.
- <sup>9</sup> "The Slow Emerger," *Piper*, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>10</sup> Lionel Stevenson, *Appraisals of Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1927; rpt. Norwood Editions, 1977), p. 234. Charles G. D. Roberts, "The Poetry of Robert Norwood," *Issa*, pp. xii-xiii. Logan and French, *Highways*, p. 318.
- <sup>11</sup> Ong, "Summons," pp. 98, 103.
- <sup>12</sup> Ong, "Summons," pp. 91, 95.
- <sup>13</sup> Logan and French, *Highways*, p. 289. "The Mother of Cain," "The Mother of Christ," *Mother and Son*, pp. 14-25 and 26-34.
- <sup>14</sup> Thomas N. Munson, *The Challenge of Religion: A Philosophical Appraisal* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 10-12.
- <sup>15</sup> Munson, *Challenge*, p. 7.



# FROM COUNTING TO 100

*Alan R. Wilson*

\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*  
81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90  
\* \* \* \* \*

81

What hidden pride.  
To take outcast 3's  
and multiply them  
into something fresh,  
acceptable.

82

Loops and twists  
as if impatient  
    with the page,  
    as if acquainted  
with rumours of volume.

83

This round mouth  
of a zero  
in a mirror  
  
even now  
(the half-loops gaping)  
begins to disappear.

Something here  
has slipped  
from memory

the words already empty  
 when they reach  
 the lips.

84

Seven dozen. Slow. Plodding even,  
 but solid, dependable. A good  
 neighbour. Willing to add to 83  
 when it needs more. Decrease the  
 strain on 85 when it aches for  
 less.

85

Watches the night sky with awe.  
     The count of stars  
             greater than itself.

86

multiplication of empties  
 over the beer hall table

curves and swells —  
 the spectacular mathematics  
 of the dancer's body

your own body —

the distance between  
 you wished to reduce:

but the heavy hands that rounded  
 your stumble to the stage

that tossed you  
 light as her single feather  
 into the street

87

Eyesight failing.  
 The 8 ahead  
 looking like a 6.

The memory:  
less than it was . . .

losing the place . . .

every time it counts itself  
getting a different result.

88

Are these shapes the humans  
of the numerals' imaginings?  
Flat and abstract,  
lacking in features,  
lifeless even to the few  
that view them with interest?

89

the still hands of the pianist —  
  
their slow roll up the keyboard  
suddenly ended

90

a ship yaws  
in the pitch-dark waves

a line of men  
struggle along the shore  
the small ones the tall ones  
equally bent

behind a still curtain  
a woman tosses and turns  
as the wind  
angles her dreams



# STEPHEN SCOBIE

## *Biographical*

*Margery Fee*

**A**CTIVE IN CANADA as a poet since 1966, Stephen Scobie has published ten books of poetry, including *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, which won the Governor General's Award for Poetry in 1980. The "Chinese Opera" is the "long/high wordless toneless wail" that got the American writer Robert McAlmon thrown out of many famous Paris bars in the 1920's and 1930's. Scobie turns it into a rich metaphor, not only for McAlmon's failures, but also for art taken to the edge of meaning, and beyond. McAlmon's milieu — the decadent, complex, neurotic, and creative Paris of the American literary exile — consistently fascinates. But it is his voice — cynical, cold, and angry — that instantly compels attention. This voice speaks with the authority and immediacy of a revenant, its pain "screaming down / the airwaves of the long dead years." That Scobie's voice is completely unlike this — except perhaps in its conviction — adds to the impressiveness of the writing.

Scobie was born in Carnoustie, Scotland, on the last day of 1943. He remained in Scotland, honing his intellect, until he graduated tied for first in the Faculty of Arts of the University of St. Andrews. He began graduate studies at the University of British Columbia in 1965, receiving his Ph.D. in 1969. He married Maureen McHale in 1967. Between 1969 and 1981 he taught English at the University of Alberta; he came to the University of Victoria as a full professor in 1981. He and Douglas Barbour frequently collaborate: they were co-chairmen of the League of Canadian Poets between 1971 and 1973; they form the experimental sound poetry performance group Re:Soundings; they co-edited *The Maple Laugh Forever*, an anthology of Canadian comic poetry; and co-authored *The Pirates of Pen's Chance*. Scobie has been on the editorial board of several journals, including *The Malahat Review*, and is a founder and editor of Longspoon Press. In 1986, he was awarded the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literature's Gabrielle Roy Prize for his contributions to Canadian literary criticism. Best known in the academic community for his critical work in Canadian literature, especially for *Leonard Cohen* (1978) and *bpNichol: What History Teaches* (1984), he is also known in Victoria and Edmonton as a trustworthy and, when necessary, vitriolic movie reviewer.

MARGERY FEE: Why McAlmon?

STEPHEN SCOBIE: This goes back several years to an interest in Gertrude Stein, and radiating out from that, an interest in that whole period of American writers in Paris. And then to an intense love of the city of Paris itself. All of this coalesced in the spring of 1977 when I was giving a graduate course on that period, which used as its major focus volumes of autobiography. Everybody who passed through Paris in the 1920's wrote an autobiography, and they all appear as characters in each other's books, thus producing this marvellous, multi-dimensioned creation like a huge *Alexandria Quartet* in about forty different volumes. Among the books I was using were, of course, Stein's autobiography and Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. I guess it was in Glassco that I had first come across the name of Robert McAlmon, several years before. One of the other books was *Being Geniuses Together*, a joint autobiography of Kay Boyle and McAlmon. It was while I was teaching that course that I began writing the poems and they began in classic form. Late one night, I was lying in bed, not getting to sleep, and Maureen eventually said "You're trying to write a poem, aren't you? Get out of bed and write the poem, otherwise you're going to keep me awake all night." So I stumbled into the next room without fully waking up and sat down in front of a piece of paper and started writing, and I was about half way through the first poem when I fully became awake and realized that this was Robert McAlmon speaking.

F: Which poem was it?

S: It was the first poem. It actually started "What I never wanted / was pity," and I really didn't know until I got to the last couple of lines — "Nine hours a day / at a dollar an hour / in 1921" that it was McAlmon.

F: Whose voice had taken over.

S: In fact that night I wrote the first three poems more or less as they appear in the book. There followed a period of about three months of intense activity, the closest I've ever come to being possessed. I was writing sometimes two or three poems a day, basically in chronological order, though not entirely. I was, partly for the course, partly for this book, reading everything on or by McAlmon that I could lay my hands on in Edmonton. I did not try to interview Kay Boyle or anyone like that, partly because I was a little scared of getting too bound up in the historicity of it. I wanted a lot of information, but on the other hand I wanted to be free to invent. So the second phase, which was quite long, almost a year, was a phase of going through the manuscript very slowly, very carefully, doing revision, which often came back to the original version. During that time I did talk briefly to John Glassco. I got a few things from him, though not all that many. He told me, for instance, that McAlmon had written a novel, of which he

(Glassco), was the hero, called *The Susceptible Boy*. I believe that the MS still exists, among McAlmon's papers, though I haven't seen it; I did use the title phrase, however. A couple of the things he told me I very deliberately did *not* use: there were things I already had in the book which he said weren't true, but which I decided to keep anyway. And a couple of my favourite stories, like the one that is ultimately used as the preface to the whole book, the filthy hand reaching in the window, and McAlmon putting his glass of whisky into it, Glassco flat denies. He said, "That never happened, and if you know the physical layout of that particular bar you know that it's impossible for it to happen." Still, the majority of the historical details are accurate.

f: You wanted to have a sort of framework to build on.

s: I wanted to have control. And I felt that there is a kind of authoritativeness in fact. One of the things that always interests me about any author is the sheer nerve of coming to you and saying "Listen to me, spend some of your valuable limited time upon this earth reading my book." I think it is an enormous demand, and that an author has to have some kind of authority — I'm playing with the different senses of *author*, *authority* there — and fact is one of them, to say: "I'm telling you a truth." And yet I can't be satisfied with someone who simply tells me fact. I want to see something done with it. I'm perfectly prepared in prose fiction to tell and to be told the most outrageous stories, but somehow in my own poetry, I'm very reluctant to invent, which, in my more personal lyric poetry, is a kind of limitation. There are certain things that I'm not prepared to do in order to write poems. I'm not prepared to go out and have five adulterous affairs and take drugs and spend a year in the mental asylum. I'm just not prepared to do any of these things in order to write poems and yet at the same time I am unable to write poems imagining that I'm doing them. I could, I suppose, as a sheer exercise, sit down and write a poem in which I imagine that I am carrying on an adulterous affair and write poems about the tortured emotions that evolve out of that, et cetera, et cetera, but it would be a false exercise.

f: Well, maybe you need a character like McAlmon.

s: Yes, certainly part of the attraction of McAlmon was that I could write poems about taking cocaine and being a homosexual in Berlin in the nineteen-twenties . . .

f: And you didn't have to do it. Do you think you'll do that kind of book again? Or do you think that it descends on you, and can't be controlled.

s: I'm vaguely on the lookout for it, but I can't at the moment imagine what it would be, because it would have to be a subject which had as much appeal, as much richness of detail as McAlmon's life had, and yet at the same time it would have to be different enough so that it didn't look as if I was doing the same thing over again.

F: Scobie warming up McAlmon.

s: I think Ondaatje has been incredibly lucky to go on from Billy the Kid to Buddy Bolden. And he's got his whole family. But I can't at the moment see another figure that is equivalent to McAlmon, which raises all kinds of problems for me. What am I going to write about?

F: You'll struggle along. Has Kay Boyle seen the book?

s: Yes, and she hates it.

F: Why?

s: Well, various reasons. Mainly, she was upset by two things: by the book's departures from factual accuracy, and (which is connected) by my evident admiration for John Glassco. I don't think there was ever much love lost between Boyle and Glassco. Years ago, I came across in Toronto a presentation copy of *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, inscribed to Kay Boyle, with a very interesting note and poem by Glassco included in it — I quote it in full, and use it as a major source, in my article on Glassco.<sup>1</sup> But the point is that it was knocking around second-hand stores in Toronto less than two years after its first publication, so Boyle must have got rid of it fairly fast.

F: That's interesting. But she's not in that book. He never mentions her.

s: I think he does mention her somewhere, but that's just a blind. In this note he wrote to her, he goes to great pains to deny that she was the model for Diana Tree.

F: Bad idea.

s: And obviously she didn't believe him. I thought for awhile that Diana Tree was really Mary Butts, but the most recent research seems to confirm that she is Kay Boyle.

F: Did you buy this book?

s: No, I didn't at the time, and I've kicked myself ever since. It's now in the North York Public Library, and I acknowledge them whenever I quote it. So that was the one problem with Boyle. She also says that recent history should only be written by those who lived through that history — which strikes me as nonsense anyway, apart from the fact that I wasn't writing history. But I do think it's understandable that people who did live through historical events should be far more upset than other people would be by distortions or transformations of these events. Kay Boyle has always had a sort of proprietary attitude towards McAlmon; I'm sorry she doesn't like my book, but I'm not surprised.

I think it does raise a major and quite legitimate question: what *right* do authors have to *use* historical figures in this way? We are in a sense appropriating them for our own purposes, even for our own gain. It's a rather queasy moral point. All I can plead is that if we make something imaginatively genuine out of it, then that carries its own justification. But I can understand people who object, on principle, to the whole idea. The same problem comes up with Bowering's Vancouver, say, or Findley's Duchess of Windsor, or Heather Robertson's Mackenzie King . . . the list is endless. Ondaatje too; he lies all the time.

F: I wanted to ask you about the connection between your work and Ondaatje's.

s: It was very deliberate. There's always been a lot of contact and interaction between what I teach and what I write. I never see any contradiction between the two activities: they're just two manifestations of the same thing, a love of literature, a concern for poetry. Often I treat the same subject in both modes at once. At the time I was writing *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* I was also writing an essay on McAlmon's fiction and I've since written a major essay on Glassco. At the time I wrote my essay on Ondaatje's *Billy the Kid* I was also writing the short story, "Deputy Bell," about Billy the Kid, which appears in the first *Aurora*. One of the aspects of recent Canadian poetry that I've been very much interested in is the long documentary poem, for which the major prototypes in the modern period are Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*.

F: And there's the Livesay essay, of course.<sup>2</sup>

s: And then there's Gwen MacEwen's T. E. Lawrence poems: an absolutely fantastic book. So, the documentary poem was very clearly present as a model. But it's not particularly *Billy the Kid*; that's just one of the major examples. If anything, I suppose, *McAlmon* is slightly closer in form to *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, in that it's in the protagonist's voice, it's divided into three chronological sections, and is a kind of retrospective. There are a couple of hints left in *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* that it was originally all intended to be spoken by him in the last year of his life to an interviewer. There are still a couple of hints in there where he says things like "You can sit where you like: / the chairs are all the same," and "You'll find / another bottle on the bookshelf there / propping up / some priceless first editions of / nobody's autobiography," which is a double allusion to William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein. Originally that was much stronger, but eventually I thought "That's kind of a hokey idea to pursue literally," so as a major idea in the book it got dropped.

F: I wondered, because I thought in the relationship between Billy and Pat Garrett, and then William Carlos Williams and McAlmon, there's a kind of parallel — two people acting against each other.

s: Well, that was inevitable, because in fact William Carlos Williams did make the comparison between McAlmon and Billy the Kid. He doesn't carry over into calling himself Pat Garrett, obviously. And I looked at that and I thought "This is too good to be true, I can't resist using that." And yet it must seem so totally gratuitous.

f: Well, it struck me as an allusion to Ondaatje, I didn't realize that it was real. You practically need a footnote there.

s: I know that a lot of Canadian readers will simply take it as that, which is fine by me. It works perfectly well that way. And I guess I put a lot of stress on the relationship to Williams all the way through, right from the very first poem.

f: Well, it's one of the themes; you want to find out what happened between them, because McAlmon's so vicious at the beginning of the book as an old man, yet they had been great friends.

s: It's one of the great mysteries of McAlmon's life: I've read and re-read the page in Williams's autobiography which McAlmon took such violent exception to, and it's hard to see what exactly hurt him so much. I suspect that more than anything else it was simply the entirely casual tone that Williams uses to describe McAlmon's marriage to Bryher. Williams sounds as if he's saying this is a funny little joke that H.D. managed to play.

f: And the marriage was McAlmon's major emotional focus.

s: It was the ruin of his whole life.

f: Do you really think so?

s: I don't know. I feel that it must have been, because there is very little in the biography to suggest that his emotional life was, up until then, anything other than normal and healthy, although he certainly had a fairly disordered childhood. But there is a kind of emotional deadness in the later McAlmon which does seem to set in around the time of his marriage. He was clearly bisexual, and I think also that Bryher was lesbian, and as far as I can tell, the marriage was never consummated. But the marriage is such a mystery. Bryher, in a 250-page autobiography, devotes one half paragraph to it, and McAlmon ostentatiously begins *his* autobiography on the day *after* the wedding, so both of them blatantly refuse to talk about it. I've written a story about it from Bryher's point of view called "A Marriage of Convenience."<sup>3</sup>

f: Which it was, except for McAlmon, and I suppose it did him more harm than good in the long run.

s: Yes, it did.

F: I instantly thought of Ondaatje's poem "White Dwarfs" when I read *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, and I thought "Aha, here's one of those so-called failed artists who yet is a success because he's withdrawn into a transcendent silence," and you took violent issue with that. I wonder if you could give your reasons, because I think other people would make that connection too.

s: Well, I don't know whether I would take *violent* issue with it.

F: Mild issue.

s: The point where I would not accept the connection is that it does not seem to me that McAlmon would ever have committed or even considered suicide. The White Dwarfs, beautiful losers, that whole Ondaatje-Cohen-Phyllis Webb connection . . .

F: All your favourite writers . . .

s: My favourite writers, yeah. . . . They are talking about very self-destructive personalities for whom suicide is always a possibility, and for many of them an actuality. That's what I don't see in McAlmon at all. He was self-destructive in many ways. He certainly had a gift for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time and he certainly had this marvellous aptitude for offending potentially useful people.

F: Publishers.

s: Publishers, mainly. I mean the famous story of how he went to New York and had lunch with Maxwell Perkins at Scribners, and Perkins was seriously considering publishing him. McAlmon, attempting to ingratiate himself with Perkins, spent the entire lunch telling him that Hemingway was a drunken homosexual who beat his pregnant wife, which may or may not have been true, but which certainly did not endear him to Maxwell Perkins.

F: Who was Hemingway's publisher, right?

s: Yes. Hemingway was the blue-eyed boy at the time.

F: But I thought suicide was not the only way out; people just stopped writing for one reason or another.

s: Well, McAlmon never really stopped writing, either. He kept on writing, and even as late as about a couple of years before his death he left California and came to New York for six months and tried to get some kind of recognition. So that really flamboyant self-destructiveness, that idea of going out in a blaze of glory — "after such choreography what would they wish to speak of anyway" — that isn't there in McAlmon.

F: He never had the glory, for one thing.

s: He never managed the parade. I have a tremendous interest in the figure of the failed artist.

F: Why did he fail?

s: It's very difficult for me at this stage truly to distinguish between talking about the historical Robert McAlmon and the McAlmon who emerges in the poems. One of the key things is certainly this kind of emotional deadness that sets in, which leads him to a kind of sterility. And yet, even in my poems, he never gives in. He never finally admits his failure, and he persists in saying that all he really wants is a fair judgment. Right to the end he's repeating:

Montparnasse in the first light of dawn  
has a kind of hard-edged honesty  
it makes all judgements lies

That whole thing. In my poems, he still believes right to the end that he was a greater writer than Hemingway.

F: Do you think he was?

s: Yes. Oh, yes. I do have to be careful here: I mean, there's always the possible confusion between the McAlmon who "really" existed and the McAlmon whom *I* created. The McAlmon in my book expresses certain literary views which, by and large, I share, and which, I think to a lesser extent, the historical McAlmon shared. I'm sure we *all* share the belief that he was a greater writer than Hemingway! But my McAlmon is kinder to Gertrude Stein than the real one was, so in some places the Scobie biases creep in. And I certainly played up the anti-Hemingway aspect because it was such fun for *me* to do!

The historical McAlmon had in his writing this whole ideal of contact which he and William Carlos Williams jointly formulated around 1920, which was a reaction against what they saw as the excessive literariness of Eliot, who was, at that stage, the major target. And I think Hemingway became the major target later. What they wanted was a very flat, realistic literature of direct contact with American life, which called for a kind of absolute honesty, but also for an almost total lack of artifice in the presentation. Now what this produces in McAlmon's writing, in the historical McAlmon's writing, is some astonishingly good short stories, especially the stories of *Distinguished Air*, because he had an honesty and an ability to accept absolutely anything nonjudgmentally which I think goes way, way beyond anything Hemingway ever achieved. The crucial thing, I guess, is the whole issue of homosexuality. Hemingway just curled up in embarrassment and took refuge in all these terribly phony macho ideals of the real man, et cetera, et cetera, whereas McAlmon just sailed right into the Berlin nightclubs of the mid-nineteen-twenties and produced in *Distinguished Air* a series of astonishing stories about homosexuals, transvestites, cocaine addicts, whatever. And he just

accepts them all, nonjudgmentally; he's not fazed or embarrassed, even when he's writing long monologues in the persona of a man called Mary, he doesn't have to prove anything about his own sexuality, his own ego. That's the "contact" ideal at its best: it enabled him to look clearly at people who were, in one sense, the dregs of humanity, and to see them simply as human; to present them that way, without posturing, without moralizing, without evading.

But equally, of course, the aesthetic that he was working with, also implied huge stretches of very dull writing, precisely because he rejected any ideas of literary artifice and didn't like to revise or anything like that. So the result is that when he's on, he's good, but when he's off, he's terrible. OK, so I'm very interested in that kind of writing, especially in the very long poem, and it seems to me that McAlmon was anticipating the things which were achieved with much greater success by William Carlos Williams, by Pound in the *Cantos*, by Olson in the *Maximum* poems, and, to some extent, by bpNichol in the *Martyrology*. There's something in McAlmon's aesthetic which leads into that whole strand of modern writing, which he himself never managed to accomplish. As he went on, he became more and more embittered, and the good patches in his writing became fewer and fewer. That bitterness sets in which I think destroys him, both as a man and as a writer. So in that sense, to get back to the poem, the poem does emphasize this and comes back several times to the idea of contact, to the idea of abundance (which is the word Stein applied to him), the reaction against the fake posing of Hemingway and of Eliot. So McAlmon's a failure. But he's a peculiar kind of failure, because at least part of the purpose of the whole book is to assert he wasn't really a failure, that right in there was a perception, there was a vision, fitfully realized, which was real and which got lost somewhere.

F: And that's the failure, the losing . . .

S: And the failure is that he got lost.

F: Given all these relationships — Robert McAlmon and William Carlos Williams, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, what about you and Douglas Barbour?

S: It's certainly not a Pat Garrett-Billy the Kid relationship.

F: No, no, no. I shouldn't imply that. Which one of you is going to get shot!

S: I think we work together so well because we are so different. We like the same kinds of thing, but we both have a very wide eclecticism in what we like. Certainly over the years we've influenced each other. He's introduced things to me; I've introduced things to him. It's never been a relationship of conflict; it's always been complementary. I think the peculiar thing was that for twelve years there, all the way through the seventies, there were the two of us in Edmonton, and we were really the odd men out in prairie poetry. If you look at the images of prairie

poetry in the seventies, there was Suknaski, and there were people like Glen Sorestad; a whole thing grew up of prairie poetry as anecdotal and realist and . . .

F: Horizontal.

s: Horizontal and conversational and all the rest of it and then off in this odd corner in Edmonton were Scobie and Barbour who clearly didn't have anything to do with that, whose connections seemed to be either to Talonbooks in Vancouver or Coach House in Toronto, who kept on talking about people like Phyllis Webb and bpNichol. Somehow, when people talked about prairie poetry they never included us.

F: You didn't fit the pattern.

s: There were nice generalizations to be made, and we didn't fit in.

F: Whereas other people, like Elizabeth Brewster, who isn't from the prairies at all, fit in so well.

s: There are ironic twists here. One is that I've just edited and introduced Suknaski's *Selected Poems* — an odd choice. And there is the whole question of Kroetsch. During most of the early seventies, Kroetsch was in Binghamton, and I don't think that people thought of him as a prairie poet. But when they try to write an account of prairie poetry that does include Robert Kroetsch, they're going to have to bring in Doug and me as well.

F: Because of the postmodernist slant.

s: And because there are connections between us, especially between Doug and Kroetsch. Doug is probably closer to Kroetsch than I am, in poetic practice, if not in theory.

F: I wanted to talk about your story "Streak Mosaic" and the whole idea of regionalism. In that story, which I found a very good one to teach students in a western Canadian literature course, you're taking the whole "prairie" thing and making fun of it. Yet I think it's also a very good story, and a story that does lead into the tradition.

s: A lot of my short stories, of which there are not many, play with a conventional form, or a conventional set of ideas, and push them just a little too far, so they can't be taken completely seriously, yet they're not so totally burlesqued that they fall over into mere parody. I like hitting that line where they still work if you take them at face value, and yet it's done also with that edge which says "I know this is cliché, I know this is a ritualistic thing." "Streak Mosaic" is every cliché that you can possibly think of, about the prairies, and yet it's true. I've written a spy story set in Victoria, which involves some weird plot machinations. The plot keeps

getting more and more horrendously complicated, and the events succeed each other faster and faster so that by about the last six pages of the story, plot twists are following each other about once every two paragraphs. So the reader cannot take it completely seriously as a spy story; it becomes a kind of parody of the genre. And yet it has to work. If you stop and figure out all the twists in the plot they are all logically worked out, and the plot does hold together, and there is a plausible explanation for everything that happens, but in a twenty-page short story there are more events than there are in a two-hundred-page novel.

F: You should add water and put it on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

s: Well, that's the point. As a prose fiction writer, I'm very lazy. I can't be bothered. I think I got corrupted years ago by Borges, who said he was too lazy to write novels.

F: Talking about prairies and regionalism and so on, does being from Scotland put you at a disadvantage? Do you think people overlook you?

s: I don't know why people don't pay as much attention to me as they should! [Laughter.] I'm regionalist, in the sense that I always have a very, very strong response to landscape, and the sense of place is always very important to me. On the other hand, I've got, oh, at least four or five different places. There is Scotland, and I can still respond very emotionally and directly to the Scottish landscape; there are the years and years on the prairies, so I have some kind of feeling for a prairie landscape; and I love the west coast. And there's the European thing, centring on Paris, so that you can't call me a regionalist from any one region.

F: Which is the way it should be, I think. It's true that people write about the place they are in, but they don't have to be in one place forever. I think that's the unfair part of it; people insist: "You're from Scotland, so you can't ever be a Canadian writer." That's silly.

s: I guess there's a suspicion that you're skimming the surface. That you haven't *earned* the right to write about Big Bear.

F: Yeah. Well, phooey to that. I thought "Why McAlmon," and then I thought "Why Cohen?" because you and Cohen don't seem to be that closely connected. If I thought "Who would Stephen Scobie pick to write a major book about," the answer certainly wouldn't have been Leonard Cohen.

s: In the first place, I arrived in Canada in 1965 at the height of Cohen's popularity.

F: Cohenmania.

s: He visited Vancouver in April 1966. He was probably the first major Canadian

author that I met. I read *Beautiful Losers* when it first came out and was completely bowled over by it.

F: Like everybody else.

s: So for that period, 1965-66, Cohen was the major avant-garde author in Canada. And secondly, there's the whole business of the songs. One of my continuing and abiding interests is in the poetic use of the medium of pop songs, which began for me with Bob Dylan, and which fascinated me in Leonard Cohen. In 1966 when he came to give a reading at U.B.C., *Beautiful Losers* was just out and none of the records had appeared. Nobody knew he was a singer. He arrived to give this reading and there were about 250 people there, all clutching copies of *Spice Box of Earth* and waiting to hear this marvellous romantic poetry. He strides into this huge auditorium at U.B.C. carrying a guitar, and instant freak-out all over the audience, "What is this?" I had no notion at that time that Cohen had that kind of interest, not knowing then about the Buckskin Boys and all his early exploits. So he gets up there and reads a couple of dutiful poems from *Spice Box of Earth* just to get us all happy, and suddenly plunk plunk on the guitar and he starts "Suzanne" which at that stage nobody has ever heard.

F: What was the reaction?

s: I don't know what the general audience reaction was, but I was knocked out by it. I thought it was just fantastic.

F: You have the art of being at the right place at the right time.

s: And he sang also, "Wasn't it a long way down, wasn't it a strange way down"; lines that echoed in my head for days and days afterwards. I was sold on Cohen as a singer from very early on. Next, Judy Collins's album that had "Suzanne" on it came out and we all rushed out and bought that. It was *the* album that spring. So that's why Cohen in the first place. Then, I guess, the more I became interested in Cohen critically, the more I also realized that he was completely different from me.

F: Another thing that comes up is your fascination with the arbitrary, the random, the cryptic, things that happen accidentally, anagrams, word play. I wondered where you got that interest.

s: Part of it is just a games-playing attitude. My parents were both great cross-word puzzle addicts, and I am too.

F: Do they play Scrabble?

s: Yeah, they play Scrabble.

F: Corrupted at an early age.

s: I am fascinated by chance happening, not just at the level of language, but odd things happening.

F: Do you call them synchronicities, rather than coincidences?

s: Well, I'm very hesitant to ascribe any inherent purpose or meaning to them in themselves. I think that the purpose and meaning are what the writer brings to them, in the very act of choosing them. A lot of people talk about chance as an ideally *impersonal* medium, as a way of escaping from the demands of the ego; you can get quite mystical along these lines. A lot of the theorizing about abstract art, you know, is very musical — Kandinsky, say, or Malevich — and it's not something I've ever been very happy with. If I had to put a philosophical name to it, I suppose I would use "existentialist": that is, the significance is not inherent in the material, the artist brings the significance *to* it, largely in the choice — which is in some way the existentialist "authentic" choice — of saying OK, this is a poem.

F: Is that what lies behind *The Pirates of Pen's Chance*?

s: Well, I don't think that Doug and I ever talked it through in quite these terms. In fact, a lot of our attitude was much more pragmatic: the technique is here to use, let's see what happens. And the composition of that book was, in a friendly way, quite competitive: I'd try out a method and get a poem, then I'd run down the corridor to Doug's office and say "Ha! Look at this!" and then he'd have to go me one better, and so on. I guess we both believe that this kind of poetry is there to be found, but you still need a poet to do the finding. And this happens not just at the level of language, of found poems, homolinguistic translations or whatever, but also at the level of events. A lot of my more anecdotal poems, when I do get anecdotal, are based on curious things that happen, things that people tell me, events that I stumble across.

F: Another area of fascination of yours that I find interesting is all these . . . borderlines . . . between various genres — sound poetry, concrete poetry — and also nonacademic interests that you bring into academia like song lyrics and films and horror movies and so on. Is this just eclectic taste, or do you have some kind of poetic theory that inclines you towards these areas of art that are not considered central.

s: It's partly eclectic taste, it's mainly a fascination with what bpNichol calls borderblur. In my introduction to my book on Leonard Cohen I say something like "There are people who define a circle by its centre, and there are people who define it by its circumference; people who define a thing by looking at the middle of the road, mainstream examples of it and people who define things by going to

the limits, and if necessary, going over the limits in order to find out where the limits really are.” In that sense, I suppose I’m like Cohen in that I really like looking at things at their outer edges. I’m fascinated by the areas where different art forms interact with each other, cross over to each other, where poetry becomes painting or music, or whatever, much more so than by a really mainstream, middle-of-the-road thing — the tradition. I’ve always had this interest in movies and in pop songs, and I just keep adding. One of my closest friends in Edmonton got me hooked on opera, another obvious borderblur area. Then, partly because of my interest in Paris, I became hooked on Cubist painting. Borderblur again. So I keep on adding interests. So far I haven’t taken a great interest in ballet, but I’m sure it’s coming. I think it’s the same thing even in my interest in Canadian literature.

F: It is. And you teach a course where you spend more time on bpNichol than on Margaret Atwood; now that it not a typical course.

S: But also, even there, even Canadian literature is an area that is, as yet, undefined. I’d much rather deal with contemporary literature than with the great tradition. I enjoy reading Shakespeare, I enjoy teaching Shakespeare to undergraduates, where it is new for them and where obviously I’m not trying to say anything vastly original about *Hamlet*; I’m just trying to get them to understand what’s going on.

F: If you teach so as to get students to understand, what are you doing reading Derrida?

S: I’ve become interested in Derrida specifically and in critical theory generally fairly gradually over the past four or five years. I guess I’d first heard of Derrida years ago, from Steve McCaffery long before Derrida was the household word he is these days in American academe. Steve was doing this marvellous poem called “Of Grammatology,” where he scattered alphabet cereal all over the floor, and rolled around, simultaneously eating and pronouncing them. He would climb up to the top of a stepladder and pour them on the floor and then get down and wallow around in them, munching them up and reading each one as he picked it up with his teeth off the floor.

F: Did you tell Derrida about this when you met him?

S: There was a project to have Steve and the Four Horsemen perform in front of Derrida this June in Toronto, but it never came to anything. It’s a great regret to me; I would have loved to see Derrida’s reaction. But it was in connection with that piece that I first heard the name Derrida, in 1973-74.

F: That early?

s: Yes.

f: That's a weird way to hear of Derrida, I must say.

s: McCaffery has this voracious appetite for strange theories of all kinds, and was heavily into Derrida very early. So, I'd been aware of Derrida for awhile. But I read a lot more Barthes. I read *The Pleasure of the Text* when it first appeared in English translation without at that stage understanding half of what was going on in it. I'm not sure I understand half of it now.

f: Does anybody? [Laughter.]

s: I've read Barthes for years; I read *Elements of Semiology* and *Writing Degree Zero* back in the sixties, in fact quite shortly after *Elements of Semiology* first appeared. But it was only a few years ago, when I read Christopher Norris's book, that I began to understand what Derrida was talking about. This is just accident. I don't think Norris's book is necessarily the best introduction to Derrida. Now I would say that Culler's *On Deconstruction* is the best general introduction. Then in Toronto in June 1984 I spent a month at the ISISS<sup>4</sup> symposium and actually heard Derrida, and certainly he's a very impressive man. He has a presence. He has all the things his theory says he shouldn't have.

f: Authority.

s: Authority, presence, charisma, the self-present word and all that kind of stuff.

f: He should stumble and mutter and throw Alphabits about, really.

s: Yes. His theory, at least implicitly, denies, puts into question, tends to qualify quite severely his own presence.

f: He should take Steve McCaffery with him wherever he goes as a kind of alter ego.

s: So over the last two or three years I've become increasingly interested in critical theory. And I'm aware that this is some kind of bandwagon, some kind of fad. But I think that there are genuine reasons for this, that is I think that theory is genuinely exciting and interesting, that the fact that everybody in North America is doing it now obviously does have undesirable consequences, that it does come to seem merely fashionable. But look at it positively, it does show that the theory is meeting a genuine need and is giving to many people a new and different way of looking at literature and revitalizing a study of literature that had, I think, become very tired and stale. Many of us were floundering around doing the usual theme studies, biographical studies, studies of image patterns and all the rest of it.

f: And it was getting boring. You could do that.

s: Do I really want to spend the rest of my life writing about image patterns?

F: Did it change your teaching, or will it, do you think?

s: It's difficult to know exactly how it will change my teaching. I did try in a graduate course I gave last year to use at least some poststructuralist or deconstructive ideas, but I was dealing with bpNichol's *The Martyrology*, which invites it, and mentions it, and necessitates it. I was dealing with graduate students, but even there I couldn't assume they knew anything about it, and indeed, some of them didn't know anything. I think what will be really interesting will be when you get to the stage when there are regular courses on literary theory and you can go into a course on Canadian literature and feel that you can say Derrida and they're not all going to look around and say "Who?"

F: It'll be awhile yet.

s: Not necessarily all that long. Just talking about the University of Victoria, we have several people on staff now who can and will be teaching these courses. So that will change. How it will filter down to freshman teaching, is difficult to predict, because obviously you can't go into a freshman composition class and offer them a course on deconstruction. On the other hand, it seems to me that a lot of the stuff I've been reading in say, reader-response, narratology, reception theory focused on the act of reading is very useful, and does provide a systematized basis for teaching. The last time I taught freshman English I presented students with a highly simplified scheme of authors, narrators, readers, in about three stages. Next time I'll probably offer them a diagram in about seven or eight stages, which is much more sophisticated, but which I think I could teach at the freshman level.

I think that theory operates at two levels; first, there is the theory in and for itself. You get carried away with the beauty of the theoretical construct. And to a certain extent if you read a lot of Derrida you don't get to talk about the text. The theory just exists for its own sake. But that seems fine. And second, it does work, where you turn and apply it to texts. It works in different ways. If you're dealing with highly traditional, hierarchical texts, then you are basically looking for ways in which these texts work against themselves, fall apart under a certain kind of scrutiny, and there's a danger there which the critics of deconstruction very often bring up, which is that you end up saying exactly the same thing about text after text.

F: Oh, look, this is another logocentric text.

s: Let us take apart the logocentrism of this text. Here is another based on the hierarchy of speech and writing, let us take this apart. Certainly there is that danger.

F: Or in discovering that your favourite authors are all secretly deconstructionists. Every essay says, ah he, unbeknownst to anybody . . .

S: Or, you can turn the theory of contemporary experimental texts, which to some extent do deconstruct themselves already or do work with these ideas. When you're working with McCaffery or Nichol or with other people like Fred Wah, these are the people who read the theory themselves and are already beginning consciously to use that kind of idea. *The Martyrology*, book 5, is scattered with references to sliding signifiers, and obviously, bp knows all about Lacan.

F: Has it affected your writing? Has it affected your poetry?

S: Some of the recent poetry, the sequence called "Rambling Sign," which is in the book *Expecting Rain*, certainly uses signs in its vocabulary and as a large part of its subject matter. I've written *about* that kind of thing. I'm not sure that I can yet break the patterns of my own writing radically enough to be able to say that what I'm writing is deconstructive poetry. Some of the sound poetry and some of the poetry in *Pirates of Pen's Chance* does seem deconstructive.

F: Even destructive.

S: Yes, I think *Pirates of Pen's Chance* is a book that could be described precisely in terms of dissemination. In terms of my own critical writing, that's another problem. The major example so far is an essay entitled "Surviving the Paraph-raise."<sup>5</sup> There's a very strong theoretical, ah, bent, to that essay. There's a long section in the middle of it which is practically wall-to-wall quotations from Derrida. But I was fascinated by that essay because I found that what I could do, by starting from some highly theoretical ideas in Derrida, circling around the notion of the signature, was to say things about the poetry which I could not otherwise . . . there was no way I could have got to that kind of commentary I offer on Wah, Webb, and Nichol, if I hadn't used theoretical ideas, or been starting from theoretical ideas. The essay is, for me, the first major instance in my own critical writing in which I have been able to take this interest in post-structuralist theory and really use it to say something about poetic texts. At the same time, I wrote it originally to deliver as a lecture at Edmonton. Part of my mischievous intent was that I would go back to Edmonton and prove to everybody there that I had finally gone completely crazy.

F: That they had gotten rid of you just in time.

S: And therefore I allowed myself in that essay a certain amount of self-indulgence which I haven't previously allowed myself in academic essays. There's a pun on every page. The entire essay is based on, and grew out of, a pun: the paraphrase/paraph-raise. That pun was the starting point of the whole essay. So the style

throughout the essay is very playful, it invites puns, rather than trying to avoid them, and at various stages in that essay, the argument is carried by puns.

F: Which in fact is what you enjoy doing in your poetry, there's a lot of that kind of language play there too.

s: And some of my recent poems have used that kind of highly convoluted word play as the basic generative devices for the poem.

F: So there is a connection between your critical and your poetical writing, then. Does this theory allow you to integrate your interest in various kinds of media — songs and films — in a way that your earlier academic criticism couldn't?

s: The theoretical certainly embraces them all. There have been several gestures towards a deconstructive theory of film. In the sense of conventional narrative cinema as perfected by Hollywood in the forties and even fifties, film is an eminently deconstructable medium. It sits up there and begs for this kind of analysis, and especially a feminist analysis, such as that carried out in Teresa de Lauretis's book *Alice Doesn't*. The attack on the structure of narrative film is a semiotic attack and a feminist attack. The subtitle of de Lauretis's book, *Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, is very interesting because it speaks to that kind of total interconnection. Obviously deconstruction works straight into a kind of feminist criticism with, at this point, a major footnote, caveat, warning, modification, call it what you want, that Derrida himself, although he provides, I think, the tools for a lot of feminist discourse, is obviously a very ambiguous figure for feminist criticism insofar as he is an extremely powerful male, subject to extreme adulation from people like me. [Laughter.]

F: Have you touched the hem of his garment?

s: I have shaken the master's hand, I have my signed copy of *Of Grammatology*. It's very hard, I think, for feminist criticism to use the insights that Derrida provides and yet at the same time to steer clear of Derrida himself as this kind of totem figure. And a great many of the bigger guns of deconstruction, which is an unfortunate metaphor right there, are in fact male. You start in on this stuff and you've got Derrida, Barthes, Lacan, Eco.

F: Kristeva's really the big name who's a woman.

s: But Kristeva's not entirely sympathetic to feminist criticism. You have to go off into people like Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. It's really noticeable that in the whole flood of translation of French critical writing that we have, very little feminist writing is available. Everything by Derrida is available. A great deal of Lacan, absolutely everything by Barthes, absolutely everything by Eco. These people are all available in English translation, even Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-*

*Oedipus* is around in translation. But Cixous and Irigaray were until very recently practically unavailable, a few essays here and there.

F: You have to be able to read French.

s: You have to be able to read deconstructive feminist French! It is a cause for tremendous concern that the pattern of translation of avant-garde French theory is at the moment very heavily male-oriented. There is a desperate need for feminist critics to be translated. Their influence in Canada is almost entirely through Quebec.

F: Through people like Nicole Brossard, Barbara Godard . . .

s: And Louky Bersianik, Louise Cotnoir, people like that, who are obviously reading and quoting from Irigaray, in French, but not any other way. It seems to me that there are very strong connections between deconstruction as a philosophical project, semiotics as a study of the social function of signs, and feminism, and that these concerns have focused upon narrative rather than poetry, and even within narrative, they have tended to focus on film largely, I think, because of the work by de Lauretis and Stephen Heath. And so much of it came out originally in *Screen* magazine in England, people like Laura Mulvey. In books like Stephen Heath's *Questions of Cinema*, and Kaja Silverman's book on semiotics and Teresa de Lauretis's *Alice Doesn't*. I'm fascinated by everything that Heath says about visual space and the construction of visual space, because that feeds into painting. And it feeds into everything that I want to say about Cubism. What I'm trying to do at the moment is to get back to a long-standing interest in Cubism and literature which has been on the back burner for about the last ten years, and trying desperately to shove it onto the front burner. Derrida is on the front burner —

F: And he won't get off!

s: But once I do get him off, I can say quite simply that what I have to do is to deconstruct Cubism.

F: You can say it quite simply, but to do it is another matter.

s: Yes. But the way I'm going to do it is by taking a lot of what the cinema people have to say about the construction of visual space, and the ideological implications of the construction of visual space and to apply that to painting. It becomes a narrative medium. Cinema came along, and one would have imagined . . . let me step back a bit. The whole Renaissance tradition in painting and the visual arts generally was to build up this very unified and coherent visual space which was organized by linear and aerial perspective, and a static point of view, and produce this whole sense of a coherent spacial world. Now when the cinema

came along, what one would imagine the cinema would do would be entirely to break up that space, because the cinema implies a moving point of view, a multiple point of view, and a film can be edited, et cetera. But in fact what happened is that as narrative cinema evolved in Hollywood in the thirties and forties, what they did was to construct again a coherent visual space, which was hierarchical, and secure in all the old ways. I'm drawing very heavily on Stephen Heath here, although I think I'm inflecting it differently. But I think what happened, against all odds and expectations, is that cinema took over the role of classical painting. And the deconstruction of the visual space that went on in Cubism, happened in painting, at around the same time that the thing that it was replacing was beginning to establish itself in cinema.

F: So you just got the theory in time.

s: The whole thing would have been very different five years ago. It would have fitted into a very much more stable kind of discourse than I can now give it. It's obviously going to be a much weirder book than I ever thought it would be.

F: Well, that's all right.

s: What it then comes down to is a question of belief.

F: Do you buy the implication of deconstructive theories?

s: Yes: that, as Hamlet said, is the question. Is it simply a set of ideas that you can use or is it something that you ultimately believe in. If Derrida's position is taken to its logical conclusion, it's not simply a way of saying funny things about literature. It's a rethinking of the whole philosophical tradition that deals with the nature of the way we see the world.

F: To see the world the way Derrida does, you have to change everything.

s: You have to change, or at least you have, to use his phrase, to be able to place things under erasure. That is, they're simultaneously there and not there. Everyone accepts that you do not live every moment of your life at the plane of ultimate philosophy. In daily intercourse, in buying groceries, you obviously make certain pragmatic assumptions about the way language works and the degree of stability in the meaning of words. If I go into a butcher's shop and order beef . . .

F: You expect to get beef.

s: Right. At the day-to-day level we work on the basis of pragmatic assumptions, and Derrida does that the same as everybody else. So obviously there's a sense in which questions of ultimate belief operate in daily life in suspension.

F: But isn't it more than just a linguistic theory? This is the problem. It is attacking some of the sources of religious belief, as well as describing the way language

works. It's not just privileging text over voice, it's also attacking God as the ultimate source of authority.

s: That depends on how you define religion. Insofar as religion is connected with a system of hierarchical authority, in which you have a god who is the ultimate authority, the ultimate origin, and the ultimate father, then obviously everything that Derrida says goes to take apart that whole system of beliefs. In deconstruction you cannot attribute any meaning to a god who is the authority, the origin, the father. He takes apart most of conventional Christianity, Judaism . . .

F: And a few other religions!

s: But if you define religion as a much more general belief in a religious or spiritual dimension to human experience without attaching it to this kind of hierarchical authority, then I'm not so sure. Derrida himself is very interested in Christian mysticism, in what is called "negative theology."

F: Religion comes up in only two, maybe three, of your poems and yet it comes up in fairly dramatic ways. How did you deal with religion when you were growing up? Were you religious?

s: I was intensely religious until the age of about twenty, or twenty-one. Probably to begin with simply without thinking about it at all, because my father was a minister of religion and every male relative in the past three generations on both sides of the family was. And when I was very young I think that I just assumed that I would do the same without even consciously deciding on it.

F: Do you think you write because your father wrote the Sunday sermon?

s: It has connections, yeah. In the first place I was brought up in an intensely literate household where people read and where people wrote and where there was even a certain kind of rhetorical tradition which probably carries over to a lot of my writing. I have written several poems about my father who is a man I intensely admired as well as loved; quite apart from anything else I just straight out admired him.

F: Did you lose your faith?

s: To say I lost my faith makes it sound much more dramatic and melodramatic than it is. But partly because I understand so much about what a religious life can be, because I lived so close to such intense examples of it, I'm probably much more demanding with myself about what true faith would involve.

F: So you can't compromise.

s: I can't drift along. So I would have to say that for the last ten or fifteen years of my life, I've been essentially nonreligious, agnostic, certainly not atheist, cer-

tainly not anti-Christian, because it still seems to me that as an intellectual scheme Christianity has not only a coherence, but a certain kind of moral grandeur. Again, thinking mainly of my father, I've seen at first hand the workings of that faith in the life of the best man I've ever known. So I can never reject it or discard it, never be blatantly anti-Christian in any kind of propagandistic sense, and yet in my own life, for the moment at least, I can't embrace it. I make no conclusions.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "The Mirror on the Brothel Wall: John Glassco, *Memoirs of Montparnasse*," *Canadian Poetry* no. 13 (Fall/Winter 1983), 43-58.
- <sup>2</sup> Dorothy Livesay, "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 267-81.
- <sup>3</sup> "A Marriage of Convenience" in *The New Press Anthology #1: Best Canadian Short Fiction*, ed. John Metcalf and Leon Rooke (Toronto: General, 1984), pp. 201-16.
- <sup>4</sup> International Summer Institute for Structuralist and Semiotic Studies.
- <sup>5</sup> Forthcoming in *Open Letter*.

## FLYOVERS/STOPOVERS

*Robert Gibbs*

i

— Ein zwei drei — the boy beside me  
counts — four five six Ich wurde

in Hong Kong geboren — Then his two tongues  
are still His mother keeps watch lovely her

Hanover eyes open to the long night The  
breeze swizzles and keeps us breathing

A boy and his mother are flying home to Perth  
thirty hours downunder from

English and German grandmothers Through  
my headset unendingly coming round

four Bach harpsichords wing me  
over the time-zones Belgrade

flickers on and out I doze and then  
the Bosphoros

## ii

Red Arabia ripples out from black  
biblelands Back of yesterday Goethe

stands bronze-eyed over his bombed-out  
city high again with night-joints and a

factory-sized *Oper* (where a fresh  
lunged tenor rang last night above

five double basses *What an*  
*icy little hand* The gulf

rages a still blue where those  
lower birds fly at tankers

white-waking for the strait This  
airport allows no photos only

pistols-at-the-hip and immaculate  
mullahs with scimitar-edged grins

boarding for Kuwait Gnarled Muscat  
drops away into an angel-scudded

sea Lost in yesterday all those  
holy places and Goethe's river

pen-and-water-coloured and spired  
tall enough Goethe's study compiled

out of bomb rubble and his father's  
tomes tomb-heavy Closed

courtyards crammed with Japanese  
cameras Japanese eyes

*Also lustig sah es aus  
Wo der Mayn vorüber floss*

back there in the dark with holy  
lands crossed in the long night

and holy wars (a bomb in that  
departure lounge already ticking)

iii

Mother India waking covers  
the world a tough lychee rind

rust and yellow Mother India as she  
has been as she has to be

heart-tightening Along a track  
something moves oxcart or truck or

low-horned buffalo goaded home  
These strands flight-threads break

groundward to the rootlands rivers  
gouged in red earth meeting

in one flow heartplace of tongues  
mother of motherlands

## WHOSE WOODS THESE ARE

*Michael Darling*

These woods are mine,  
my neighbour says,  
dumping the remains of last year's flowers  
on my budding raspberry bush.

You're wrong, I say,  
 dropping another bag of  
 grass clippings on the trilliums  
 behind his house —  
 these woods are mine.

To prove our claims  
 we each have  
 similar red stakes we've  
 planted in the no-man's-land  
 behind our tenant farms.

The kids across the street —  
 social climbers to the end —  
 steal the stakes to  
 hammer in a tree,  
 making a ladder we can only hope  
 the landlord never wants to use.

## NOVEMBER SUN

*Dale Zieroth*

The November sun can't find its way  
 to me  
 It slants around  
 and dives  
 into the ground, the white crusty  
 snow and dirt  
 It leaps off a house  
 horizon and pell-mells in  
 through the long hall window  
 but I have already gone It can't  
 take me in its arms like a summer sun  
 It can't draw me down into the grasses  
 tossed by the creek  
 It is fiercely forgetting  
 where I am, turning its hot face  
 to the bodies of the South The days  
 shorten and stall,

everyone piled up in the house  
 and all our baubles  
 do not turn the dark around    One morning  
 from under your layers  
 brush open the curtain to see  
 frost works, and far off  
 the winter sun  
 Hearts grow stiff here  
 or die hardy    Afternoons spent  
 catching what you can  
 on your face    At night  
 never once does the name Canada  
 appear in your dreams — but the country  
 is tipping away, pulling  
 down and you are going with it  
 November's sun is cold  
 and the earth grows colder

## THE GREY FLEECE

*Michael Bullock*

Nailed to the tall wall that surrounds me  
 a fleece hangs grey and dirty  
 a ram's skin and tail  
 dangles forlornly

Aries in decline his horns turned downward  
 the horoscope has circled about me  
 leaving this garden of black earth and damp leaves  
 a melancholy graveyard in which the dead

dance their midnight sarabande  
 before the Great Beast flayed and martyred

# IMAGE AND MOOD

## *Recent Poems by Michael Bullock*

*Jack F. Stewart*

THREE RECENT COLLECTIONS attest to the current creative efflorescence of Michael Bullock, who has been called “one of the most vivid, mysterious, and technically proficient poets writing in English today.”<sup>1</sup> His poems have an enigmatic clarity that does not yield up their secrets to casual reading; they delight and puzzle.

It may be helpful to divide Bullock’s long career as a poet into four phases, beginning with (1) *Transmutations* (1938); resuming with (2) *Sunday is a Day of Incest* (1961), *Poems of Solitude*, translated from the Chinese with Jerome Ch’ên (1961), *World Without Beginning Amen!* (1963), and *Zwei Stimmen in meinem Mund/Two Voices in my Mouth*, a two-language selection with German translations by Hedwig Rhode (1967); continuing with (3) *A Savage Darkness* (1969) and *Black Wings White Dead* (1978); and culminating with (4) *Lines in the Dark Wood* (1981), *Quadriga for Judy* (1982), *Prisoner of the Rain: Poems in Prose* (1983), *Brambled Heart* (1986), *Vancouver Moods* (1986), and *Poems on Green Paper* (1987).<sup>2</sup> Many of the images and symbols that grow and spread throughout his work first appear in *Transmutations*, in which a *TLS* reviewer found “the secret intensity of life and the strangeness of beauty.” This prelude is marked by eclectic experimentation, especially with Imagism, Surrealism, and Orientalism. At this stage, the nineteen-year-old poet had read one poem by Ezra Pound (“The Garden”), plus one number of the *Imagist Anthology*, in which he discovered affinities with Pound, Aldington, and Lawrence. He had responded enthusiastically to the Surrealist Exhibition of 1936 (organized by Sir Herbert Read, whom he was later to meet), and this was the start of a lifelong involvement with Surrealism. Finally, he had made a voyage to India (where he had fallen in love with Maya), and he had read Chinese, Japanese, and Sanskrit poetry in *An Anthology of World Poetry*.<sup>3</sup>

The style of Bullock’s second phase (published in England and Germany in the sixties) is a personal amalgam of Expressionism and Surrealism. In this period, however, he also encountered the eighth-century poet Wang Wei’s “Forty Poems of the River Wang,” which led to his *Poems of Solitude*, a significant exercise in the art of conveying a mood through natural images. The freshness

of Bullock's style stems from a deep immersion in nature, an aptitude for meditation, and a craftsman's precision in handling words. He once maintained that a single word, "Green" for instance, could be a poem. This would require a creative reader, who could release the potential that lies locked up in a word, and harmonize its radiating associations. Poetry would thus become a form of subliminal stimulation, inducing the reader to pass beyond the mirror of the text in a "free and deliberate exercise of the imaginative *Book* that is in all of us."<sup>4</sup> The third phase of the poet's development (and the first in Canada) is the most strongly surrealist, although Bullock eschews Breton's automatist dogma in favour of a flexible approach to conscious and unconscious creativity.<sup>5</sup> The fourth phase (consisting of six books artistically produced by Third Eye Press) involves considerable stylistic diversity. Here Surrealism may serve as a technique for expressionist ends, as in *Lines* and *Quadriga*, or appear unalloyed as in the brilliant prose poems of *Prisoner*.<sup>6</sup>

The present essay is an investigation of image and mood in the latest trio of texts, whose predominant styles may be characterized as Imagism fused with Symbolism in *Brambled Heart*, and Imagism with surrealist overtones in *Vancouver Moods* and *Poems on Green Paper*. This mature poetic vein shows a return to, and refinement of, original techniques and themes. As a young man, Michael Bullock was influenced by the Symbolist theory of "Pure Poetry." Poetry, he felt (with Mallarmé), aspires to the condition of music; it is nonreferential — it gives no message, makes no point. It deals in images and is nonexpository. It can't be presented in any other way; it is essentially *these* words in *this* order. Indeed, theorizing is a paradoxical activity, for pure poetry doesn't stem from a concept or have a purpose. Bullock was later to quote to his students McLeish's maxim, "A poem should not mean but be." These ideas, which he has never repudiated, show how firmly rooted his poetry is in the aesthetic soil of Imagism and Symbolism.

Yet Bullock's chief orientation is to Surrealism, and his own fiction and painting are "unequivocally surrealist." What then is the role of Surrealism in his poetry? Surrealist philosophy aims at a conjunction of opposites, including "the real and the imagined" (*M*, 123), while surrealist technique involves startling concatenations of disparate images to form previously unimagined entities. As Lautréamont observes, "One does not often see a lamp and an angel united in one body."<sup>7</sup> J. H. Matthews has pointed out that "the key to the surreal is to be sought in the image," and Bullock also "believe[s] in the overriding importance of the visual image as the embodiment of the imagination at work."<sup>8</sup> Thus the cult of *the image*, which Pound describes as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time," provides a legitimate link between Bullock's Imagism and his Surrealism, which often shade into each other. A statement by the author best clarifies the issue:

My poetry is made up of images; therefore it is *imagist*. The images are surreal in that they follow their own laws and not those of everyday reality; therefore my poetry is *surrealist*. The images are drawn from the natural world but shown in the distorting mirror of a personality and used as a means of expressing this personality; therefore my poetry is *expressionist*. Let critics make of this what they will. For my part I feel that the designation surrealist is the most all-embracing and affords the highest degree of freedom; therefore I embrace it. But if ever I felt that surrealism had assumed the significance of a dogma, I should at once discard it. (Journal 4/5/86; italics added.)

At the heart of Bullock's eclectic, but original, style stands the visual image.

*Brambled Heart* is divided into six parts, in which short poems cluster around a nuclear image. Whereas his prose-poems allow for a fluid form of surrealist automatism, Bullock's linear poems are more consciously composed and tend towards a crystalline art of the image. But these poems are far more than imagist decorations. An explicit key to Bullock's underlying motif of abandonment and loss is to be found in "Complaint of the Poet's Foetus" (the title of which is taken from a poem by Jules Laforgue):

Curled in this liquid warmth  
I cling  
tight to the paradisal rope

Expulsion looms  
the open gate  
will close against my backward gaze

Ahead a long road stretches  
cold and grey  
with sharp stones strewn along the way

The journey's end  
I see it in the gloom  
the hard walls of a wooden womb

Curled in this liquid warmth  
I cling  
tight to the paradisal rope

Here the paradisal state is suspension in the inner sea of the mother's womb, and birth (expulsion from the womb) is the fall. The world is a stony road leading east of Eden to the tomb. Active fantasy strives to recapture that paradisal state of oneness. The trauma of severance is sometimes linked with a mysterious voice, a whispered but aborted communication. The desire to conjure with words, to share a secret language with nature — a motivating force in Bullock's art — seems to go back to the pre-speech phase of infancy, when the poet lost his mother. The significantly titled "Word" (which first appeared in *The Double Ego: An Auto-collage* [1985]) reveals this pattern:

The song streams skyward  
 a fluttering ribbon of sound  
 spun from the poet's navel  
 to the placenta of a cloud

The umbilical imagery is explicit, and one notes that it is poetic language ("song") that links the poet to cloudy space, a sublimated image of the Mother. Reciprocally, a voice flies toward the poet from this remote abyss, only to die as "it whispers / a word I cannot grasp." This elusive word, assuming the angelic attributes of the voice that delivered it, then plunges back into the cosmic womb. The poet remains bereft, like "a tree with a severed root": an image that relates to the broken umbilical bond. The mother's early removal from the poet's life obviously left a traumatic wound, which the act of art-speech strives to anneal. Another version of the umbilical image appears in "Bird," where the sense of being cut off from the life-source causes emotional erosion. "Without its feeding stream / my heart has dried / and shrivelled in the heat. . . ."

Water is an archetypal symbol of birth, death, or regeneration and streams, pools, and subaqueous imagery occur with almost obsessional frequency in Bullock's work. In "Voice," "the pale light from a drowned sun / runs like water-colour behind the roofs," and "The silence is deep water / in which I drown. . . ." Many of the images in "Voice," if read against those in "Word," relate obliquely to intra-uterine experience. Drowning, which has the dream significance of re-immersion in the womb, is a key trope; in "Drowned Poem" it is compounded with the act of writing, seen as a form of suicide.

The razor edge of the paper  
 slashes my hand  
 releasing a stream of blood  
  
 The ink runs  
 in turbulent waves  
  
 Words drown  
 their faint cries  
 rise from the black flood  
  
 The poem  
 is swept away on the flow  
  
 Silence returns  
 the page is once more white

Such poems, which at first sight seem mere fantasies, are actually microcosms of the poet's preoccupations. For one thing, poetic imagination is immersed in a trancelike state — the genesis of such writing lies in images long nurtured in the unconscious — and the will to verbal expression is linked with its double, the will to purgation (or voiding) of consciousness. There are subtle transactions here between what lies inside and outside of language.

ONE SIGN OF THE TRUE POET is his aliveness to the infantile sources of his imagery. The key poems discussed above reveal unconscious underpinnings of many others that deal with natural objects in a Symbolist fashion. (The references to Jules Laforgue and the romantic poet Gérard de Nerval are surely indicative.) Consider, for instance, the Rose that floats, sinks, falls, is “consumed in the flames,” then rises as perfume to the sky — “Only its thoughts / still drift about the room.” Surely this spiritual icon is correlative of the Mother, who appears in so many guises — consoling, menacing, or seductive. But once the psycho-symbolist nexus is established, one does not need to labour the manifest content of these poems, for each exists, irreducibly, as a work of art.

“Leaves” is a dendromorphic folio, the key to which is “Tree 1,” where empathy leads to metamorphosis:

Sap runs through my veins  
 leaves sprout from my fingers  
 by morning  
 birds will nest in my hair

My roots seek water  
 deep down in the soil  
 as each cell swells  
 filled with green soul

The exchange of human and arboreal attributes is complete when “*sap* runs through my veins” and the new tree is “filled with green *soul*.” Here is “the motive for metaphor” in extreme form: desire to close the gap between the mind that observes and the vitality that simply *is*. If the trend of “Tree 1” is dendromorphic, that of “Tree 2” is correspondingly anthropomorphic, with the tree yearning to burst into human life. Incidentally, a photograph on the back cover of *Brambled Heart* shows the author’s face half-lit, with a female mask, sprouting antlerlike branches from its head, peering blankly over his shoulder. This mask-like apparition is a detail of a painting by Joe Rose, based on Bullock’s poem “Black Wings White Dead,” which contains the lines:

I am here hiding  
 behind dark trees  
 growing from a soil  
 nourished by the white dead.<sup>9</sup>

The humus of the white dead has produced an Anima-figure, a catalyst of ramifying transmutations, who seems to stare back at us from the heart of a black mirror. Moreover, the title which appears on the cover design in red lettering against an expressionist background of black and white shapes, suggests entanglement in nature — a motif amplified by the Shakespeare epigraph which links

everyday sufferings with the Forest of Arden. The theme of metamorphosis is further enhanced by greenish art-paper, with muted tree, sun, stone, and sea designs.

The last three sections are linked by the central “Mirror” image, for “Moons” are shining spheres and “Rivers” reflect. The first four texts in “Mirrors” are prose-poems, which give more scope for surrealist expression. “Moons” also begins with a surreal image. “Greenly the dark-haired moon / floats above the water of the lake.” Then a “Skull Moon” “mirrors [the poet’s] face in [its] midnight glass.” “Moon smeared with red” provides a Heraclitean image of duality: it is

a broken mirror  
reflecting the sky  
reborn above  
still floating below  
twin moons yearning  
one for the other

“Moons” are mirrors of creation in all its aspects — eroticism, grief, exhaustion, death, frustration, violence, fruition, decay. The most minimal are “Japanese Moons,” a series of brief illuminations that approximate *haiku* form, ranging from a classical seventeen to a mere eleven syllables.

Mirrors, symbolic of imagination or self-perception, have complex associations in literature. As J. E. Cirlot points out, “mirror-symbolism [is linked] with water as a reflector and with the Narcissus myth: the cosmos appears as a huge Narcissus regarding his own reflections in the human consciousness.”<sup>10</sup> This mythic image consorts well with Bullock’s pervasive animism, that marries the mind to nature and the perceiver to the world he perceives. It is the flux of phenomena that “projects this quasi-negative, kaleidoscopic image of appearance and disappearance reflected in the mirror. . . . It is a surface which reproduces images and in a way contains and absorbs them.” In folklore, it is a source of potent magic, “serv[ing] to invoke apparitions by conjuring up again the images which it has received at some time in the past, or by . . . reflect[ing] what was once an object facing it and now is far removed. This fluctuation between the ‘absent’ mirror and the ‘peopled’ mirror lends it a kind of phasing, feminine in application, and hence . . . it is related to moon-symbolism” (*ibid.*).

Bullock’s “Clear Mirror” is psycho-metaphysical. It illuminates “a room where everything hovers as though floating beneath water” — the poet’s subaqueous world of memory and reflection. Here the drowning image becomes transparent: “the face in the mirror is drowning in light. The deep water behind it will soon wash it away. It is marked by the transience of tidal things. No rocks of darkness halt the flow of light in this evanescent, mirrored world, and the mirror-gazer has nothing fixed to hold.” “Black Mirror” reflects its own opposite — a proces-

sion of childhood memories centred on white robes, snow, and silver tints. There are signs of a ritual sacrifice. As the memories fade, leaving only a few “shimmers of white,” the black mirror reveals a gaping void. If “Black Mirror” relates to memories and the unconscious, “Cloudy Mirror” relates to fantasies and the subconscious. In a mirror-within-the-mirror, “a myriad hazy figures drift . . . caught in an aimless and unending saraband.” This rapturous dance, suggesting the Veil of Maya, is very different from the solemn processional in “Black Mirror.”

The aim of Bullock’s surrealizing imagination is to move “Beyond the Mirror,” the title of his next prose-poem. But even in this “landscape of the soul,” there are hidden mirrors, for “trees lean towards the mirror’s light reflected in scattered pools. . . .” This is the realm (or source) of art, an exotic jungle where things move swiftly and grow freely, where “huge flowers” festoon the trees “with badges of defiant colour.” A coda well exemplifies the enigmatic quality of Bullock’s art: “But the mirror offers only the smooth perfection of its surface and the mocking reflection of whoever looks into it in a vain attempt to see beyond its veil.” “Watery Mirror” deals with flux and dissolution, and with the duality of the self — a Double Ego that can never quite close the gap between conscious and unconscious being. Here the mirror is a pool shadowed with reeds. Lack of punctuation (as in all the poems) affords an interesting ambiguity, or moment of doubleness, in the second line of the last stanza:

The face looks down  
behind the bars  
it gazes up with empty eyes  
that close as the mirror-watcher turns away

The face that looks down for a moment converges with the face that looks up. The last poem in this sequence, “Blue Mirror,” seems genuinely mystical. Its theme is the yearning of the creative soul to pass through the mirror and reach that point of surreality where opposing modes of dream and reality fuse in a visionary state of being. Blue is the spiritual colour, but who will presume to interpret the image of “the blue star burning / in the arching night”?

“Rivers” involve movement as well as reflection, and traditionally symbolize passage through life. The poem “River” is divided into twelve short sections, that reflect this notion without imposing any pattern of progression. In the opening piece the river is a Mother, “carrying on its bosom / a child with closed eyes / clutching at the moon” — possibly an image of the poet’s role as blind seer (cf. Rimbaud). The idea of vital momentum is underscored in this sequence by verbs and participles. But the life of the river “that flows on wedded / to an empty boat” is motion that knows no purpose other than to mingle with the ocean — even if, along the way, it “seeks its soul beneath the soil.” Surreal animism flourishes as sun and moon make love to the passing river:

The river lets down its long green hair  
 catching the eye of the sun  
 the sun comes down and with brazen fingers  
 strokes its silky skin

The “rose on the river,” a symbolic extension of the Mother image, takes on negative overtones. It “sends out waves of scent” that form a net which pulls the observer into the river and drowns him. The lost enchantress has become a “devouring mother.” In the next piece, the serpentlike river seems bent on annihilation of the island-self it encircles. However, passing on towards the sea, it “scribble[s] a winding path / white on the green earth.” Thus the flow of life merges with the flow of writing.

The last poem, “River and Raven,” involves an aborted communication between the river that writes and the raven that reads, between earthly depth and cosmic height. “The willows bend lower / scribble on the water / mysterious words / risen from their roots,” terrifying the raven that “soars / back into the fathomless sky / pursued by its vengeful stars.” This poem seems to contain an apocalyptic myth of writing — the spirit above provokes the dark place beneath into ritual acts of language that spring from the unconscious.

THE CLEAR BUT ELUSIVE POEMS in Bullock’s *Vancouver Moods* are arranged according to the four seasons and are essentially imagist, giving an “emotional complex in an instant of time.” In a sense they are empty; they provide no grist for the mills of thought. Rather they attune the mind to silence or “unheard melodies.” A faint enigmatic aura clings to each piece. This is a minimalist art that smoothes out ripples on the surface of the pool. Yet the blank spaces around the texts seem to open into wider mental and spiritual expanses. Bullock’s transparent images enable one to look at nature through a poet’s eyes. Reading them suspends the mind in a state of contemplation. There is a lingering sense of something just out of reach that adds to the enchantment. Rather than stirring up ideas, these poems co-opt the reader’s sensibility and encourage it to perform in new ways. This is the function of an oriental as well as a minimalist aesthetic.

Metaphors in *Moods* spring from a series of binary oppositions between nature and culture, nature and language, sound and silence, artifice and being. Animism prevails, for the life of the perceiver mingles with that of the visual scene, while objects mirror moods. Language is a metaphoric key; the writer reads nature as a palimpsest of signs. Thus the surface of Beaver Lake is “mapped by waterlilies / scribbled by the beaks of gulls”; in Jericho Park, “sparkling water . . . flashes messages,” and a tree points “a gaunt finger . . . at the unwritten sky.” All the

world's an illustrated book: as scenes and seasons change, one turns the leaves.  
But it is a gnostic script, a secret code:

On the leaf I see written  
in the thickened veins  
a message indecipherable  
as the sand  
after the sea has left it

Often the message is reduced to a single word cut free of context, or to a wordless word, a hieratic gesture toward language. Where the "pointed nails" of the bamboos "scratch the porcelain sky / white letters write a word / that crackles with a sound of breaking ice. . . ." Aware of the "ineluctable modality of the visible," the poet of Spanish Banks might echo Stephen Dedalus's "Signs of all things I am here to read."

The beach is covered in signs —  
crab's claws  
footprints  
  
shells upon shells  
twigs and leaves  
a gull half buried in the sand —  
that tell an indecipherable tale.

All such objects bear the marks of complex individual histories and of the obscure forces that shape organic matter into protean forms.

But the sign language of *Vancouver Moods* does not lack emotive overtones. A pervasive melancholy, a cool sense of solitude flows through these poems. "An absence casts an endless shadow the sun has no power to banish." Delicate scenes are sketched upon a void. The sense of abandonment has psychological and metaphysical dimensions. These poems, with their repeated, almost hypnotic, natural images, do not offer the kind of meaning that Western readers are conditioned to expect. Instead, they point beyond objects to a meditation without content. Here the sound of water blends with silence, emptiness, space. For all their visual precision, these images remain *images*, that open up luminous spaces. The secret of Bullock's transparent poems is an act of the mind that transmutes scene into sign, and generates a corresponding act in the mind of the reader.

The earth is alive, and if we still our hurrying thoughts we can learn to read its silent language. Some of these poems are so stark in their expression of nothingness ("the birds are black notes on a lineless page") as to express an erasure of personality and its persistent inner monologues. As an aesthetic sequence, "Winter" displays an austere black-and-white abstraction that surpasses the art of photography. Meditations like "Winter Pond — UBC Asian Garden" are acts of clearing the mind: there is no attempt to make the image function as a symbol. Bullock shows that, like Wallace Stevens's Snow Man, he can cultivate "a mind

of winter,” and “nothing himself, [behold] / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.” This does not preclude an amorous play of fantasy around the visual image. The secret of these poems is that dual sense of fullness and emptiness that lies at the heart of Zen. There is an oriental precision, like that of a Japanese garden, in Bullock’s articulation of space. In the economy of his art, scene is mood, and perception Being. As with Roland Barthes’s perceptual Japan, “the place has no other limit than its carpet of living sensations, of brilliant signs . . . it is no longer the great continuous wall which defines space, but the very abstraction of the fragments of view . . . the garden is a mineral tapestry of tiny volumes . . . the public place is a series of instantaneous events which accede to the notable in a flash so vivid, so tenuous that the sign does away with itself before any particular signified has had the time to ‘take.’”<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, Bullock’s poems are acts of attention that illuminate, even while they frustrate the reader’s greed to “know.” These miniatures point to nothing beyond the visual/verbal image as a momentary conjunction of mind with nature. Although the same images recur and interweave, they do not “add up” syntagmatically: they are discrete units in a succession of timeless moments. They may glow or fade, but they can never be arrested in a fixed idea. Indeed, their effect is that “suspension of meaning which to us is the strangest thing of all . . .” (Barthes, 81). As in Japanese calligraphy, executed with a soft brush, “everything, in the instrumentation, is directed toward the paradox of an irreversible and fragile writing, which is simultaneously, contradictorily, incision and glissade . . .” (Barthes, 86). Briefly, Bullock’s art of casual precision marries surface and depth.

The minimalist surface of Bullock’s texts should not blind one to the intricacies of his imagery. As in “Winter Pond,” there is a level of implication that invites reverie, and ultimately “teases one out of thought.” The restraint of Bullock’s language allows images of things themselves (such as raindrops on dark water) to spread through the poem and flow over the reader’s mind, dissolving its habitual structures. There is a suggestive magic here that invites the reader to exercise his own creativity. Poems such as “Rainy Day” seem sinister, because the synaptic link between image and mood is concealed. The metaphoric image of “dagger-pointed / bamboo leaves / . . . serpent’s fangs / seeking / a vein to pierce” is visually clear, but its metonymic symbolism is more enigmatic.

Ponds, in all their seasonal trappings including ice, have a special fascination, for Bullock’s key motif is water, dark or dazzling element of constant transmutation. These poems range from limpid transparency to obsidian opacity: extremes that are not ultimately remote from each other, except in mood. Their visual concentration does not lend itself to elaboration, but there are some surreal touches, as in “December Snow,” where “The world is suffocating / beneath white roses / fallen from a black hearse / on its way across the sky.” Bullock’s

imagery is pervasively animistic, and self-reflexive metaphors of art fall naturally into this poetic context: "Very softly / the melting ice / is singing to itself / The cold sun / paints everything / diamond bright."

*Poems on Green Paper* is divided into three sections: "In the Woods," "Gardens," and "Beyond." A basic trope is inversion of above and below, taking a subaqueous form: "*In the deep water of the wood / I fish for poems.*" The enchanted forest is that of the U.B.C. Endowment Lands, but more significantly it is a Baudelairean "forest of symbols" where one looks for "Correspondences." ("La Nature est un temple ou de vivants piliers / Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles. . .") Indeed, the opening poem, "Lure of the Forest," speaks of a "wealth of manifold images," then lists eight nouns in a single line, each of which will proliferate into a cluster of images. If Gardens represent art and civilization, Woods represent the archetypal unconscious. Fantasies of submersion in the forest lead to a series of transformational images in the succinctly titled "Wood Water." Water is a polyvalent symbol in Bullock's work, that permeates the structure of his imagination dissolving the solid world into a dream, and it can stand for the flow of imagination itself. It is also associated with the waters of birth and with the shadowy figure of the Mother: "Leaving behind the hot sun / I swim / into the cool womb of the wood." Transformation is again the poetic strategy in "Drowned in a Dream," the undercurrents of which can be clarified by reference to the "drowning" poems in *Brambled Heart*. The poet's fertile fantasy springs from a psychic source to transmute images drawn directly from nature. In this poetry of "Correspondences," outward impressions set off inner echoes.

In "Sunlight and Shadow," there is a rhythmic interplay of opposites, like a dance of nymphs and dryads, leading to their joint immersion in running water. Streaming sunshine and sunny streams unite, as nature takes on magic. This alchemical process is treated with a classical lightness and grace. Nature speaks in sign language, encoded in animistic metaphors:

Bare trunks tower skyward  
waving green flags  
to semaphore the sun  
excited birds  
add their messages in Morse

In some unstatable sense, the key to existence lies in such signs. The "Voice" of the wood, made up of multiple animate and inanimate sounds, "speak[s] an unknown language." The seeker's "footsteps / echo sadly / among the trees / periods marking the end / of these despairing sentences. . ." There is a semantic gap, for the language of nature does not cohere without consciousness, and consciousness cannot quite formulate its syntax. Many poems engage with this problem,

and in "Voice" it is suggested that the signs of nature hold some clue to the labyrinth of self. The final poem of this sequence, "Today," negates a whole series of metaphoric fantasies, affirming that "everything is serenely itself / The trees are simply trees," only to conclude that "the root-snakes," earlier seen as obsessive, "still crawl across the path." Not all the symbols of this Pandora's box can be exorcised, for some objects persistently give rise to unconscious fears and memories. Visible impressions strike chords with invisible moods and memories, and out of such identifications poetry is made. The forest darkness contains an "array of mysteries," and in reading them the poet explores hidden strata of the self.

The darkness of "Woods" contrasts with the brightness of "Gardens," where the quest is for aesthetic essence, a music distilled from flowers. A surreal animism enlivens these scenes ("The grass combs its tangled hair") and subaqueous imagery recurs ("In pools of shadow / fallen leaf-fish swim"). "The upward and the downward way are one and the same," according to Heraclitus, and here above and below are formally interwoven in arabesque units —

Blue hydrangeas  
speckles of sky  
caught on green prongs  
amid green leaf-birds

My garden  
is sky-invaded

— where the "green leaf-birds" suggest René Magritte's or Max Ernst's hybrid forms.<sup>12</sup> Surrealist imagination assimilates the world by seeking points of junction between contraries. Thus cyclamens become "Greyhounds / with their purple ears laid back," a *trouvaille* in Pierre Reverdy's sense whereby the sheer distance between objects increases the power of the image (see *M*, 20).

Ponds are microcosms in which universal patterns can be read. The idly stirring "green scum" becomes "a vegetal galaxy / spinning / in the cosmos of a pond." Similarly, the genesis of the earth can be read in "Crater Garden," where "flowers bloom / multicoloured sparks / spurting from the magma / far beneath." Inside and outside enfold one another in harmony:

the spraying of a fountain  
closes the watchful eye  
and with its sound  
makes the mind  
another silent pool

This microcosmic image reminds one of Andrew Marvell's metaphor of "The mind, that Ocean where each kind / Does streight its own resemblance find" ("The Garden"). In "Meditation Garden," the affinity of *Poems on Green Paper* with Marvell's cult of greenery grows to the verge of allusion —

Pines and palms  
 hold the sun at bay  
 leaving a shade  
 in which the mind can fade  
 dissolve in a penumbra

....  
 my mind is filled  
 with dark green thoughts

— as if “Annihilating all that’s made / To a green Thought in a green Shade.” Marvell’s neoplatonic meditation is closely allied with Bullock’s Buddhist or Zen meditations, as in “Japanese Garden,” where the multiple forms of nature seem to merge with the empty sound of “falling water.”

The affinity with Marvell is one of sensibility rather than form: Bullock’s poetry is formally closer to the translations he made from the Chinese of Wang Wei, in *Poems of Solitude*. A mood of solitude is also the keynote of these poems. Walking in the gardens clears a space in the mind, so that past and present meet in a moment, and “a sunlit emptiness / walks beside me.” Memories merely enhance the sense of solitude that is strong in all these communings with nature. Absent voices (ghosts) speak more clearly in the silence “than the voices / of all the invading strangers.”

As its title implies, the third section, “Beyond,” has symbolist overtones. The “Dark Rose,” whose “reflection on the still dark water / remains unmoved / impassive and untouched / fixed and eternal / in a different world,” can again be seen as a symbol of the departed Mother, while a “Black Bird,” “[flying] between me and the sun,” has the effect of “cutting the cord of warmth” that tied the poet to his life-source. The motifs of “Grey Morning” suggest entrapment or paralysis: a struggle between the desire to relapse and the desire to fight on is projected into the scene. In an atmosphere of saturated stillness, only the creative impulse motivates existence:

This world grows shadowy  
 everything moves farther away  
 or turns its back  
 only my writing hand seems real  
 at the centre  
 of this phantasmal universe

Writing authenticates inner life and bestows significance on the shadowy world of phenomena. As Wittgenstein says, “There is no reality in the world”; reality is only to be found in acts of consciousness that construct a subjective or aesthetic order.

*Poems on Green Paper* represents one such virtual order, in which the life of the mind overlaps with, and transfuses, vegetal existence. The hieroglyphic script of nature, that parallels the meanderings of verbal art, is ultimately a system

of “empty signs” in (Barthes’s sense) signifying nothing beyond its own vital process:

On the blue-black water  
of the midnight river  
a single golden thread  
is lazily floating

Curled and coiled by the swirls of water  
it writes its moving message as it passes  
the banks of dream gardens  
planted with flickering flowers

There is no eye to read the message  
that is washed away by the flowing water  
Blinded by their own light the flowers  
see nothing and vanish when the dark river

is lost in a pale-blue lake  
The golden thread has made its voyage in vain

Here basic homologues link nature and language, life and art. The poet is a seer who studies signs in a gnostic script:

A solitary bird  
haunts the lonely sky  
black ink  
marking blue parchment

When the bird has gone  
the palimpsest sky  
bears an invisible text  
that taunts the hungry eye

To a mystic like Jakob Boehme nature is a repository of layer upon layer of occult significance, inscribed in a language that reason cannot fathom. It is here that poetic imagination comes into play, and it seems indicative that Bullock’s final emphasis should fall on an appetency not of the mind but of the eye, a visionary hunger.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Brambled Heart: Poems* (London, Canada: Third Eye, 1986); *Vancouver Moods: Poems* (London, Canada: Third Eye, 1986); *Poems on Green Paper* (London, Canada, Third Eye, 1987). The quotation is from Andrew Parkin, *Issue 2* (March/April 1985): 60.

<sup>2</sup> These phases have been abstracted from a prolific career in other genres (eight fictional works and numerous translations), not to mention parallel activities as a painter and graphic artist.

<sup>3</sup> See *Randolph Cranstone and the Veil of Maya: A Parabolic Fiction* (London, Canada: Third Eye, 1987), where Maya, the “goddess of illusion,” is based on a

real girl. *An Anthology of World Poetry*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Harcourt, 1936), was the greatest influence on Bullock's early style. Other important influences were Symbolism (Baudelaire, Valéry, Verlaine) and Expressionism (Peter Baum, Else Lasker-Schüler, Richard Schaukal, Kurt Heynicke, and Georg Heym).

- <sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Auquier and Alain-Valéry Aelberts, quoted in J. H. Matthews, *Toward the Poetics of Surrealism* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1976), 190.
- <sup>5</sup> See André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1982). (Subsequent references in my text are based on this edition, abbreviated as *M.*) In the first *Manifesto* (1924), Breton defined Surrealism as "Psychic automatism in its pure state . . . dictated . . . in the absence of any control exercised by reason . . ."; in the *Second Manifesto* (1930) he spoke of liberating the imagination through an "alchemy of the word" (*M* 26, 173). In his *Journal* (18/5/86), Bullock amends Breton's views with a clearcut distinction: "Not 'automatic writing' but *free association* is the essential characteristic of Surrealism. Automatic writing implies a true state of trance; free association, on the other hand, is practised in a state of full consciousness but with the minimum of conscious control, which is *voluntarily* relinquished." See also Bullock, "Some Thoughts on Writing," *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 50/51 (1985): 137-40.
- <sup>6</sup> See my essay, "The Surrealist Art of Michael Bullock," *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, in press.
- <sup>7</sup> *Maldoror*, trans. Guy Wernham (N.p.: N.p., 1934), 94.
- <sup>8</sup> Matthews, *Poetics* 161; Bullock, featured in *Canadian Author and Bookman* 61 (1985): 22. See also Mary Ann Caws, *Surrealism and the Literary Imagination* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 21.
- <sup>9</sup> *Black Wings White Dead: Poems* (Fredericton, N.B.: Fiddlehead, 1978), 49.
- <sup>10</sup> *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), 201.
- <sup>11</sup> Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill, 1984), 108. Subsequent references in my text are based on this edition.
- <sup>12</sup> See Magritte's *The Natural Graces* (1962) and *Treasure Island* (1942), in Harry Torczyner, *Magritte: The True Art of Painting*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Abrams, 1979), 32: Figs. 36, 37; Ernst's *The Joy of Living* (1936), in Uwe M. Schneede, *Surrealism*, trans. Maria Pelikan (New York: Abrams, 1973), 71: Pl. 8.





# FOR MISS COOKE

*Lachlan Murray*

From 3000 miles away  
the blunt typography  
of a murder, actually  
two

A Phys.Ed. teacher  
liked by her students  
at the private school  
for girls, with  
(lucky our media)  
a somewhat younger lover  
of a different race,  
receives an appalling reward  
for living,  
one fears, salaciously —  
a final caress  
which necessitates reloading

When questioned, our detective:  
(does one imagine the hint of a sneer?)  
LOVE TRIANGLE REVENGE MOTIVE  
In the past her fluid  
muscles had been put  
to many uses

A distaste for the gravelly-voiced  
users of this library.  
Already two weeks old  
the paper from another city  
is left,  
one of a hundred  
yellowing shrouds  
in its rack



# AFTERNOON AND EVENING

*Dale Zieroth*

Afternoon dreams do not fit the usual analysis:  
you lie down with your feet up  
when sleep comes to the ottoman Or not quite sleep  
The sunlight seeps in and dilutes the greater colours  
The woman who has been married three times  
dreams she has no name; the man who lives for Sunday  
dreams he is three men The child might dream one colour  
that isn't in the rainbow — and which we yearn for —  
but when he wakes, his head is for play and arrangement  
I wake up worried I have slipped  
a deadline, the orange-flowered cover pawing me awake  
I leap to the window, looking for time, and see crows  
already gathered in the far woods  
raking their hearts together in a pile for the sunset  
claw-claw-clawing

\*

She's taking seventeen pills a day At least one of them  
is making her voice waver as if she's deaf so  
when I listen on the phone and she talks to me  
from half a continent away, it's underwater talk  
*My youngest on the line* As for me I'm focusing on the hallway  
the door at the end, the smell of the pay-phone in my hand  
all the troubles poured into its mouth Later  
propped on the bed, I might shout what rushes us  
More likely I'll drift, get under the covers  
and doze, perhaps the dream will come  
to open the lines in one great jag of light  
back to what's been — to where — the doors blown open  
cats from childhood hunched up and hissing, wind  
where the fires used to be



# HUNTED CITIZENS

*R. Hillis*

In the fall you discovered death,  
a headless bird on the sidewalk outside  
our home. You turned it over & over  
then with the toe of your sandal

until a passing jogger said a falcon  
hunted our town. It is winter now.  
Chill winds have already claimed  
the lives of two. You and I

keep to ourselves and read. A stray  
cat outside the window has been  
scratching & you throw bits of  
hard food into the snow. Try to

forget the frosted lace on its ears.  
We have cats of our own, you say.  
Rabies, ringworm, distemper, dollars,  
death, you say, we have our own.

I have something to tell you. This  
morning on our walk of ice I found  
another bird fallen through the cracks  
of branches. I held it in my gloves,

expecting the falcon's reminder, but  
instead saw the frozen beads of its  
eyes. There was no wound, no blood,  
but what could I do? I killed the bird

for you. With a stone brought down  
over the head. Buried it in snow  
by the black bridge. That was this  
morning, & tonight we listen for  
the scratch that will not come.



# IN DECEMBER

*Derk Wynand*

Everything drops or threatens to drop:

the final leaf burned to a fine brown  
on the last tree, the tree as well,

the cat in its tracks, the dog in its,

the low sun, too, hanging on  
a thread of cloud, the thread itself  
dropping or seeming to drop,

the woman carrying wood, on her last legs,  
the man stacking the wood also —

everything, everything dropping  
or about to drop.

In context, this need not call  
for such alarm:

the thought of petals on the air  
already promises much;

the cats and the dogs, at least,  
have stopped raining down on one another;

and the woman and the man, if true  
to their nature, will bear up, each  
for the sake of the other.

It's the end of autumn already,  
is it not? The piles of wood  
can be stacked no higher.



# THE END OF POETRY

*David Solway*

Our native Muse, heaven knows and heaven be praised, is not exclusive. Whether out of the innocence of a childlike heart to whom all things are pure, or with the serenity of a status so majestic that the mere keeping up of tones and appearances, the suburban wonder as to what the strait-laced Unities might possibly think, or sad sour Probability possibly say, are questions for which she doesn't . . . in her lofty maturity any longer . . . care a rap, she invites, dear generous-hearted creature that she is, just *tout le monde* to drop in at any time . . .

— W. H. AUDEN, *The Sea and The Mirror*

1.

**D**ESPITE THE STATE OF FRATRICIDAL STRIFE that exists among poets and the schools they are associated with, there is a common and implicit assumption about the poetic calling in the modern world that unites them. It has now attained to the status of an unchallenged dogma, which can be syllogized as follows. First, if a poem is to be a vital and meaningful comment on or analysis of experience, it must to some extent reflect that experience. Secondly, experience in and of the contemporary world is a reductive phenomenon, fragmented, anarchic, pulverized. Consequently, any poem that pretends to authenticity or authority must reflect the discontinuities of the life we are compelled to live by virtue of the fact that we are living *now*.

This series of postulates has much to recommend it and is obviously persuasive. For one thing, who can doubt the critical placebo that poetry must, in one way or another, reflect the structure, quality, or contours of the age in which it moves and has its being if it is to retain its vitality? Otherwise, must it not be hospitalized, kept alive by elaborate life-support systems, surviving intravenously in a state of archival nostalgia? Poetry must be *in* its time in order to be *of* its time, and it must be of its time if it has any intention of lasting since only through a vigorous participation in the temporal can it presume to achieve eternity.

For another thing, the analysis of contemporary experience as disintegrative is now little more than a blatant truism. Hardly anyone questions any longer the psychological commonplace that a sense of alienation, loss, and despair is the essential factor in the modern experience of the world. The only absolute we

acknowledge is the speed of light; as for the rest, the Heraclitean flux has escaped the confines of a pre-Socratic apothegm and threatens to swamp us all in every aspect of our lives. If God died in the nineteenth century, as Nietzsche tells us, Religion promptly followed in the twentieth, taking with it our only viable guarantee of a now mainly worthless moral currency. The spectre of instant annihilation robs us of our seriousness in our dealings with one another and with posterity. Political life has broken down as has the humanist faith in Reason, and even the ultimate cohesions of speech have been syntactically undermined. It is not just that monologue has replaced dialogue but that the monologue has become largely unintelligible. The precarious balance of whatever ecology we wish to consider has been upset beyond, as many suspect, the possibility of restoration.

If this is the condition of life which the poet confronts, then (assuming that the creative *élan* has not abandoned him, that he has not been reduced to silence, which may be the only honest response to such irremediable devastation) it follows that the poem he sets about composing, repressing the conviction of its futility beneath the surface of his narcissism, must reflect the chaos, the rootlessness, the violence, the disruptions, the spiritual centrifugalities of the world he is condemned to die in. And this evidently means that the poem he is condemned to live in must rid itself of all historical ballast and of all those traditional beatitudes of form, order, and intelligibility invoked by the more fortunate poets who still lived in the age of innocence between Pericles and Hitler.

Such, put simply, is the modern poetic creed. Obviously, the issues it raises are more complex than its mere formulation might indicate. For example, does not a poetry which *resists* its time, opposing lucidity to obscurity, order to chaos, sense to senselessness, by that very token indirectly or elliptically participate in its time, if only through the medium of a problematic recognition? Is not its actual practice implicitly diagnostic? May not rhyme, let us say, constitute a plea for harmony and not an atavistic ineptitude? May not the very existence of, if not metre, a discernible cadence suggest the need for internal continuity and psychic momentum rather than the ineffectual hope of dim arcadian symmetries? In short, may there not be historical periods in which poetry if it wishes to survive is compelled to live *in partibus infidelium*, carrying on a sort of guerrilla warfare against the pervasive assumptions and dominant 'realities' of the day? The relation of literature to its time is not necessarily one of strict equivalence and the commitment of the former to the latter is often paradoxical or rebellious.<sup>1</sup>

We are touching on the insoluble dilemma of the relation between art and life which I do not want to resurrect here. Suffice it to say that neither pole of the equation can substitute for the equation itself. The self-contained world of art is at best a dubious refuge from the confusions and banalities of raw experience, bringing with it the dangers of inanition and preciousness. On the other hand, the sheer, voluminous flux of experience into which the artist is regularly advised to

plunge in order to revitalize his flagging energies will more likely than not leave his literary corpse washed up on the beaches of respectability, academia or, if he is thorough, in the churning surf of an African exile. But the artist must nevertheless judge which pole of the equation he should diffidently approach in the service of his unforgiving muse if his work is to avoid becoming parodistic or inconsequential.

To return to the development of our theme. Despite the almost infinite permutations which the subject permits, the theory of poetry reduces as does that of art in general to the theory of imitation taken in its widest conceivable sense. And imitation is conceived in basically two ways. The artist is required either to imitate "nature," which can mean anything from landscape to manners to interior or psychological configurations. Or he is exhorted to the imitation of the traditional forms of literary endeavour in appropriate language, in which case he "copies" not "nature" but one or another of the formally established ways in which it has been agreed that nature may be copied. In the first instance, his imagination must be governed by his apperception of reality or, in the complex refinements of later speculation, by its own intrinsic laws as it conspires with the external *materia* to produce reality itself. In the second case, imagination must be subordinated to a social and critical consensus regarding the appropriate forms of literary representation, whose pedigree dates from the *Republic* and the *Poetics*.

The operative terms are, of course, to be understood with a certain generous latitude. Literature is not slavishly mimetic, it is also inventive and analytic, and no genuine writer is concerned with photographic verisimilitude. He does not copy so much as interpret. Similarly, the antithetical terms "nature" and "tradition," notwithstanding the venerable polarity into which they have been historically locked, are susceptible of endless modification. But the two "moments" of the antithesis can never be entirely eluded and the thrust of the writer's creative temperament moves in one or another of these ancestral and inevitable directions. In this sense it may be valid to claim that beneath the profusion of individual modulations we can distinguish these two fundamental impulses toward the imitation of "nature" on the one side or the imitation of established "form" on the other. That is, we may speak either of the "laws" which the creative temperament must obey or of the "norms" to which it must conform.

The two impulses are not at bottom diametrically opposed, as the social doctrine implicitly assumes that reality is not infinite and there accordingly exists a definable number of expressive forms which correspond to its limited permutations. Of course, the classical world is extinct and the neo-classical sensibility was hijacked by Industrial Capitalism, but the simple fact that we continue to accept the rhetorical distinction between poetry and prose, that poets (somewhat heedless of their innovative practices) tend to leave the customary margins on either side of the page, and are also given to declaiming or chanting their verses rather

than merely *reading* them, is evidence of an abiding belief in the formal difference between the two media and therefore in the general validity of the classical idea. "Form" is grounded in "nature" and is solidly associated with a repertoire of legitimate strategies for the expression of different kinds of experience.

## 2.

The blunt fact remains that the theory of poetic convention has fallen on evil days and is widely regarded as superannuated. The classical idea of poetry as requiring elevated diction — as commanding a unique language distinct from both prose and ordinary speech, equipped with a peculiar set of rules, conventions, and formal exclusions — is now considered as an exercise in brahmanic arrogance or anachronistic fatuity. It simply does not meet the brazen imperatives of contemporary experience and is as unseasonable or ludicrous as mixing a Molotov cocktail in a Ming vase. When Ortega defines poetic language as a "hovering" medium, raised above the abrasions and rugosities of current speech, he is looking back to the traditional conceptions of epic, drama, and the prophetic literature. But even the conversion of the hoary emblems of the winged steed or magic carpet into that of the lexical helicopter does not redeem his formulation from the charge of antiquarianism. Poetic conventions are *passé*: rhyme is obsolete (did not Milton consider it a barbarism?); metre is infantile, and even the stress-count is a throwback to Anglo-Saxon artlessness; the stanza form continues to be used but more as a logical convenience, an adaptation of the prose paragraph, than as a part of the traditional architectonic; and the language itself must avoid archaic "heightening" or "point" as it scrupulously democratizes its mandarin inclinations in the direction of the idiomatic, the colloquial, and the ubiquitous. Poetry can now be dialed on the telephone and read on the buses sandwiched between advertisements, as if Wordsworth's Preface were actually to be taken seriously.

The prevailing dogma is clear and unmistakable. The doctrine of the imitation of traditional form is defunct, relegated to the limbo of a classical irrelevance. A poetry which honours the canons and attitudes of its masonic past, which reveres the illustrious predecessor, which recognizes degree and precedence, and which deploys a complex, formally appropriate, and distinctively memorable language is dismissed as either hieratic snobbishness or creative senility. The proper use to which this kind of poetry can be put was determined by Congreve's Mrs. Millamant, who curls her hair with love letters, but "only with those in verse . . . I never pin up my hair with prose." And the poets who continue to practice these ancestral sanctities are patronized as elegant but pitiable old fogies mourning the end of their feudal prerogatives. The world has passed them by. The careening motorcar has flung the yellow caravan into the ditch and the poet

who wishes to survive must shake the dust out of his knickers and dream of magnificent onsets into a levelling future. Thus the principle of mimetic form is no longer adequate to the explosiveness and terror of the modern world and must be abandoned if we are to come to terms with the nature of our experience, the superluminal chaos of our event-horizon. Otherwise, along with religious faith, good craftsmanship, diplomatic immunity, and other such vestigial remnants of a vanished order, poetry cannot hope to escape obsolescence. This, more or less, is the creed to which the majority of poets now subscribes.

But if the imitation of form, the hallowing of poetic convention, has been tossed onto the scrapheap of outmoded pieties, we are left with the imitation of nature as the only theoretical foundation on which to ground the poetry of the modern era. The forms we must devise or discover in order to mirror, contain, or deflect the volatilities of our experience must inevitably *correspond* to that experience. In consequence, form moves toward the paradoxical assimilation of formlessness and the poet begins to conceive of his work as a sequence of ambiguous strategies to reflect the sense of confusion, homelessness, and disruption (or of mere indifference) with which the world persecutes him. Honesty, he asserts, compels him to write directly — eloquence is suspect, stable form the result of quaint artisanal compulsions, and time too valuable and fugitive an inheritance to waste on laborious composition. A poem can no longer claim the luxury of evocativeness, and the sense of its commitment to pressing, immediate needs invalidates its allegiance to its own constituent materials, an activity it can only regard as an untenable hedonism or technical encapsulation. The predictable effect of all this is that poetry comes increasingly to resemble prose.

The poetic modes which flourish in this climate of misinformation are clearly the descriptive narrative, the documentary, and the personal reminiscence (often deflected pronominally into the third person to evade the accusation of lyrical infatuation). These modes of poetic discourse are seen as unobjectionable from the standpoint of the contemporary milieu and even as adventurously experimental. And they are accompanied by the feverish search for structural models: the memoir or diary is high on the list of acceptable templates, but a quicksilver backing can be scraped together from almost any paradigmatic quarter, provided it is non-poetic in origin, such as the TV script, the recipe, the memo, or even the telephone book. (The fact that Villon, among others, used the testament in precisely this way partially explains his resurgent popularity.) The point I am making is that today the tendency is almost universal and by no means a maverick or eccentric gesture. The technical vacuum left by the extinction of conventional form has been surreptitiously filled by the substitution of prosaic or documentary prototypes, since the poet must get his structural patterns from somewhere. The element of disingenuousness arises from the conflict between the proclaimed conviction that form must be internal and organic and the obsessive practice of

ransacking (to use Johnson's word) the world of common, unmediated experience for exemplars and paradigms. There is no escaping the ironical conclusion that the contemporary notion of form is at least as external and artificial as the literary conventions for the application of which the traditional poet is routinely denounced.

But there is a further and more corrosive irony at work in the matter under discussion. The imitation of form is widely construed as archaic, reactionary, and inappropriate; heightened language is regarded as artificial (once a term of approval, now dyslogistic); order and restraint are dismissed as hangovers from a pastoral and genteel state of mind, now understood as historically incongruous or irrelevant. But the imitation of nature or of the given state of affairs which underlies contemporary practice is in effect the province of the novel, as has been the case since Robinson Crusoe domesticated his island and Moll Flanders picked the pockets of the contemporary scene. And when it comes to holding the mirror up to nature on Stendhal's dusty highway or in Hamlet's theatre, poetry is out of its league and cannot compete with its formidable opponent. The novel is just too compendious, too all-embracing, too versatile and flexible and omnivorous a genre to defer in its analysis of experience to the right of poetic primogeniture. Moreover, to add injury to insult, it is capable in its lyrical mood of actually swallowing and digesting its traditional rival, so that the only place where we may still encounter poetry in its old-fashioned guise of evocative speech is in the body of the novel itself — an irritable Jonah, a lying Pinocchio, whistling in the depths of the Leviathan. And as if to administer the *coup de grace*, modern criticism has deposed that the novel is not a continuation of the classical tradition, the descendant of the epic, but is the unique literary expression of modern society deriving ultimately from the Puritan reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the industrial upheavals of the eighteenth.

This irony is not only inescapable but possibly terminal as well. Poetry, in approximating to the novelistic parallax, ceases to be "poetic" and grows more and more prosaic in structure, content, and language. The idea of "decorum" did not wither away, however, with classical and Renaissance literary values. Decorum may be defined as style accommodated to subject, means to ends, idiom to intention. Thus the idea of poetic decorum in today's literary environment exacts an extortionate price from the practicing poet because he must now bring his poem into line with the novelistic perspective on the world and adopt the techniques and strategies of an alien genre if he is to retain or regain credibility. So the truth stares us glumly in the face. The poet goes on multiplying narrative upon description upon documentary in odd linguistic constructs called poems that scarcely anyone bothers to read except other poets and an entrenched minority of academic critics — without whom, be it said, the medium would quickly succumb to literary entropy. Meanwhile it manages to maintain itself prosthetically.

If the imitation of nature is the privilege or the proper sphere of the novel and the imitation of form has been consigned to oblivion, it seems reasonable to assume that poetry is confronted with only two options, namely, it must be either prosaic or irrelevant. There is no *tertium quid*. It reflects and participates in the modern experience of universal chaos and predictably disintegrates, becoming discontinuous, haphazard and aleatory, or variously smuggles an extraneous concept of order into its performative ambience and so reduces itself to a parasitical and undistinguished existence, encroaching on the terrain of the novel only to be wiped out or incorporated. This is where the imitation of nature inexorably leads it. The other alternative is equally depressing: it opposes the experience of violence and anarchy and stays equally clear of the giantocracy of the novel, setting up a small, countervailing linguistic system predicated on order and continuity. Thus it becomes instantly obsolete and intensely private, the formal expression of nostalgia for a lost coherence.

The modern poet navigates in the straits between the Scylla of the irrelevant and the Charybdis of the prosaic, and there is every sign in the apocalyptic moment we inhabit that his epic journey is about to be cut short, if it has not already ended. And if, as many believe, the novel is itself endangered by the graphic and electronic revolutions inspired by a triumphant technological barbarism, prose will soon confront its own set of complementary options: to become irrelevant as its predecessor, or somehow cinematic and instantaneous as its successor. In which case it is possible that poetry will be deprived of even its posthumous survival in the body of the novel, one more minor, unremembered casualty in the collapse of the past.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> This is a point stressed, perhaps overstated, by Wilde in *The Decay of Lying*, which claims that art in no case reproduces its age. "So far from being the creation of its time, it is usually in direct opposition to it. . . ."

*Concluding Note*

In a certain sense poetry (or the improbable act of writing and reading it) has more in common with Science Fiction than with any other branch of prose literature, given the 'Coleridgean' proviso that Science Fiction (of the cruder sort at any rate) is popular since it relies on the familiar operations of fancy and poetry is paradoxically remote since it is based on the rigorous principles of the imagination. The traditional poem and the SF story construct codified worlds which in terms of consistency and intelligibility provide a fleeting alternative to the feeling of dispersion and the experience of triteness we associate with contemporary life. At the same time, it is obvious that Science Fiction cannot be diffracted through the medium of verse (although this has been inadvisedly attempted) without the reciprocal annihilation of the two genres. The poem in its quest for poise and equilibrium is immediately crippled by an orthopedic self-consciousness while the Science Fiction story in its need for spectacle and narrative expansiveness chafes in frustration at the formal

and rhetorical limitations imposed upon it. But it might be worth suggesting that poetry was the Science Fiction of the ancient world, not in the sense of detailing implausible adventures in the epic (or even Lucianic) mode but rather in describing an implicit trajectory that overarched and to some extent negated the world of daily experience. Poetry once provided, as Science Fiction does today, the significant alternative to the commonplace.

We might also note that poetry has been crowded out of the aesthetic field not only by its brawny, mimetic competitor, the novel, but by its once-pliant, former handmaiden, music. Eric Havelock tells us in his *Origins of Western Literacy* that as the written word gained its identity and became "increasingly prosaic," it was freed from its previous bondage to mnemonic verse rhythm. But this emancipation had the concomitant effect of releasing rhythm from its subservience to poetry, allowing it to be conceptualized in pure sound independent of diction and "increasingly thought of not as an accompaniment to words but as a separate technology with its own laws and procedures." Thus both the mimetic and phonetic functions of verse have been taken from it by the disciplines of fiction and music, which are better adapted to the respective modalities of verbal imitation and rhythmic sound than is their ostensible predecessor.

W.R. Martin

# Alice Munro

## Paradox and Parallel

Dr. W.R. Martin discusses Alice Munro's writing and the prominent features of her art: the typical protagonist, the development of her narrative technique, and the dialectic that involves paradoxes and parallels.

0-88864-115-X; \$25.00 cloth  
0-88864-116-8; \$14.95 paper



**The University of Alberta Press**  
141 Athabasca Hall, Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E8

## DISCOURSE OF THE OTHER

ROBERT KROETSCH, *Advice to My Friends*.  
Stoddart, \$6.95.

*Advice to My Friends* consists of eight sequences of poems: five of them have previously appeared in print; the remaining three, "Advice to My Friends," and the two remarkable sequences, "Sounding My Name" and "The Poet's Mother" are published here for the first time. Together they constitute the second volume in Kroetsch's continuing poem, *Field Notes*, and establish that work as one of the most important poems published in Canada in many years.

"We go into the unknown, even the unknown," the speaker in "The Frankfurt *Hauptbahnhof*" declares, "with expectations." Readers of *Field Notes* will find many of their expectations met in this second volume. Certainly the speaker of the poems is familiar; he is that lonely, self-conscious, slightly bemused, often sad, frequently amusing figure encountered in the earlier poems. From "Delphi: Commentary":

Meggie was taking pictures. Laura and I stood behind the omphalos and Meggie took a picture. Meggie and I stood behind the omphalos and Laura took a picture.

How does one pose for a picture taken at the belly button of the earth? What smile is not a smile of embarrassment? of self-satisfaction? of hybris? What angle of the arm

Frazer: *Even in his best days he [Apollo] did not always rise to verse, and in Plutarch's time the god appears to have given up the attempt in despair and to have generally confined himself to plain, if not lucid, prose.*

does not betray a certain inappropriate possessiveness?

Here, as in so many of the earlier poems, the situation is commonplace; the poet as tourist, smiles self-consciously for the camera, caught in the discourse of the obligatory photos. (Here's Laura and I standing beside the omphalos; here's Meggie and Laura by the omphalos; here's Meggie and I . . .) The language, too, is commonplace, sometimes taking on the colour and energy of colloquial speech, sometimes taking flight, but more often than not, quietly insisting, like the speaker himself, on its own prosaic qualities.

"I AM A SIMPLE POET," the speaker of "Mile Zero" writes "in the dust / on the police car hood." But we know better. We come to the poetry expecting to find, behind the speaker's seeming naïveté, the figure of Coyote, the trickster; and we are mindful that the poet's declaration of simplicity occurs in a poem complex enough that it cannot adequately be reproduced here.

I looked at the dust  
on the police car hood.  
I looked around the horizon.  
(Insert here passage on  
nature —

*try:* The sun was blight  
enough for the wild rose.  
A musky flavor on the milk  
foretold the cracked earth . . .

*try:* One crow foresaw my fright,  
leaned out of the scalding  
air, and ate a grasshopper's  
warning . . .

*try:* A whirlwind of gulls  
burned the black fields white,  
burned white the dark  
ploughman  
and the coming night . . .)

I AM A SIMPLE POET  
I wrote in the dust  
on the police car hood.

What cannot be reproduced here is the insertion, in the new "Mile Zero," of

another poem, "Chateau (A Landing) Frontenac," following the line "and the coming night. . ."

The seeming simplicity of the poetry is belied at the level of discourse: one column speaks to another, one poem to another, one text to the next. In "Mile Zero" the original version of the poem becomes the intertext of the new work; in "Delphi: Commentary" the contemporary poet's account of his tour of Delphi is juxtaposed with passages from Pausanias' *Descriptions of Greece*, a second-century A.D. guidebook:

*From this point the high road to Delphi grows steeper and more difficult to a man on foot. Many and diverse are the tales told about Delphi, and still more about the oracle of Apollo.* (Pausanias. His Scattered Greece under Roman rule.)

It is always that way, the poem, the abandoned poem, in which the hero, seeking the answer to the impossible question, seeking the impossible question, takes to the road. Hero. Eros. The evasion that is the meeting. The impossible road.

And we follow (so the story goes). We find ourselves entranced in the play of texts, find ourselves in the relations of the texts.

In *The Postmodern Condition* Jean-François Lyotard defines postmodern simply as an "incredulity toward meta-narratives." In the postmodern world there are no master narratives; we have, finally, not one narrative but many. Kroetsch characteristically finds his own formulation closer to home, in a passage from Ken Dryden's *The Game* which serves as an epigraph for the new "Mile Zero":

... hockey is a *transition game*: offence to defence, defence to offence, one team to another. Hundreds of tiny fragments of action, some leading somewhere, most going nowhere. Only one thing is clear. Grand designs don't work.

This passage could easily serve as an epigraph not just to "Mile Zero" but to the seventeen sequences that, to date, make up Kroetsch's continuing poem, for in *Field Notes* poetry is a transition game, writer to reader, reader to writer, "hundreds of tiny fragments of action, some leading somewhere, most going nowhere." The evasion that is the meeting. "(Insert here a passage on / nature — / try:" from "The Frankfurt *Hauptbahnhof*," written in response to bp Nichol's question about notation in *Field Notes*:

Notation in *Field Notes*, Barry, is the reader in the text. The narrator, always, fears his/her own tyranny. The notation, in the poem occasions the dialogic response that is the reader's articulation of his/her own presence (the ecstatic now of recognition? the longer, if not always enduring, experience of transformational vision?)

"Silence, please."

Bugles.

the gone stranger  
the mysterious text  
the necessary  
transfer.

The necessary transfer. Kroetsch's poetry insists on that transfer, insists on the evasion that is the meeting.

As these brief excerpts suggest, *Advice to My Friends* is, among other things, a meditation on the transition game that is poetry; it is, above all, an exploration of "the other" conceived and addressed in discourse. The need for and creation of the other in discourse is made readily apparent in the opening game of the "Advice to My Friends" sequence, titled "for a poet who has stopped writing":

if we could just catch a hold of it,  
catch ahold, some kind of line,  
if the sun was a tennis ball or something  
but it ain't, the impossible thing is the sun  
if words rhymed, even we could catch a holt  
(a bush) and start the stacking, words  
lined up, I mean, like, in the old days  
wood behind the kitchen stove

but you take now your piecemeal sonnet  
wow, certain of these here poets,  
these chokermen can't even count to  
fourteen  
and as for Petrarch, well, I mean

I've been to bed with some dandy and also  
skilled  
ladies, sure, but would I a ballyhoo start  
for the keen (and gossipy) public?  
I'd be sued or whatever, maybe killed

but (now and then) you've got to tell  
*somebody*  
and a reader has I guess, in spite of all,  
ears.

The poet as chokerman. What he catches  
aholt of here, gets a line on, are the ears  
of the other, the other conceived *as* ears,  
as *somebody*.

In *Advice to My Friends* the other is  
variously conceived: sometimes the "you"  
of discourse is a fellow writer, sometimes  
the poet's daughters, sometimes the ab-  
sent lover. From "Letters to Salonika":

June 4

No mail at all from you. None. I talk to  
myself. I begin to suspect I am writing these  
letters to myself, writing the poem of you.  
Its title is, *I Think About Women Much of  
the Time*. That is the poem about you and  
your silence.

In the lover's discourse, as Roland  
Barthes observes, the other is always "ab-  
sent as referent, present as allocutory."  
As a result, the "I" is "wedged between  
two tenses, that of reference and that of  
the allocution: you have gone (which I  
lament), you are here (since I am ad-  
dressing you)." As Barthes also points  
out, historically the discourse of absence  
is articulated by the female; "Letters to  
Salonika" fascinates, in part, because the  
discourse of absence is sustained by the  
male:

What am I supposed to do with the egg-  
plant in the fridge? It stares out at me  
when I open the fridge door. . . . It reminds  
me of the color of your eyes when you are  
angry.

I took my black oxfords, the shoes you don't

like, to the shoemaker behind the hotel on  
Pembina to have them resoled and he said  
they aren't worth resoling. After I throw  
away my black oxfords I'm going to throw  
away the eggplant. In fact I may throw  
black itself, defying that absence of color  
even to color my life again. I shall thereby  
refute Greek widowhood. I think of your  
grandmother, serving olives and bread and  
sliced tomatoes, pouring ouzo. I am, today,  
my own widow.

The absence of the other not only colours  
his life but grants him entry onto the  
stage of language. "Penelope was the  
artist, in that story," he reflects in an-  
other story, "Odysseus, only the dumb  
and silent one, approaching and being  
unravell'd and approaching again."

The most remarkable poems in *Advice  
to My Friends* are the two closing se-  
quences, "Sounding the Name" and  
"The Poet's Mother," toward which the  
volume as a whole seems to move. Both  
focus on the figure of the poet's mother.  
In *Labyrinths of Voice* Kroetsch ac-  
knowledged some years ago that he had  
kept the mother figures very silent at the  
centre of his writing, partly because the  
death of his mother caused him such  
pain, and added:

. . . it's funny how I kept that silent and one  
of the things that I can see happening, in  
the next few years as I go on writing, is a  
kind of enunciation. But I can feel even  
my long poem, *Field Notes* drawing toward  
that.

In the last two sequences we have that  
enunciation, poems that bespeak an al-  
most unbearable pain, poems written  
with the guard down, with the arms wide  
open:

In the fall of snow  
I hear my mother.  
I know she is there.  
In the weight of the snow  
I hear her silence.

I count white stones  
in October moonlight.

I break dry bread  
with a flock of gulls.

I tear sheep's wool  
from barbed wire fences.

The visible,  
the visible —

where are you?

"The central figure of Nichol's work," Stephen Scobie writes in his recent, much needed study of the poet, "is separation — of the child from the parent, of the signifier from the signified, of friends from each other — and the humanist drive to his writing is a heroic attempt to overcome such separation." Much the same, I think, can be said of Kroetsch's poetry. We don't think of him as a humanist; we don't *want* to think of him that way. He is Coyote; he is postmodern. But he *is* a humanist, at least in the terms Nichol himself sets out in his 1966 statement:

there is a new humanism afoot that will one day touch the world to its core. traditional poetry is only one of the means by which to reach out and touch the other. the other is emerging as the necessary prerequisite for dialogues with the self that clarify the soul & heart and deepen the ability to love. I place myself there, with them, whoever they are, wherever they are, who seek to reach themselves and the other thru the poem by as many exits and entrances as are possible.

*Advice to My Friends* is a collection of poems written for and about the other, about the self's need for and discovery of that other. (It is, among other things, the poetic counterpart of Tzvetan Todorov's fascinating study of the other, *The Conquest of America*.) At the Ottawa symposium on "Literary Theory and Canadian Literature" Kroetsch announced that *Advice to My Friends* had turned out to be the last volume of *Field Notes*. Let's hope he proves as wrong about *Field Notes* as bp Nichol has been about *The Martyrology*.

PAUL HJARTARSON

## UNDERSTANDING ZERO

LORNA CROZIER, *The Garden Going On Without Us*, McClelland & Stewart, \$9.95.

IN LORNA CROZIER'S SIXTH book of poems, *The Garden Going On Without Us*, there is a poet at home in many places. She uses the old legends of the Garden and of Icarus and of swans, whether they be Leda's or Tschaikovsky's. She imagines into herself the more modern voices of Wallace Stevens and David Wagoner and Georgia O'Keeffe. She traces the prairie landscape and the timeless themes of love and family. She is an erudite but accessible poet.

A section of "Poem about Nothing" shows Crozier's easy blend of allusion and observation:

Icarus understood zero  
as he caught the smell  
of burning feathers  
and fell into the sea.

ø

If you roll zero down a hill  
it will grow,  
swallow the towns, the farms,  
the people at their tables  
playing tic-tac-toe.

ø

When the Cree chiefs  
signed the treaties on the plains  
they wrote X  
beside their names.

In English, X equals zero.

ø

I ask my friend  
the rhetorician who studies mathematics  
*What does zero mean and keep it simple.*

He says *Zip*.

. . . . .

Zero starts and ends  
at the same place. Some compare it  
to driving across the Prairies all day  
and feeling you've gone nowhere.

Yet the language and imagery are not always this accessible. In the poem filed under the title "Marriage: Getting Used To," the speaker blends images from fairy tales and cocktail parties and the old northern legends of dragons:

It did not take me long  
to get used to his leather  
wings . . .  
It was his feet I couldn't stand,  
his horny feet, ugly as a bird's,  
. . . . .

It was waking to find him  
with a flashlight and a mirror,  
staring under the covers at his feet  
It was his nails  
clicking across linoleum  
It was the fallen gold scales  
that lay on the sheet like scattered coins

Other poems are as dry and restrained as a prairie landscape, their allusions to place and to near history. In "The Photograph I Keep of Them" Crozier writes:

It is before my brother  
and long before I demanded  
my own space in her belly.

Behind them the prairie  
tells its spare story of drought.  
. . . . .

I can write down only this  
for sure:  
    they have left the farm,  
    they are going somewhere.

Or Crozier can be simply and happily bawdy, as in "Carrots" from *The Sex Lives of Vegetables*:

Carrots are fucking  
the earth. A permanent  
erection, they push deeper  
into the damp and dark.  
All summer long  
they try so hard to please.  
*Was it good for you,  
was it good?*

Actually, this bawdiness seems to me a little contrived, the images as masculinely familiar as inked on beards and

mustaches on postered women. "My New Old Man, He's So Good" offers sensuously the more remarkable lines: "snake / swallows mouse, he dies / inside me often."

These poems do not lend themselves to generalities. Crozier's voice is a consistent one, her lines short and vivid with occasional self-effacing rhymes that include internal and sprung variations. Her images, whether of dragons or drought, zeros or mindlessly fertile carrots, are intense and precise. Lorna Crozier is a regionalist in the best sense, intensely aware of the world immediately around her but also of its connections to the geographical past and to the cultural past brought to the land by the language in which the poet writes. Icarus and Eden, Englished, are as much a part of the Canadian prairies as of the Mediterranean world, packed carefully in the cultural baggage of prairie settlers, along with hymnals and pianos and the folk wisdom of "Sex Education":

They said  
    mice wear paths in the linoleum  
    hide in the couch springs and  
    under your bed   wait for a chance  
    to whoosh  
                up your housecoat  
    nest in your crotch

Crozier's angels are of snow, not stone, and they melt and reform themselves again and again in this collection as experience and education come together in strong and witty images.

FRANCES W. KAYE



## HARNESSING ENERGY

ROBERT MELANÇON, *Blind Painting*. Philip Stratford, trans. Véhicule, n.p.

MICHEL GARNEAU, *Small Horses & Intimate Beasts*. Robert McGee, trans. Véhicule, n.p.

A TRANSLATOR OF POETRY who is set on a close working relationship with the author of the original may be looking for trouble. Frustration with the usual difficulties of rendering shades of meaning can conceivably be aggravated by personal temperament, and the inevitable "betrayal" of one language by another might quickly become a source of personal animosity. On the other hand, the interaction may stimulate the creative processes; as Northrop Frye has noted, some translation is tantamount to a "creative achievement in communication, not merely a necessary evil or a removal of barriers."

Such was the case some years ago when F. R. Scott and Anne Hébert engaged in a meticulous and courteous dialogue on the subject of Scott's translation of "Tombeau des rois." The result, adroitly edited by Jeanne Lapointe, and with an introduction by Frye from which the above remark is quoted, was published as *Dialogue sur la traduction* (1970). The translator can learn much from the dialogue's revelation of inspired craftsmanship on the part of Scott and patient elucidation on that of Hébert.

In the case of the works under discussion here, poet and translator have worked at a level of intimacy at least as productive as that experienced by Scott and Hébert. Philip Stratford, anthologist, critic and seasoned translator of fiction, embarked on his first translation of verse with Robert Melançon's *Peinture aveugle*, winner of a Governor General's award in 1976. Robert McGee, a Montreal poet of the Solway, Harris and Furey generation, and translator of Mi-

chel Tremblay's *Albertine en cinq temps*, has undertaken the challenge of putting Michel Garneau's ebullient *Les petits chevaux amoureux* (1977) into an equally energetic English.

For Robert Melançon, getting translated was by no means a passive experience. Forced to look once more at his poems, he found many of them wanting. "Je l'ai enrichi de suppressions," he writes in an introductory note, "et j'ai corrigé, parfois récrit complètement, presque tous les poèmes." In effect, *Peinture aveugle* has been reborn through the catalytic action of translation. Melançon has deleted whole poems from the original, enlarged and changed others, added new sequences, and tinkered with the remainder. Whether he has made better poems or simply other poems cannot be discussed here, though one detects an easier flow and a more calculated elegance in the new text. The more tantalizing question is exactly how the collaboration with Stratford affected the creative processes of both, for Stratford tells us that the poems "continued to change on both sides of the crease." Perhaps the process cannot be disentangled at all; Melançon says that at times it was Stratford's version which became the original. All that one can say with confidence is that there is, in the present Véhicule text, a French poem on the left and an English on the right which appears to be its translation. For further clarification we must await a new *Dialogue sur la traduction*.

*Blind Painting* is arranged in sets of carefully interwoven sequences, each poem meditating variously upon place, season, love, time, and the creative process. The structure is essentially musical: themes and variations orchestrated chiefly for strings and woodwinds, a muted, chromatic poetry, something like Debussy in an autumnal mood. In *Liberté* (décembre 1983), Melançon has written

on the importance of music to poetry: "Il cherche une langue qui atteigne à la transparence, dont le sens serait immédiat comme celui de la musique." Here he writes of "le poème / naît par lente improvisation" and of poetry as "chant muet / où s'entend toute musique, figure / sans forme où remue / le possible" ("mute song / in which all music's heard, formless / figure that contains the range / of the possible"). This mellow sound is matched with a "taste for skies of clouds / where the hours melt together / in a neutral light" ("ton goût des ciels de nuages / où les heures se confondent / dans une lumière neutre"). Again and again the poems depict varieties of light and surface, leading Stratford to a diction replete with words like incandescent, shimmering, glistening, laquered, washed, melted and shadowless, somewhat over-rich in English perhaps, but faithful to the original and in any case quite unavoidable.

Melançon's verse gives the impression of unobtrusive music revealing by degrees an inner world of finely tuned perceptions. On the whole Stratford has been able to do justice to his subtle tonal range, even to the internal assonance of individual lines. He has succeeded in producing a convincing and familiar English movement to the lines while committing few injustices against the original. Where he does deviate significantly, it is to avoid an awkward literalism by choosing a conveniently "poetic" English word: "Notre peu de raison" becomes "our fragile wisdom," "l'obscurité lavée" becomes "silver obscurity," and "dans l'inachevé" becomes "into the inchoate." I found only one truly unfortunate line. When Melançon writes: "Les bois, les champs, la Loire, les villages / résumaient alentour le désordre universel," Stratford construes the verb clumsily as "re-summed around."

Michel Garneau's celebratory, idio-

matic poems are another kind of challenge altogether. There is the temptation to make him sound like Walt Whitman, and indeed there are certain similarities: a happy self-centredness, an unabashed commitment to pleasure, a tendency to lively inventories. But Garneau seems much closer to the primal juices, and his ego much less prone to cosmic posing. Some of the poems in *Small Horses and Intimate Beasts*, given as they are to flights of boastfulness and tongue-in-cheek excess, are really for afternoon drinkers:

je pète en couleurs  
et je prends à la santé de tous  
une belle grosse botte de vie

(I fart in technicolour  
and to everyone's health  
I take a great big flying fuck at life)

Clearly the political and social Garneau of times past has been swallowed up by a more elemental voice defying death, seizing the day, celebrating kinship with other creatures:

comme des bouleaux qui auraient gagné la  
parole  
nous nous écorchons jusqu'à la vulnérable  
vérité  
en nous criant des noms par-dessus la  
tendresse  
pour faire reculer la mort l'empêcher  
de baver sur nos vies

(like birch trees given the power of speech  
we skin ourselves down to the barest truths  
calling each other names louder than  
tenderness  
to make death back off to keep it  
from drooling all over our lives)

Poetry, Garneau has said, "is made by everyone / the poet is anyone at all / and man is anyone at all." These poems are an extended gloss on this democratic and populist affirmation. Garneau spreads his sympathies to animals of all kinds, the "animaux intimes," which are, in fact, metaphors for human feeling, and, collectively, an environment of

energy and tenderness. See especially the book's last poem "pour chanter à tue tête en auto" ("to sing at the top of one's lungs while driving").

Like Stratford, Robert McGee has been able to work closely with his author; in his introduction he acknowledges the "luxury" of "inside information." Although there has been nothing like the transformation wrought on Melançon, one does nevertheless detect in these verses a spirit of camaraderie, as if Garneau, who has a keen ear for North American English himself, was able to assist McGee in some of his more inventive renderings. How, for example, was McGee so confident in extracting the word "absolute" from the sub-text of "et tu as mis ta robe de présence" ("and you put on your robe of absolute presence") except with a bit of "inside information"? Obviously, of course, there was little either of them could do with "les cheveux, les ch'veux les ch'veux" with its auditory pun on "hair" and "wish" except to go to "hair hair hair." What makes *Small Horses and Intimate Beasts* such a convincing rendition of Garneau's "hairy warmth" is McGee's own ability to harness the energies of colloquial speech, to make "engueuelent" mean "lambasting" and "molles" mean "shabby," and get away with it. The result is a fresh, lively and highly readable text.

In the atmosphere of cultural détente which characterizes Québec at present, the art of translation, though still not thriving to the degree that it should, is at least going about its painstaking business with new vigour and determination. These two Véhicule editions are outstanding examples of the art of translation, making available in eloquent English two very different and very readable voices from Québec.

PHILIP LANTHIER

## BODY & LANGUAGE

*In the Feminine: Women and Words.* Longspoon, \$9.50.

K. K. RUTHVEN. *Feminist Literary Studies.* Cambridge Univ. Press, \$8.95.

THE WOMEN AND WORDS conference held in Vancouver in 1983 has become somewhat of a legend. Writers, editors, academics from across the country gathered to explore their experiences as women whose lives, livelihoods and identities are embedded in the uses and meanings of language. "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master — that's all." But Alice would have to wait, for as long as grammar and syntax, educational institutions and distributions systems were controlled by others — men, if you were a woman; whites if you were a Black: WASPS if you were an ethnic minority, and heterosexuals if you were a lesbian — she would be outside. Women are, as Louky Bersianik put it, "born on the wrong side of language."

All of the major grievances were aired at the conference. Women writers are underpaid and underpublished; women academics are undertenured; women critics and women actresses are unemployed. Motherhood presents no problems if you have money, daycare and can sleep standing up. The gatekeepers in universities who shape the curricula and the editors of professional journals who enforce the canons are androcentric by training and conviction. In short, it was the litany of substantive bias, professional discrimination and lifestyle overload that has been the cornerstone of feminist criticism. By now it is familiar; nevertheless, it bears repeating.

Four years later and in retrospect what stands out about the conference is the enormous vitality of women from

Quebec writing in French. Barbara Godard who translates many of the new Quebec writers — and who, incidentally, has contributed a very intelligent piece on the creativity of translating — observes that anglophone writers are more oriented toward their bodies, while francophones toward language itself. Is this the influence on the latter of contemporary French criticism, the “deconstructionists,” or is it the fact that francophones in Canada have had to fight for the survival of their language and for the right to use it? Have Quebec politics made them more conscious of language as communication?

Quebec politics have created a very special relationship between writer and reader. Phyllis Webb, for example, writes for herself in response, she says, to a muse, while Pol Pelletier and Nicole Brossard have committed audiences with whom their relationships are close, volatile, and, often without aesthetic distance. It is the audience that has willed the new poets and playwrights into existence, not a muse, not a single, individual, private voice. That difference is crucial not only for the artist or performer but for the academic as well. Andrea Lebowitz is concerned that feminists in academe may win the battle, but lose the war if they establish the legitimacy of feminist criticism but cut off their lifeline with ordinary women who read for a variety of motives, good and bad, and seek a variety of gratifications, pure and impure. She speaks of a new feminist elitism.

But a new feminist elitism is still a long way off, for there is no consensus yet about the specificity of the feminist voice — content, style, genre — or the feminist norms of evaluation. Both writers and scholars in this collection have tried to define what they mean by feminist art. For some it means rediscovering women writers and giving them their proper due in literary history; for some it is being

free to write about a pregnancy as a distinctively female experience; for others it is the open, non-linear structure of a short story as in the work of Alice Munro (according to Lorraine Weir). It has a subversive function yet celebrates the sexuality of women; it is nonviolent and about nonviolence, yet it can also humanize violence. The vagueness and, often, contradictory nature of these statements reflects the fragmentary form of the contributions in the book, but it also indicates the current state of the art. It is particularly difficult for Canadian women to isolate the feminine in a society which is less gendered than most European societies are. In any case, it is becoming more and more clear that the feminine aesthetic is not a unitary, monolithic one. “Writing in the feminine,” France Théoret says, “is a plural language, and it is necessary to aim for a pluralist logic if we are to give an account of it.”

The more systematic efforts to define a feminist literary aesthetic are reviewed by K. K. Ruthven in a short, highly readable analysis. Unlike many papers and books on the same subject which look either at the French scholars — Irigaray, Kristeva, Wittig, Cixous — or the Americans — Showalter, Kolodny, Simpson, Ellmann — Ruthven brings them together without playing off one against the other. *Feminist Literary Studies* includes also a discussion of androgynous writing to which Virginia Woolf aspired and which is still seen by many as an alternative to the more restrictive boundaries of women’s writing. But, despite the care and balance in his discussion of the major thinkers in the debate, Ruthven offers no solution; the major paradigms remain: the European with its roots in linguistics, the American with its roots in social structures.

The wisdom of how to live with differences may ultimately be the great gift

of women to the world of scholarship. Meanwhile, both of the books discussed here provide a good introduction to the current reconstruction of knowledge begun by feminists. It is an unfinished agenda.

THELMA MCCORMACK

## RESIDENT & ALIEN

GEORGE BOWERING, ed., *Sheila Watson and "The Double Hook."* Golden Dog, \$12.95.

BLANCHE H. GELFANT, *Women Writing in America: Voices in Collage.* Univ. Press of New England, n.p.

TWO VERY DIFFERENT BOOKS are here wed by the magic of book-reviewing assignment. To Canadian literature enthusiasts, of greatest interest — at least on the surface — is *Sheila Watson and "The Double Hook,"* a collection of somewhat time-worn critical essays and reviews about Watson's singular text. George Bowering, who edited the volume and provided an "Afterword" in the form of his 1981 essay "Sheila Watson, Trickster," calls *The Double Hook* "the watershed of contemporary Canadian fiction," and there are few among the contributors who would disagree with the compliment. The volume contains several brief personal notes, five interestingly forward-thinking book reviews, and fourteen essays, many of which are taken from familiar thematic studies (Atwood, Moss, Mandel, Jones, Northey). Bowering even includes that most accessible of pieces, the New Canadian Library introduction by John Grube.

As an addition to the peregrinating "Critical Views on Canadian Writers" series, the collection will be welcomed as useful and convenient by students who like what criticism they read to be prepackaged and pre-arranged. Anyone coming upon *The Double Hook* un-awares, perhaps fresh from a summer of

light reading, will find comforting directions here. As a scholarly text, however, the book is of small interest. It lacks a bibliography. It provides no descriptive overview of the available criticism. It contains nothing written since 1981 (most of the material belongs to the 1970's) and its essays are all by Canadian critics. In noting the latter fact as a kind of limitation, I do not ignore the ample signs here offered of scholarly energy within the country. It is simply to say that for all its attention in Canada, *The Double Hook*, to judge by this collection, has been too little noticed abroad. For a book so deliberately modernist, writer-conscious, and revolutionary ("Mrs. Watson," notes Bowering, "was not much interested in a revolution in the Canadian tradition. She has always felt her tradition to be defined by what she read"), this is a curious fate. Both in its essays and its bibliography, the recently published *Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature* indicates virtually no interest abroad in *The Double Hook*. It thus awaits a later date and a more mature international attention to the development of Canadian literature before we have perspectives upon this book other than our own.

By contrast to Bowering's collection, Blanche Gelfant's *Women Writing in America: Voices in Collage* has only marginal connections to Canadian writing. It offers, however, a more stimulating collection of essays that have, at least by implication, applicability to the work of many Canadian women writers. Gelfant, who teaches at Dartmouth College, has long been recognized as a critical mind to be reckoned with in the field of American literature. In particular, her book on the city in American fiction and her revisionalist, thought-provoking essay on Willa Cather, "The Forgotten Reaping Hook: Sex in *My Antonia*," have won her enduring respect. In stylistic ele-

gance and quality of analysis, her critical writing stands out from the run of journeyman-like presentation that too often characterizes the Bowering volume. In *Women Writing* Gelfant includes much of her previous writing (though the text curiously includes no record of the dates and locations of earlier appearances). One finds both her *My Antonia* essay and what appears to be a new Cather piece, "Movement and Melody: The Disembodiment of Lucy Gayheart," in which Gelfant challenges prevailing critical views of this later work (*Lucy Gayheart* [1935]) by arguing that Cather, always a romanticist, found in her deliberate use of the material of the popular novel "a bold and unexpected way of confronting her welling doubts about the permanence of [her] writing." The "collage" also includes essays on Grace Paley (a special Gelfant exemplar), Ann Beattie, Jean Stafford, Tillie Olsen, Meridel Le Sueur, Margaret Mitchell, Mary Austen, and Katherine Anne Porter. The sole exception to this idiosyncratic gathering of American women is Ethel Wilson.

Originally introduced to Wilson's work through a Willa Cather connection, Gelfant contributed a paper to the Ethel Wilson Symposium held at the University of Ottawa in 1981. Entitled "The Hidden Mines in Ethel Wilson's Landscape (or an American Cat Among Canadian Falcons)," her study, as her coy subtitle suggests, is a candidly American response. "When I compared Wilson with American male writers like Ernest Hemingway and Theodore Dreiser," she writes, "I saw how pervasively I deal, as a critic, with violence, uncertainty, and nihilistic visions of life, and with the writer's quest for a language consonant with an American landscape that is always being discovered or created, that is always new. When I compared Wilson with American women writers like Willa Cather, I realized how precariously I

balance idealism against bleak disillusionment in discussing the literary treatment of such ordinary events as courtship, marriage, family gatherings — events that usually shape women's lives." Ethel Wilson thus becomes in the collection a kind of touchstone. While Gelfant's concern is the "confluence" of "American motifs and women's experience," Wilson's work helps her to see her subject more precisely.

But what does Gelfant in her feline Americanness make of Ethel Wilson and of Canadian women writing generally? Except for brief mention of Canada's several "excellent women writers," Wilson is her sole focus and one must wonder whether Wilson alone, given such alternatives as Laurence, Munro, Roy and the "modish" Margaret Atwood, is sufficient basis for the kind of comparison undertaken. Moreover, how difficult is it for an avowedly "American" critic to adapt to the assumptions and nuances that guide the sensibility of an Anglo-Canadian like Wilson?

Finding much to praise in the serenity and elegance of Wilson's style, her humour, and her heroines' aptitude for survival and "Providential rescue," Gelfant finds that "the truth of her women is hard to define." She balks uneasily at their gentility, their apparent lack of passion, their acceptance of traditional roles (she finds them "appealingly regressive"), and their innocence. Commenting on Maggie Lloyd and Lilly (*The Equations of Love*), Gelfant writes, "I like the desire of Wilson's women for self-possession, and I am not always pleased at their acquiescence to a servant's role, no matter how much I admire the order they bring into others' lives and, by this means, into their own." In Wilson's portrayals of her heroines, Gelfant misses a "sense of the new" and of deeply felt personal struggle (as in Dreiser), of grim inevitability (as in

Wharton), of "absorbing interest in [her] characters" (as in Cather), of crucial things forever lost (as in Hemingway and Fitzgerald). Wilson's "manner seems alien to American writers," more akin to the manner of Virginia Woolf and, in particular, to certain aspects of *To the Lighthouse*.

Thus, for all her admiration of Ethel Wilson, Gelfant confesses to uncertainty and unease of response. She seems to miss not only what might be called the juice she is accustomed to in American letters, but many of the signals that underlie Wilson's assumptions and responses, in brief the differentiations in commitment to ideas of order, social identity, and individual liberty that have made Canadian experience in the "new land" different from American response. Gelfant's essay is a particular challenge to Canadian readers, for in adopting an approach that is on the one hand personal and national and on the other scholarly and richly allusive, she invites Canadians to see Wilson in a new and, in many ways, a compelling light. Thus interested, we may well on our own apply the questions she raises about other American women writers to writers, male and female, north of the 49th parallel.

MICHAEL PETERMAN

## THE IMMORALIST

SCOTT SYMONS, *Helmet of Flesh*. McClelland & Stewart, \$24.95.

IN THE "Preface to 'The Reverberator'" Henry James mentions that in reading over two of his early stories he realized that with the passing of years they had "become in the highest degree documentary for myself." If we understand "documentary" as synonymous with "autobiographical" — a substitution James might not accept — then we have an accurate enough hint of why Scott Symons' third

novel, *Helmet of Flesh*, delivers so much less than both its dust jacket and blinkered narrator promise. Symons' main problem in this novel of a homosexual Canadian writer's journey to contemporary Morocco is that he is unable to achieve any intellectual and emotional distance between himself as narrator and his hero York Mackenzie. As a result he leaves the reader with the impression that the author could not decide whether *Helmet of Flesh*, despite its highly stylized set scenes, the florid hot-house style and the too obvious striving for literary effects, is autobiography or fiction.

That the book is transparently autobiographical should be obvious to anyone familiar either with Symons' earlier forgotten and forgettable novels, *Place d'Armes* and *Civic Square*, and with Charles Taylor's sympathetic chapter on Symons in *Six Portraits: A Canadian Pattern*. In all three novels Symons reveals that he can not imagine a set of events other than those that have happened to him or a protagonist different from himself. As a result his novels always leave me with the impression that they are edited transcriptions of notebooks and diaries in which the author is less concerned with re-imagining his own life in the form of a fictional re-enactment than with describing what had happened to him and, not incidentally, justifying in the form of a set of positive moral judgments, his behaviour in various relationships. In *Helmet of Flesh* that justification appears as a tacit complicity between the third person narrator and his central character. As Roland Barthes pointed out, one of the ways in which we can discover a narrator's emotional and ideological allegiances is to replace, in his narration, a character's name with the first person singular. The substitution that seems to be the right "fit" will indicate a tacit relationship between author/narrator/character. If we

do this with the dialogue-free paragraphs of *Helmet of Flesh* we discover that their narrator's point of view — his attitudes, emotions and ideas — is identical with the entries from York Mackenzie's journals and with the views he articulates in dialogues with others.

I emphasize this issue not simply to quibble over generic distinctions but because the question of the author/narrator's relationship to his main character seems to me of particular importance in any novel which, like *Helmet of Flesh*, has an ideological or polemical intention behind it. This is evident even in the dedication whose slightly shaky Latin informs the reader that the book is for all those desiring a better country — "Desiderantes [*sic*] Meliorem Patriam." The narrator's description of York Mackenzie (the name is deftly suggestive), the action in Morocco, and the journal entries interspersed throughout the text made it clear from the start that the story of Mackenzie's journey to Morocco is to be read realistically and symbolically. On the former level, we have the story of a well-connected and supposedly talented middle-aged Torontonian running away from his young male lover and their home in Newfoundland. The journey to North Africa is thus a means of finding respite from an intense but also wearying relationship and from a Canadian society every aspect of which Mackenzie despises. If *Helmet of Flesh* had been content simply to tell this story as effectively as possible then my complaints about it would have been primarily stylistic and formal. For example, the dialogue is awkward, the English characters are stereotypes out of post-war *Punch*, and the supposedly liberated Moroccans are described in figures and terms already dated when Gide wrote *L'Immoraliste* and that could provide an interesting footnote to a revised edition of Edward Said's *Occidentalism*. The main prob-

lem, however, lies in the astonishing discrepancy between what the narrator tells us about Mackenzie and what the novel *shows*. If we listen to the narrator's telling then Mackenzie is a radical conservative vehemently at odds with the twentieth-century's liberalism and secular humanism and convinced that Western civilization is ultimately a gynarchy, that is, a society in which males have been repressed, even emotionally and sexually castrated by their Puritanical women. If we pay attention to the tale, on the other hand, we see a slightly pathetic, anxious and confused homosexual desperate to justify his predilection for young Moroccan boys and his neurotic hatred of women with a confused view of sexuality that is ultimately little more than an intellectual sublimation of his own situation.

Whenever the novel generalizes on the basis of Mackenzie's case or treats his dilemma as representative or symbolic, it raises questions requiring critical responses going beyond style, form, coherence and credibility of plot. The reader recognizes that more is at issue than a particular set of fictional events. Thus when Mackenzie asserts that "Women having ruled (invisibly) for years, are now rioting for their freedom . . ." or that the Moroccan way of life in which women remain cloistered while the men are free is the necessary antidote to Canadian society, or that the relatively casual homosexual coupling Mackenzie enjoys is (1) different from the sexuality of the gay world he despises and (2) a possible solution to the debilitating sexual malaise of the West — in all these cases the reader is justified in asking commonsensical if uncomfortable questions in the face of which the text's brittle polemical assertiveness collapses. And with that collapse are revealed two crucial flaws in the novel's presentation of Mackenzie's case.

All of the narrator's bluster and bluff about the extent to which Mackenzie has been persecuted by his society for being a homosexual cannot hide the fact that his persecution has its origins not in his homosexuality but in a love affair with a young boy, a minor. Mackenzie's self-pitying and whining lament that the Canadian gynarchy will not let him fulfil himself amounts to little more than the fact that the boy's mother and Mackenzie's ex-wife tried to bring the affair to an end. As D. H. Lawrence would have put it had he written about Symons in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, "boo hoo."

Second, whatever may be the virtues of Mackenzie's and Symons' new eroticism — and its genealogy goes back through Genet, Reich, Lawrence, Gide and Whitman — it is fairly obvious that reverence for the male "helmet of flesh" and the new uninhibited love resulting from it involves a fundamental hatred of women. It is not coincidental that the novel's main and supporting characters are all men, that Moroccan women are either silent or invisible and that, with one exception, North American women are castrating bitches. Homosexual kitsch, like its feminist counterpart, is able to deal with only one sex; the other is sacrificed to the exigencies of an ideological polemic. Had Symons written *L'Immoraliste* Marceline's illness and death would have taken place behind closed doors and a guiltless Michel would have been shown preaching a sermon on sensuality and homosexuality to his startled but sympathetic friends.

Needless to say the implied comparison with *L'Immoraliste* is inappropriate since it is obvious that Symons is simply not talented enough a novelist to be our Gide; perhaps the best he can aspire to is being a Canadian Edward Carpenter.

SAM SOLECKI

## SEEKER & FINDER

R. MURRAY SCHAFER, *Dicamus et Labyrinthos: A Philologist's Notebook*. Arcana Editions, \$8.00.

BILL BISSETT, *Canada Gees Mate For Life*. Talonbooks, \$7.95.

JOHN V. HICKS, *Rootless Tree*. Turnstone, \$12.95.

BOTH AS A WRITER and as a composer, R. Murray Schafer has a longstanding interest in ancient myths and texts, as two compositions on the Ariadne story (*La Testa d'Adriane* and *The Crown of Ariadne*) and his book *The Chaldean Inscription* show. *Dicamus et Labyrinthos* (the title is from Pliny and means "let us also speak of labyrinths") is an elaborate and intriguing investigation of the Minotaur legend, cast in the form of the notebook of a philologist who (before he disappeared) had set himself the task of translating a text written in what Schafer calls Ectocretan. (Schafer's name, incidentally, appears nowhere in this book.) In the introduction, a fictional archaeologist explains how a series of nineteen inscribed tablets were found in 1938 at a site called Magia Tribia, and how the inscriptions had resisted decipherment, despite a series of attempts, until the present notebook was discovered among the author's papers. Schafer has cleverly introduced a small element of fiction into what is largely the true history of the twentieth-century discovery of the Mycenaean and Minoan cultures. The introduction relies heavily on John Chadwick's book *The Decipherment of Linear B*, although some facts and names are slightly altered. Schafer's tablets found in 1938 at Magia Tribia near Pachino rest in fact on the discovery in 1939 of tablets at Epano Englianos near Navarino; Schafer's Bedrich Stepanovich and his book *Les inscriptions ectocrétoises, Essai de déchiffrement* are actually Bedrich Hrozny and his book *Les ins-*

*criptions crétoises*; H. H. Kretchmer is the Bulgarian scholar Vladimir Georgiev; and so on. Readers can if they wish recover much of this from the third chapter of Chadwick's book, and various details throughout the rest of *Dicamus* have been excavated from the Chadwick text.

The text of the notebook proper is fascinating, clever, and convincingly propped up with references to numerous authorities both ancient and modern. From the first, one realizes that there is more at stake here than the mere decipherment of a mysterious script. (The author is hopeful that the tablets will be literary, in spite of the fact that the Linear B texts were lists of accounts only.) "Can a translator ever tell the truth?" asks the philologist a few pages after he had pondered on a recently discovered Greek inscription: "The more the seekers, the fewer the finders." As the decipherment gradually unfolds it becomes apparent that the search for the key to Ectocretan, and to the crucial knowledge of what the struggle with the Minotaur meant (which it is hoped the tablets will reveal) is an elaborated metaphor for the search for transfiguration, or knowledge, or the mystery of life. In the end, the philologist discovers that the script is a cypher invented by Daedalus, that symbolic figure of "the humanly possible," and that far from revealing the secret of the labyrinth, the text breaks off just before the crucial encounter. Furthermore, the searcher is himself consumed by his own research (or his own text): he narrates at the end a dream in which he meets the minotaur, and his path through the labyrinth ends in a splash of blood. The philologist has come up against the limited ability of art and science to unravel human experience. If I may alter slightly the inscription on the wall of San Michele Maggiore at Pavia (quoted by Schafer at one point): *Auc-*

*tor intravit et monstrum biforme eum necavit.*

*Canada Gees Mate For Life* is Bill Bissett's 50-somethingth book. In the twenty years since the publication of his first collection, Bissett has built up an enormous *oeuvre* whose bulk and general spirit are more impressive than are individual poems. One finishes a Bissett book with a strong sense of his continuing commitment to countercultural values, his playfulness, his determination to keep a fresh and original eye and mind on things; one does not come away from a Bissett book with a list of a half dozen indisputably fine poems that stand out above their companions. Though in many respects unlike him, Bissett in this way resembles Raymond Souster. What counts finally is a body of work of unarguable importance rather than a small number of masterpieces.

The comparison with Souster is not as unlikely as it may seem at first. Like Souster, Bissett sometimes writes little poems containing wry observations he has made about everyday events in his life. The orthography aside, "whn prime ministr diefenbaker went" could almost be a Souster poem:

into spirit  
i was sitting in restaurant up north  
looking out at th meadow th sheep  
n ponees

i herd th radio say

his bodee wud tour canada in  
a train so peopul n him cud  
see each othr for th last  
time

th train went from ontario  
wher it startid thru manitoba  
to saskatchewan wher it  
stoppd

yet anothr view  
uv geographe

Bissett's other much used form, the talk poem, is on the other hand less souster-

ian. Pieces like the title poem ("we wer sitting around up north talking 2,000 feet above see lev in th karibu"), or "canyun uv th flying mattresses," or "hold on to yr typwritr" are in essence spiels, and represent bissett at his most charming. Who can resist poems that begin "god dont make me eet anothr big mac n strawberee milk shake" or "vietnam veterans ar hunting sasquatch north uv hope bc"? These poems occasionally ramble on to exasperating length, but one accepts such unselectedness as part of his poetic habits. *Canada Gees Mate For Life* is vintage bissett.

John V. Hicks's first book, *Now Is a Far Country*, was published in 1978 when he was 71. *Rootless Tree* is his fourth collection, and it continues in the tranquil, meditative mood of its predecessors. It seems perhaps a shameful reproach to make of a poet who waited so long for book publication, but it seems to me that this new book suffers from its size. There are 91 poems here, some of them in several sections, and eventually the poems begin to pall. Many individual poems work well, and even some of those which are not wholly successful contain arresting lines or images. There is, however, a sameness of style and voice which over the course of 155 pages becomes wearisome. Hicks's poems are resolutely adjectival, and though their music has a distinctive quality, many are marred by a slightly old-fashioned sense of poetic diction ("It is a warmth and a good feeding, / and accepted company, more joy's whorl / than I found ever in your country. / More I may not tell; you must wait out / your hours till whether I come again"). This would be less apparent, and less aggravating, in a shorter book, and I cannot help but think that Hicks's publishers would have done better by him if they had pruned *Rootless Tree* by a third.

BRUCE WHITEMAN

## UP IN THE AIR

RACHEL WYATT, *Time in the Air*. Anansi, \$9.95.

AIR TRAVEL SEEMS to be becoming more popular in fiction as well as in everyday life. It was an important narrative component in Atwood's *Bodily Harm* and Lodge's *Changing Places* and *Small World* as it is in Rachel Wyatt's latest novel; indeed it seems to provide more spaces for fantasizing than travel by road used to for Kerouac or Nabokov in *Invitation to a Beheading*. Wyatt's novel begins up in the air with her male protagonist smiling ("He had spent roughly three thousand, three hundred and seventy three hours in the air so far") and ends with him making a perfect landing. The facts that this is a different flight, that he is changed now and no longer the centre of the action, and that the novel has moved away from realism to something close to fantasy are not allowed to disturb the narrative shape, which is that of the journey completed. Actually the only thing that is completed is the novel itself, for the stories of all Wyatt's characters are left in the air in this inventive comic novel which draws attention to its own inventiveness through its intricate and artificial structure.

The novel tells the story of the adventures of Sidney/Alex Snowden, a businessman with a double life, who, like his business enterprise, has two bases — one in Toronto and one in Leeds, Yorkshire. While in Toronto he lives (as Sidney) with his mistress Jill, a television producer, and while in Leeds (now Alex) he lives with his wife Zoe, a historian, and their twin sons; in between he flies the Atlantic and feels exploited because his women "expect miracles every damn time." A common enough situation in a male novel and from the beginning the reader might expect Snow-

den to be heading for a nervous collapse — as indeed he probably would if all the attention were focussed on him. But it is not, for this is a woman's novel and a wittily feminist one where the women in Snowden's life not only express their own points of view but actually come to dominate the action. Snowden's adventures pale into an endless repetition of patriarchal attitudes while the adventures of Jill and Zoe, assisted by Jill's mother Alice and the wise woman Serena (also a television personality) reveal exciting new possibilities in their lives as they both leave Sidney/Alex behind. Jill leaves her television work in Toronto to "be brilliant and shine" as the high priestess of a secret Yorkshire sisterhood, the Wise Women of the Well, and Zoe in an elaborate double act of changing places goes to Canada where two possibilities open to her — one in television and one in extramural history studies at McMaster. Both are poised on the edge of possibly glorious futures in the final section of a narrative that spins out into wish-fulfilment fantasy for all. Even for Snowden the contours of desire are rounded out as, bereft of wife and mistress and his former complacency, he is taken under the wing of Serena, the glamorous mother-lover for whom he has always longed. His former women may assume their freedom but for him, "A new, steadier way of life loomed ahead. Sidney Snowden, divested of wife and mistress and assorted dreams, was no longer a flying man. And Serena was to be his helpmeet, eternally with him." A wryly comic ending to this story of sexual politics where roles seem to have been reversed. (But what of Serena's wisdom in choosing Sidney?)

Like Jill the television producer, Wyatt too has a good eye for visuals and "sees things framed and in sequence." She structures her multivoiced novel with the kind of dramatic economy that she has

learned from writing over fifty radio plays for the CBC and the BBC since the early 1970's. This novel might have been called *Time in/on the Air* (except that this would have been too ponderously explicit for Wyatt) for it is about media entertainment quite as much as it is about flying. Every scene is carefully scripted, and there is a neatly self-reflexive moment when Jill in the studio "became the script, she was words, she was visuals, she was time, she was essence. This was her work." As it is the work of Wyatt the novelist. The dimensions of unreality and artifice associated with television programmes, with their on-screen/off-screen divisions of life, their directives of 'Roll' or 'Cut,' and the constant possibilities for editing, are also the dimensions within which this fiction works, shifting as it does between countries and points of view and between the modes of realism and fantasy. Narrative artifice is most obvious in the elaborate patterning of doubles — Sidney/Alex's two names and double life and his dual English-Canadian inheritance, two countries, two women in his life (who double to become four), twin sons, Jill's and Zoe's double choices, not to mention double crossing as an important survival strategy. The doubles game is played out in the structure of the middle section after the shattering of comfortable illusions with Zoe's transatlantic phone call to Jill, "I want to speak to Alex please, Alex Snowden, my husband. I know that's where he is." What follows is a sequence of time slots alternating between Canada and England throughout one day (Thursday, which has an occult significance in the narrative as well) where Jill, Zoe and Sidney/Alex react to their domestic crisis in ways that are both characteristic and unexpected. Through these disruptions the way is prepared, not for resolution but for the connections and new directions taken to-

wards wish-fulfilment in the final section. Whether the promises will be fulfilled or remain the illusions of another media event is left up in the air. Is Snowden on the air at the end, even as his plane is landing? We cannot be sure.

It is characteristic of Wyatt's fiction that for all its comic fantasizing it pays attention to a wide range of human feelings and genuine dilemmas. This novel is a family romance rewritten in an intricately complicated modern way where traditional values like marital fidelity and the relationships between parents and children are being challenged by the influences of modern technology and modern ideologies. It is strongly feminist in its critique of Snowden's limited masculine values and in its endorsement of women's power and women's secret heritage encoded in the sisterhood of the well-worshippers (their book is titled *The Wise Women of Early Britain*). When Zoe gives the book to Jill at Toronto airport (not knowing who she is), Jill's flash of recognition confirms a female bonding which is stated directly, seriously and in very human terms, "She wanted to take her by the arm and lead her to the nearest seat and have a conversation that reached far back in both their lives, and beyond, into the history of all women." But that desire cannot be fulfilled because real life with its pressures of circumstance works differently. The narrative makes it plain that there are limits to freedom for women and for men, but that these limits need not always be the obstacles that tradition has made them. The novel seriously proposes a redefinition of limits and a reassessment of masculine/feminine stereotypes by its comic strategies of wish-fulfilment fantasy.

But fantasies they plainly are, and as the readers make the perfect landing with Snowden and Serena at the end, we have to acknowledge the fictiveness of the novel's world. Like the television

shows produced by Jill, presented by Serena and got on the air freakishly by Zoe, it is an entertainment (where "entertainment" has its double sense of amusing and also entertaining new possibilities). The time of reading has also been "Time in the Air."

CORAL ANN HOWELLS

## FAMILY CONTINUUM

CARLA L. PETERSON, *The Determined Reader: Gender and Culture in the Novel from Napoleon to Victoria*. Rutgers Univ. Press, \$25.00.

SHERRILL MACLAREN, *Braehead: Three Founding Families in Nineteenth Century Canada*. McClelland & Stewart, \$24.95.

JUDITH TERRY, *Miss Abigail's Part or Version & Diversion*. Macmillan, \$19.95.

ON FIRST SIGHT these three works appear to bear little in common except to the most ardent reviewer. However, the obvious differences of literary theory, history and fiction are less telling than the shared concerns: the problematic relationship between writing/reading/received knowledge and the experience of living; the influence of culture; the familial drama of children and parents; the concern for understanding the past, both personal and cultural, in order to find meaning in the present; the interest in traditional narrative patterns as both objects of study and structuring devices. Finally, all three authors address a general audience. While hoping to satisfy the specialist, they remain accessible to the generalist through a careful management of style, terminology and format.

In *The Determined Reader*, Peterson begins with the observation that innumerable fictional protagonists are avid readers, seeking escape and solutions in books. In studying these characters, she hopes to trace more general attitudes toward the act of reading, as well as the

role reading has in determining the resolution of the quest for identity, self-actualization, and happiness. Peterson starts with a review of our culture's ambiguous relationship to the written word — Plato's remedy and poison — and then focuses her study on the nineteenth-century novel.

This period is chosen for scrutiny since the motif of the reader gained new impetus with the Romantic Movement. From an initial Romantic enthusiasm for the possibility of a new language which could offer an understanding of nature and the past and regeneration through that knowledge, Peterson traces the movement to pessimism in the later part of the century, particularly in Hardy who has lost belief in historical knowledge and the quest for origins.

Peterson also tries to see the ways in which female and male authors differ in their attitudes, and the ways in which French and English authors employ the motif of reading. As a feminist critic, she uses the "method of radical comparativism" of Myra Jehlen rather than the "gynocriticism" of Elaine Showalter in an effort to understand character, and the ways in which female and male authors adapt and adopt attitudes toward reading, writing and knowledge.

Interestingly, Peterson argues that two women, Mme. de Staël through the narrator of *Corinne ou l'Italie* and Charlotte Brontë through the narrator/protagonist of *Jane Eyre*, come closest to achieving harmony and freedom through their revision of texts and re-reading of the world. In so doing, these authors affirm women's right and ability to control culture and the possibility for radically altering the lives of women. All the other authors studied (Balzac, Dickens, Stendhal, Flaubert, Eliot and Hardy), although differing in their attitudes toward the liberating possibilities of knowledge, are seen to fail to imagine a

protagonist capable of escape through knowledge.

Throughout the study, three narrative structures emerge as the organizing principle for the novels: the *Bildungsroman*, the picaresque and the spiritual autobiography. In discussing the cultural differences in applying these paradigms, Peterson suggests that the English novel is always more concerned with social integration and reconciliation, although the possibility of achieving these ends is increasingly denied and replaced by a movement toward interiority and regression, while the French novel eschews the social in favour of imagining the triumph of the superior protagonist inspired by a Napoleonic will. However, the "radical comparison" of cultures is left entirely to the reader, since English and French works are studied in separate chapters. The comparison of female and male writers fares better, particularly in the chapter on *Jane Eyre* and *David Copperfield*. In particular, Peterson insists upon the importance of the mediating role of Jane Eyre as narrator, interpreting her life and quest. Peterson suggests that the triumph of the actor Jane liberates the writer, who in turn uses her writing to document and disseminate her revisionary life. Such success is not seen to occur in *David Copperfield*.

Equally interesting is the chapter on Stendhal and Flaubert. Peterson argues that these two authors "abandoned male forms of heroism" and "turned to their heroines . . . seeking in them the possibilities of artistic and heroic self-realization," for they recognize in the female, the other, their own sense of alienation from patriarchal culture. Further, Peterson sees these female characters as representations of the Dionysian artist, and their failures as the author's "final comment on the Romantic aspiration toward unity, reconciliation, and synthesis."

While unity, reconciliation and syn-

thesis may seem impossible to the writers of nineteenth-century fiction, MacLaren's narrative of three Scottish families who pioneered Canada affirms such goals. She suggests that her book's "strength lies not in individual renown but within a spirit which binds the family continuum. In sharing their story, the Crosses, the Drevers and the Macleods have provided us with some historical vision of two nations, and perhaps with a glimpse of our own ancestries, whatever they are." However, the drama of three families, who were important settlers and founders in Upper Canada, Lower Canada and the Red River, is little more than a family history.

Compulsive letter writers by training and necessity, the families offered MacLaren a massive amount of primary material on which to draw. Equally committed to education, the families insisted upon education for their children, but an education radically different for girls and boys. In addition, as the generations progressed, training for the males turned from an emphasis on a classical education to an insistence on the need for technical and technological training in agriculture, animal husbandry and engineering. The pattern of education is itself a reflection of the family's fortunes based initially on cultural background and later on material achievement.

Structured as the quest of each generation for experience and success, this work is patterned by the actions of the sons, whose conflicts with and rebellion against their fathers are finally reconciled in expansion of the family fortunes in the west. The author chooses to trace closely those sons who seek to escape paternal hegemony and to find personal adventure. The unsettled frontier gives them a literal space within which to find fathers. Female members of the family attract attention only when they display the fortitude and courage necessary in

the mates of such heroic figures. Thus despite initial rebellion and inevitable separation, all individuals are seen as wedded to the imperatives and necessities of the families, which by coincidences of fate are joined together in the marriage of Ernest Cross and Helen Drever Macleod.

Along the way, the reader is immersed in details of geography and adventure. Since one of the Cross sons settled in Wyoming while his brother pioneered Alberta, the work promises the possibility of an interesting radical comparison of the history of the settlement of the Canadian and American west. However, the work fails to deliver on this promise. Equally tantalizing is the chance to understand the causes for the growth of regionalism. Although frequently alluded to, regional hostilities are never explored in any detail. Again and again, the book turns from the social drama of nation building to the family drama of fathers and sons. In telling this story, MacLaren acts only as compiler. Always sympathetic, at times an apologist, she never analyzes the impact, particularly negative, of the families on the development of Canadian culture, and her assertion that we can all see shadows of our ancestors in these actors, particularly if we did not happen to come from the empire which controlled Canada, is tenuous at best. While a reader may turn to this work for interesting incident and successful endings, at least as measured by material wealth, she will come away little the wiser about the larger history of Canada.

The narrator of the novel *Miss Abigail's Part* does, however, emerge a wiser as well as richer person. Subtitled 'Version and Diversion,' the novel is a revision of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* written from the point of view of Jane Hartwell, lady's maid. But Jane is also a picaresque hero in her own right. Dis-

playing many of the characteristics of Peterson's determined reader, Jane is an orphan educated above her station. Employing her knowledge, Jane offers a critique of those above stairs and often speaks for her gender and class. This is all highly amusing, especially if you happen to agree with Hartwell's interpretation of Austen's characters, for example, the assertion that Fanny "was pale, mild, somewhat insipid and much put upon."

Turning from books to action to complete her education, Jane indulges in romantic dalliance with Henry and thereby gains sexual knowledge. Rather than being destroyed by her fall from virtue, Jane, like a true picaresque, capitalizes on chance and runs away with a political radical, who also happens to be a scene painter employed for the disastrous amateur theatricals at the Park. Pursued by bounty hunters, they escape only to have Jane fall, literally, among thieves, who introduce her to even more exotic forms of carnal knowledge. Always resourceful, Jane again escapes and learns yet another script, this time dramatic, which leads her to fame and fortune on the stage. The plot closes inevitably with marriage, as Jane finds a reasonable, educated aristocrat, who has the good sense to marry her without fencing her in. Like Jane Eyre, Jane Hartwell turns from the life of action back to the life of writing, and, as an instructing narrator, sets out to record her quest and to present its triumphs and truth.

Judith Terry is well aware of the narrative structures of the novel, and puts them to good use in her novel. She is also familiar with the detail of life below and above stairs in Austen's time, and uses fiction to convey many of the facts of history. As such, the novel is an interesting social history as well as an amusing tale. Like many picaresque novels, character is at times sacrificed to setting and incident. While Jane may be a-historical

and surprisingly unmarked by her culture, she does allow her twentieth-century author an opportunity to explore conditions of gender and class which are often invisible in the novels of Austen's time.

Although it would be inadvisable to overburden the meaning of this novel, it does raise again the questions addressed by all these works. In an echo of Jane Eyre, Jane Hartwell tells us that, as a mature woman, she began to ponder the questions of gender and class, rich and poor, child and parent, past and present, and "to seek the answers with a measure of independence." Seeking the answers to these questions is the common ground for all three works.

ANDREA LEBOWITZ

## HEART STRINGS

TED FERGUSON, *Sentimental Journey: An Oral History of Train Travel in Canada*. Doubleday, \$22.95.

ROBERT H. HAHN, *None of the Roads Were Paved*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, \$15.00.

"FOLK ART" WOULD BE the formal term for these two informal books. Ted Ferguson's *Sentimental Journey* is like a vast button collection. It presents over two hundred and sixty anecdotes of railway travel in Canada — reminiscences of food and weather and disaster and royalty — from as many unidentified storytellers. Each tale is bright and colourful; the whole collection is unmatched and only roughly sorted. Robert Hahn's *None of the Roads were Paved*, on the other hand, is more like a quilt. Bits of family anecdote are banded together by the characterization of "Dad"; the patches of story are strong in themselves, symmetrically shaped, and unified by the narrator's way of telling.

Hahn's father propelled his family from Eatonville, Saskatchewan, to the

northern edge of the 1920's frontier, then back through the prairies to Ontario and finally to New York and wartime show business. "Dad" was a Kroetsch character: undertaker, car-dealer, repairman, bootlegger (nothing like a hearse for running the Montana border!), swapper, and impressario. He traded his building skills for music lessons for his children, and then traded their musical talents for a family career in small-time entertainment. Hahn suggests candidly the growing complexity of sibling rivalry and generational friction, as the "Harmony Kids" moved through the rodeos, the bar-rooms, the service-club meetings, playing, singing, and dancing, under Dad's orders.

Each chapter is cut to the shape of anecdote: each reads as though it had been told many times, keeping family memories vivid, and making them into acutely felt moments of initiation, confrontation, and triumph. These are stories of people who sound like Mitchell's Saint Sammy, or like Laurence's Nick Kazlik. The stories suggest both the material that our prairie writers have found available, and also the narrative voices they have heard, the kind of pitch to an audience that has been second nature to them.

To turn back to Ted Ferguson's book is to experience reduced interest. The railway story in Canada is a tremendous one, and this should be one way to tell it: by clusters of anecdotes, gathered in Brandon and Sudbury, Sutton and Hamilton, Dawson Creek and Moncton. The very names in the stories give the kind of pleasure that children find in Dennis Lee's *Jelly Belly* rhymes. The motifs that make up the chapter headings promise to work well: "battling the elements," "the sporting life," "the war years," "the turbulent Turbo" — most of us recognize the aptness of such groupings by a surge of personal memories that could footnote

each chapter. Many Canadians remember stories of the colourful people whose lives were somehow linked with railway travel: Harry McLean, John Diefenbaker, King Clancy, Fred Sloman of the "school-on-wheels." But somehow the whole collection doesn't work, over the long haul. No really engaging voices sound, no really surprising touches of regional diction or time-tied detail pull the heart-strings. And if folk art doesn't work in that way its force is gone.

The problem perhaps is that Ferguson's method as well as his material is folksy. His introduction tells us nothing of his methods of interviewing, of recording the original versions of the tales he heard, or of selecting and editing the final versions. Fair enough, in a book designed for general interest. But even the general reader will lose some of the real pleasure of oral history, because of the extent of silent editing. A sample of verbatim transcription, complete with "ums," and run-on sentences, and repetitions and hesitations, would add a rough authenticity. And you don't have to be a social historian to find the process of collection suspect. Ferguson knew what he wanted: "I tried a dozen different sources looking for someone who had been on a harvest special," he says. Not a good method, and in this case not one to produce a valid report. The neighbour who eventually produced the required reminiscence believed that the harvest excursions ended around 1930. Many easterners could tell a different story: McGill graduates still remember going from Montreal to Regina on the wartime harvest excursions, in 1942, for instance, under the alcoholic chaperonage of that engaging academic, Professor Culliton. Or the war brides story, touchingly told by the Brigadier who chaperoned *them* — was this chosen in lieu of tales told by the brides themselves? (They're still an articulate and available

group.) The whole book would be better if it followed, discreetly and unfussily, more canons of oral history. As it is — a nice bunch of buttons, but many of them are a little too smooth. Yet, like the Hahn book, these folk stories do stir memories worth preserving, both of Canadian travel and of Canadian tale-tellers.

ELIZABETH WATERSTON

## CRITICAL PROGRAMMES

RONALD BINNS, *Malcolm Lowry*. Methuen, \$5.95.

KERRY MCSWEENEY, *Four Contemporary Novelists: Angus Wilson, Brian Moore, John Fowles, V. S. Naipaul*. McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, \$24.95.

THE VERY LOOK and shape of these two books signal some of the contrasts that we find within; indeed, prompt the reader to consider the possibility of some kind of comparative reaction. Ronald Binns' is a thin paperback, about pocket size, with a crisply inked black, white and red cover hinting at urgency of response. Kerry McSweeney's is a sturdy cloth-bound volume of standard size with a mutely coloured grey, white and red dust jacket inviting in the reader a certain solemnity of response. In each case (and let me say right away that we have two good studies here, however different), tone implied by surface features betrays something of tone of voice within.

Binns dashes gaily and engagingly about, dancing here and there amongst and astride current critical attitudes, almost flaunting an eclectic and informed post-modern critical flair as he elucidates pieces of Malcolm Lowry's life and, more extensively, Lowry's work, published and unpublished alike. McSweeney, occasionally willing to acknowledge the influence

of contemporary criticism either upon his own work or upon the novelists with whom he is concerned — Angus Wilson, Brian Moore, John Fowles, V. S. Naipaul — often seems barely able to endure those very instances and, when it comes to open preference (or prejudice), eschews anything smacking of the critical fashions offered by structuralism, or semiotics, as he proceeds deftly, tenaciously, carefully — indeed, cautiously and conservatively, when judged by Binns' greater derring-do — closely reading the many novels which constitute his material.

McSweeney, with his far longer list of works, relies on a systematic — essentially comparative — close reading of successive texts, preferring to vary in form only a little from chapter to chapter, subsection to sub-section, in his discussion of theme, structure, character, and technique. He begins with Wilson, considering him not only as novelist of manners and as social realist, but also as investigator into man's moral condition, particularly into what McSweeney refers to as "the dilemmas of liberal humanists who are forced to confront the reality of evil without and within." McSweeney brings to the work of what must be the least known of his subjects, Brian Moore, an assessment focussing on what he sees as the cumulative richness within Moore's work as it progresses through twelve novels; he finds special assurance in the representational quality in Moore's (as also in the other three writers') fiction, and sets it in the context of the technically conservative Moore's negative attitudes — his "anti *anti-roman*" stance — toward much contemporary fiction. Fowles seems to offer McSweeney the richest field for investigation and analysis: it is Fowles whom McSweeney most relishes as he writes. Though McSweeney exults in what he thinks of as Fowles' conservative aesthetic, his ample

exploration of Fowles as stylist and technician makes him seem a little harsh in using Fowles — without much of any qualification or question — to launch an attack (again) on the *nouveau roman* and its many relatives which involve so much self-exploration of art as art. In Naipaul's work (again as in that of the others) McSweeney praises the writer's aim to "communicate" (a term McSweeney likes to use in relation to his preference for representational art) and criticizes novelists in whom the concern for "style and technical perfection" seems to predominate over any obvious societal concerns.

Although he is sometimes boxed in by his own structure, McSweeney spreads his analysis evenly to all the clearly identified corners of each of his subjects in turn, with a tone more controlled, less obviously vigorous, less pressing than Binns'. Where McSweeney actually loses ground and flirts with the possibility of a reductive treatment of his material is in his repetitive pursuit of categories too artificially, too obsessively sustained. At the same time, the rigorously maintained structure of his project provides a kind of linear clarity the reader misses in Binns' seemingly more random approaches to various kinds of fiction. McSweeney allows no gaps, no snap judgments; Binns risks, and willingly extends, both.

Binns, touching on many but not committed to any critical programmes (though Marx and Freud keep making appearances alongside other kin), neatly avoids the pitfalls of using critical postures which might simply close in upon their own mode of discourse without ever saying very much about the literary texts at hand. He conveys a sense of warmly embracing worlds wider than his subject's, and of using those worlds to enlarge his subject, and, in the process, his reader. McSweeney, sometimes miffed at

the very existence of critical postures which reveal, for example, in the "pyrotechnics" of writing (such as John Barth's), prefers to incorporate his respective novelists' own statements about life and literature in the formulation of central parts of his thesis, in the mapping out of his terrain. Sometimes he uses these sources — valuable enough as leads, though dangerous when applied literally — a little too passively, however; he takes the writers too much at their word, takes without sufficient caution their statements of intention, in his effort to admire and assess and place their work.

Binns, placing Lowry in the anti-realist tradition and ascribing to him a role of lonely, pioneering metafictionalist pursuing a fiction of "fracture, disintegration, warring moods and tendencies," opens for Lowry students doors McSweeney prefers to shut. In urging on his reader an expanded and expanding critical view of Lowry, Binns reveals that Lowry's work can endlessly reward, and withstand, a growing legion of critical enquiries. Ironically enough, in the end Binns' opening of doors to shed fresh critical light is actually confined to rooms that even McSweeney (with his reiterated interest in humanity) feels at home in, by insisting that Lowry's is a "human-centered experimentalism."

Even non-print technologies such as cinema are seen — like current critical ideologies — as threats by McSweeney, opportunities by Binns. For example, Binns suggests that cinema provided Lowry with one of many metaphorical or conceptual models for expanding his range as a writer, that cinema in fact stimulates the novelist, contributes to the growth of the novel. Indeed, for Binns Lowry's film-script based on the novel of a fellow artist (*Tender Is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald) represents a major and important stage in Lowry's develop-

ment as a writer. Binns aptly describes the (soon-to-be-published) script as “a kind of hybrid metafiction which deconstructs the Fitzgerald novel and remakes it in the image of one by Malcolm Lowry. . . . When it is . . . published it . . . can only boost Lowry’s reputation.” McSweeney is altogether fearful of literature’s connections with cinema and, accepting at face value references to the tyranny of film upon the passive viewer, or to the fragmentation of modern man by the medium of film (while the novel “offers an approach to the possibility of wholeness”), reiterates arguments often rehearsed in literary reviews as early as 1920. Of course, these arguments — though most have been long eclipsed — have some truth in them, but surely McSweeney is too categorical, too dogmatic, in his application of these truths.

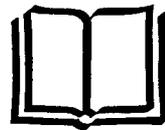
Underlining Binns’ interpretation of Lowry is a political reading — interweaving (oddly, perhaps, for a critic trying to keep some distance between life and art) the stages of Lowry’s political attachments with the stages of his writing. Binns stresses Lowry’s drift away from left-leaning politics partly by pointing to the contrast between Lowry’s marriage of the 1930’s (to Jan Gabriel) and his marriage of the 1940’s and 1950’s (to Margerie Bonner). Political attitudes of the 1930’s, Binns suggests, gave Lowry a oneness with his material which he was almost unable to recapture after writing *Under the Volcano*. But Binns, however shrewd in freshly placing Lowry as man and artist within wide frames of reference (whether in terms of critical idiom, the context of cinema, or the influence of politics, for example), sometimes gives his subject short shrift of his own kind. For example, when he says that for Lowry “these two characters represent the poles of human possibility — whether to be actively part of society, fighting to change it, or whether to be outside it

altogether as addict, visionary and drop-out,” he is on the verge of caricaturing Lowry.

Certainly both critics, however dissimilar their responses, are alert to the “problematic nature of fictional form in our time” (to quote from McSweeney’s reference to Bergonzi); and a comparison of their vastly different stances as critics suggests something of the problematic nature — and the richness and variety — of the form of criticism in our time. McSweeney might very well enjoy reading Binns, for Binns has in the end employed contemporary critical forms conservatively, however effectively. McSweeney is too shrill in eschewing such techniques. Yet, ironically enough, it is McSweeney who borrows from post-modern fictional codes when he inserts himself fairly intrusively into his own text, intervening, for example, to describe caustically the very process by which it was appraised by a reader when it was still in manuscript form. Does McSweeney thereby claim the last chuckle?

McSweeney’s study — unlike Binns’ — ends with an index, thereby reminding us that it can lay claim to a degree of encyclopedic breadth of analysis. It invites the reader who will return time after time, seeking out commentary evenly distributed title by title. Binns’ book awaits the writer who will carry on the conversation.

PAUL TIESSEN



# LAZAROVITCH TO LAYTON

ELSPETH CAMERON, *Irving Layton, a Portrait*.  
Stoddart, n.p.

IT IS ALL SUMMED UP on pages 452-457. We learn that like "many Jewish immigrants to North America, [Layton] had made an important contribution to the arts and to culture." He won prizes. Etc. His poems are a "truly remarkable achievement": "roughly fifteen are world-class poems. . . ." "Another thirty five are extremely good." Etc. "In his best work, he does not employ coarse language." "As a lover, Layton was exciting, bold, all-consuming, tender. . . ." "It is as a father that he has been most vulnerable." Etc. "He proved himself the perpetual child."

Thus, and with a little more of the same, Elspeth Cameron sums up Irving Layton. But why, after 450 pages, is there this need for a condensed Layton? Not, I think, just to close off the book. Not just to retain (or re-establish) the tidy voice. It is, rather, a compensation for the fact that she had lost track of her subject some 100 pages earlier — perhaps as early as the chapter "The Day Aviva Came to Paris" (pages 305-307; the year was 1959). Granted, her subject was on the move. But somewhere along the way Cameron lost the authorial voice which she had established in the earlier part of the book. Her predicament raises some question for us about biographical writing, especially on prominent authors, on subjects like Layton whose life is already inscribed in writing.

*Irving Layton, a Portrait* provides, for about 300 pages, if not a model at least an organized representation of a life that was already authorized as culturally significant. "Irving Layton" had already been invented: the life, the life-style, the

name (something more than just the invented "Layton" from "Lazarovitch"). The biographer of an already culturally established figure has, at the very least, a doubled task: the invented must be re-invented. A *given* life must be reproduced in a "closed" text, in this case the framed portrait, and *given* again. Bakhtin's term "heteroglossia" takes us to the problem: "all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve." The possibilities for achieving objectivity are slim indeed.

In *Biography: Fiction, Fact & Form*, Ira Nadel has argued persuasively that biographical writing is, in special ways, fiction. Within the fictional mode of biographical writing, we expect something *resembling* objectivity, an authority established not by facts but by perspective and discourse. Cameron provides much factual material, and for awhile her writing provides the perspective necessary to create such authority. But for a number of reasons — her own position, her subject, the cultural congruities and incongruities residing in herself and in her subject — she fails to maintain her distance, to maintain her perspective, her own authority. Perhaps Cameron herself knows that it would have been better to publish a different book, *Irving Layton: the Early Years*. Her archaeological project would not then have left so much debris.

Biographical writing has its specific conventional modes: the exemplary life, the growth of the writer's mind, the life and work (or times) of X, the "case study" of Y. (Nadel provides a valuable discussion of the problem.) Cameron chose one of the most demanding conventions, the "life and work," almost "life and times," model. Authority in this mode is established by, among other powers, patience, "sheer plod," combined

with the awareness of cultural factors, including ideological factors, that construct a life: selection, arrangement, omission, connection, all within some plan. For the early years, Cameron carries out this procedure with deliberation. The plan *is* in place, if somewhat awkwardly, at the beginning: it is that of documenting the transformation of the subject, the movement — seemingly inevitable (fictionally considered) — from Israel Lazarovitch to Irving Layton.

Let it be said: there are wonderful re-creations in this book. The documentation of family situation, early schooling, the immigrant community in Montreal, the influence of certain teachers, the early reading, his study of politics, the relation with Suzanne Rosenberg, the political activism, the attraction to and revulsion from institutionalized learning, and the steady movement towards becoming "Layton" — these provide insight not only into the subject, but into the forces of Montreal's intellectual and literary (and anglophone) culture. Cameron rightly documents Layton's study of politics, but she does not demonstrate an adequacy of political and ideological insight into what the issues are. This is the case with her treatment of Layton's relation to Nietzsche. She sloughs off ideological references when they are the formative material for the kind of biography that she is writing. The put-down of Layton's M.A. thesis ("fuzzy" because, for example, he "argued that Nietzsche and Marx were similar") is too slick. To make her point, Cameron needs to show *what* grounds of similarity Layton put forth. There *are* similarities. Cameron's jejune ideological references mar her frequently informative discourse. In her "Preface" (written last, we assume), she refers to Layton's career as a zig-zag inscribed best by Zorro's "Z." This cheapens the effort from the start (and it marks, of course, the fate of her own

discourse), but it does set up the possibility (the missed opportunity) of using Nietzsche's Zarathustra, an emblem who could have led her into the kind of serious life-writing, the kind of critique, that is finally missing from this book.

The point here is not to note specific failures, but rather to emphasize the complexity of writing about a life that has to a considerable degree already been invented, in a sense, already written. The book is conceptually at odds with the particular talents that Cameron has: gathering information, getting people to talk openly to her, organizing a difficult project, persistency in tracing possible leads, becoming an authority over detail, mastering the mysteries of annotation. Had her model been consistent with her talent, then we could have had a coherent book. She would have done well to take an example from her colleague, G. E. Bentley, Jr., whose *Blake Records* provides the guidelines for what, ideally, ought *first* to be done, before the archaeological site has been cluttered.

In the biography of a poet, there must be an accounting of the poems, of the poet's own reading of her or his life. Cameron's forte is not textual interpretation. Poems fit most often into this biography as pieces of documentation: "Here's an event. Here's a poem about it!" This failure of interpretative power, by omission and commission, is conspicuous in the treatment afforded "A Tall Man Executes a Jig." This is identified as "one of his best poems." Its narrative "approximates Shakespearian blank verse." (Why or how it approximates *Shakespearian* blank verse we are left to wonder.) The dying snake is noted. There is a summary discussion of "execution," and then the conclusive summing up: "To attain aesthetic beauty and stature, Layton's poem suggests, the poet must be an immoral hypocrite." The

thought that this will be quoted in student essays is too much to bear.

The reading that Cameron offers of this poem, coming as it does at what I have already noted as a turning point in the book, marks the move from the authority of disclosure, which is the biographer's position, to her own authorial, interpretative disapproval which characterizes the later part of the book. It will be interesting to see which way Cameron moves next: I hope that it will be toward the kind of serious biographical writing that she has, at times, shown herself able to do.

BEN JONES

## DIAMOND & DAYDREAM

W. P. KINSELLA, *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*. Collins, \$19.95.

LIKE W. P. KINSELLA'S first novel, *Shoeless Joe*, this book defies easy description. To call either work "just" a baseball novel would not do it justice, for both deal with far more than the game; they are about life itself, the bittersweet qualities of loves lost and time past, and in the new book a marathon game in Iowa becomes a metaphor for the physical and spiritual struggles of the human condition. *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* conjures up memories of such diverse works as "Back to the Future," *Our Town*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Faust*, *Lake Wobegone Days*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and "Dear Hearts and Gentle People." Mostly, however, it reminds me of *Shoeless Joe*'s mix of subjects: love, family, baseball, religion, mystery, local colour, Indian lore, history, time, magic.

To enjoy this book fully, you must believe — or *want* to believe — that magic

is possible, that the immutable forces of time and death can and should be challenged. If you don't, you probably won't accept the outlandish premise of the novel: a man named Gideon Clarke attempts to demonstrate memory inherited from his father, namely that the 1908 Chicago Cubs, contrary to all surviving records, really did play a fantastic exhibition game against a collection of Iowa All-Stars. Seventy years after the fact, Gideon sneaks through a "crack in time" to relive the epic struggle that took place in a tiny town on the outskirts of Iowa City.

Magic in this novel affects time, place, and action. It is startling enough that Gideon is able to travel back in time, but what at first appears to be an innocent yearning to experience the past turns out to be a struggle to the death *with* death and the ravages of time. From the beginning, when Gideon's father recounts the "one moment in which you would like to live forever. . . . One moment when you'd like to be frozen in time," to the end, when Gideon hopes, "Perhaps there does not have to be any more death. Perhaps time can be defeated," time and death prompt the fascinating revelations of this novel.

The magic of place shapes Iowa City and its fictional neighbour, Onamata, formerly called Big Inning. Residents of Iowa City (Johnson County) — and the Canadian Kinsella is one of them, dividing his time between there and White Rock, B.C. — speak of a certain "magic" which pervades the area, much as did Gideon's father, who was "always talking of the magic in the air."

The magic of action is the sport of baseball. Here as elsewhere, Kinsella lyrically praises the great game, but again, baseball is the means not the end. Baseball is the perfect medium through which to illumine the magic and mystery of human existence.

Name me a more perfect game! Name me a game with more possibilities for magic, wizardry, voodoo, hoodoo, enchantment, obsession, possession. There's always time for daydreaming, time to create your own illusions at the ballpark. I bet there isn't a magician anywhere who doesn't love baseball. Take the layout. No mere mortal could have dreamed up the dimensions of a baseball field. No man could be that perfect. Abner Doubleday, if he did indeed invent the game, must have received divine guidance.

When does a dream become a quest, and a quest become an obsession? This question is central to the novel. Gideon and his father are obsessed with proving their theory, defeating time, and rewriting history. His friend Stan always dreamed of making the big leagues, but his success against the Cubs in Iowa turns the dream to an obsession: eventually he is ready to leave his faithful wife Gloria "behind" in the future. The Indian named Drifting Away is obsessed with defeating time by restoring his dead wife to life, and his will collides with that of the ancestral spirits who insist on their own obsessions. What links all of these characters is the song "I Shall Not Be Moved." This is the favourite hymn of Big Inning/Onamata believers and the watchword of the caricatured Twelve-Hour Church of Time Immemorial. The church members have their obsessions, too — "Iowa stubbornness" and bizarre religious customs. It takes the flood, lightning, and death of the apocalyptic forty-day ballgame to bring them all to a sense of tolerance and self-sacrifice.

If the book were not so well paced, one could easily be inundated by the abundance of stimuli, but the novel's structure, with only a few exceptions, precludes that. The plot is roughly divided into thirds, not exactly corresponding to the three parts called "The Warm-up," "The Game," and "Post-game Show." Each segment addresses the questions facing the narrator: Was there

really a league called The IBC? Did its all-star team play the champion Cubs? Can one go back in time? As these questions are answered, others arise, introducing a new stage of the novel and keeping the reader wondering until the rapid denouement: Will Gideon be able to change history? Will he get to stay with his love, Sarah? Can he and Stan return to 1978? Who will win the big game, and what forces are at work prolonging the action?

The tale is reported in the first person by Gideon Clarke, but segments of his father's book on the Baseball Confederacy are reproduced in italics, and putative articles from the *Iowa City Citizen*, which nowhere mention the conspiracy, are interspersed in the narrative. Scorned by an unbelieving public but absolutely positive that the league existed, Gideon gains the reader's sympathy and support as he strives to prove his contention. When a dying man confirms Gideon's belief, we share the narrator's satisfaction that his intuition was correct and join him in slipping through the knothole in time which admits us to the ballpark at Big Inning, Iowa.

This is the transition from the first part of the novel to the second. The move from the second to the third part occurs when Drifting Away, the Sac-Fox Indian who holds the key to the contest, tells Gideon, "I will tell you about the game, the whys and wherefores of it." His revelations, however, are gradual, and the reader must wait until the end of the book for enlightenment. It is only then, as we yearn for the denouement, that the novel shows its major weakness.

The game is too long and the explanation for it too complex and confusing, at least on first reading. In creating more suspense than in *Shoeless Joe*, Kinsella has sacrificed some of the clarity and subtlety that marked the former novel. His otherwise delightful propensity for

fantasy and innovation becomes so bizarre that the reader, who was willing to "believe," begins to question the faith. Whereas slipping through cracks in time is an exquisite idea, watching Leonardo da Vinci float in on a balloon and claim to have invented baseball is not. Naming Gideon's sister Enola Gay might be cute, especially when she turns out to be an urban guerilla, a "bomber," but animating an Iowa City statue called The Black Angel and putting her in right field against the Cubs is distracting. There could have been less time spent on the Indian lore and on Gideon's love affair with Sarah. Both play an important role but, like the game, would be more effective if condensed.

When Kinsella writes in his last chapters, "The game slogs on," and "The game sputters along," the reader is tempted to say, "Yes, and so does the novel." That would be clever but unfair, for *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* is an extremely entertaining book. But *Shoeless Joe* is the proverbial tough act to follow. If *Shoeless Joe* is, as some believe, the greatest baseball novel ever, then *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* is not far behind.

ALLEN E. HYE

## DE SE DIRE

IRENE BELLEAU & GILLES DORION, eds., *Les oeuvres de création et le français au Québec*, Tome III. Editeur officiel du Québec, n.p.

THIS IS THE THIRD volume of proceedings of a conference titled Language and Society in Quebec. The conference, held in 1982, was co-sponsored by the review *Québec français*, the Quebec Association of Teachers of French and the Conseil de la langue française. The text includes twelve sections, each treating a different area of Quebec's cultural life: comic

strips, song, literary criticism, the legend and short story, children's literature, pedagogy, poetry, the novel, the téléroman, science fiction, minority cultures, and feminist literature. There was a workshop on theatre at the conference, but it was not included in this volume, for reasons which are not explained.

The keynote speaker was Victor-Lévy Beaulieu. His remarks are provocative in the extreme. He accuses Quebec of being provincial, traditional, banal, and "neutrialisé." According to him, Quebec suffers from "l'absence d'un véritable projet collectif, tant politique que social et religieux." He refers to the province as "ce monde arrêté, enfermé et moisi" and affirms that the only true writers Quebec has produced are Hubert Aquin and Jacques Ferron. For Beaulieu, "le Québec, ce n'est pas un pays, mais une chorale!" He concludes by announcing his intention to return to writing, "puisque écrire est un désespoir, bien sûr, mais un désespoir entreprenant, radical et joyeux."

The remainder of the presentations are less polemical and more scholarly. Gilles Dorion, for example, on the subject of the novel, discerns two groups of writers since 1970: those, like Jacques Godbout, who are concerned with political questions, and those, like Marie-Claire Blais, who write about social and personal issues. He notes, however, that these differences are more apparent than real and uses the writing of Yves Beauchemin to illustrate his point: "Cet écrivain traduit bien la double orientation des romans de la dernière décennie: les problèmes de la collectivité québécoise et les préoccupations de l'individu." Unlike Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Gilles Dorion is impressed with Quebec's literary life and is optimistic about its future: "Le roman est devenu très florissant et il contribue à accorder à la littérature québécoise une voix singulièrement puissante et une au-

tonomie indiscutable parmi les littératures de langue français."

Noël Audet's piece on language is the stuff of which Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's worst nightmares are made. Audet argues for continental French as the language of Quebec and the mainstay of the Quebec novel. However, he recognizes that the novelist must be free to use all the linguistic resources at his disposal: "Dans ce sens, les langues d'une collectivité sont comme un orchestre sous le doigt du romancier, orchestre dont il faut savoir harmoniser les voix selon ce que l'on veut dire." Audet dismisses as myth the notion that Quebec has the power to impose "joual" on the French-speaking world, since it isn't even common to all of Quebec. He concludes urging Quebec writers to use "nos parlers comme une richesse et non comme le signal d'une indigence linguistique que l'on essaie de faire passer pour un droit sacré."

Gabrielle Poulin's contribution, "L'Espace romanesque: un territoire à défendre," is a spirited defence of the writer's artistic integrity and his struggle to express himself amidst commercial considerations which sometimes seem overwhelming and tend to dominate discussions about literature. For Gabrielle Poulin, if publishers must be concerned with sales at home and abroad, the proper territory for the writer's concern is the centre of himself which he explores when he puts pen to paper. That is the territory to defend.

The collection is a lively and diversified series of presentations which represents modern Quebec. In the words of one of the editors, "ces multiples facettes de l'écriture québécoise manifestent une volonté collective de s'affirmer, de se nommer, de se dire avec une foi et une vigueur sans cesse renouvelées."

PAUL G. SOCKEN

## MEANINGFUL NONSENSE

ELIZABETH CLEAVER, *The Enchanted Caribou*.  
Oxford Univ. Press, \$8.95.

ROBERT HEIDBREDER, *Don't Eat Spiders*, illus.  
Karen Patkau. Oxford Univ. Press, \$9.95.

ALLEN MORGAN, *Le Camion*, illus. Michael  
Martchenko, trans. Raymonde Longval-  
Ducreux. Editions La courte échelle, \$5.95.

ROBERT MUNSCH, *Le Dodo*, illus. Michael  
Martchenko, trans. Raymonde Longval-  
Ducreux. Editions La courte échelle, \$5.95.

DON OICKLE, *Edgar Potato*, illus. Sue Skaalen.  
Ragweed, \$4.95.

IF "WE ARE ALL poets when we read a poem well," then children's books ought to be particularly sensitive to the kind of poetic creation their books permit. An illogical, facile, condescending book creates its own appropriate reader; an imaginative, demanding book creates a very different one. Whether in response to rhythm, dialogue, humour, or illustration, reading demands that a child participate in the text, and given that their intended audience differs so remarkably from their creators, children's authors should be particularly sensitive to questions of participation. Even nonsense must respect its reader. What is the book's attitude towards the child, how does the book involve the child, making him or her in Carlyle's sense a poet, sensitive to the meaning of the universe?

One certain way to create the child poet/reader is through humour and illustration. La courte échelle has just published translations by Raymonde Longval-Ducreux of Robert Munsch's *Mortimer* and Allen Morgan's *Matthew and the Midnight Tow Truck*. Both texts preserve the original illustrations by Michael Martchenko. In *Le Dodo* the perspective is that of the adult outsider. What does one do with a child who refuses to sleep but persists in singing at the top of his lungs? Munsch and Mart-

chenko's response is to exaggerate the situation and laugh at both the child and the tormented adults. With each threat, the child's song grows more exuberant until after his seventeen brothers and sisters warn him, his song fills the room. Martchenko's illustration shows music notes upsetting the bed, the lamp, the curtains, even the teddy bear. The police are then called in, and the next illustration parodies the criminal's interrogation as their bright flashlights seemingly intimidate tiny naked Simon (Mortimer in the English version) and his teddy. Martchenko even adds a detail not mentioned in the prose, a frightened Simon hiding under the blankets as the police depart. But the joke is that no one wins. Upstairs Simon continues to sing; downstairs everyone screams, and Simon bored, finally falls asleep. Perhaps if anyone wins, it is Simon, still blessed with the child's ability to ignore noise.

*Le Camion* tells its story from a child's perspective, the fantasy of a little boy who loves two things above all, liquorice and toy trucks. His daytime frustration provokes his midnight adventure/dream in which he helps a tow truck driver do his work. The driver not only appreciates his help; he shows that Mathieu's values are his own, for his lunch box is full of red liquorice: "La reglisse rouge c'est bon, ça donne de gros muscles." The driver even tows trucks for his own collection and when he gets two similar ones, he trades them. The magic that children's fantasy allows explains how the driver keeps a collection; he takes Mathieu to a magic carwash that shrinks cars. By the end of his adventure, Mathieu's initial sadness has disappeared; he has also learned how to protect his mother's car from the midnight tow trucks by sticking a piece of liquorice under the windshield wiper, and even better, his mother believes him. In the final illustration, mother and child walk

away both clutching their magic tokens, red liquorice.

Young children's books seem obsessed with all kinds of food as seen in the titles of two other books, *Edgar Potato* and *Don't Eat Spiders*. Unlike Wilbur the pig in *Charlotte's Web*, Edgar the potato wants to be eaten but is fearful that his exceptional size makes him unlovable and therefore undesirable: "Who would ever want you, Edgar? . . . You'll be tough and pulpy." Obviously a child substitute in his yearning for acceptance and friendship, Edgar is even shown wearing a diaper. This all seems very cute until we think about a child's possible relationship to such a text. Concentrating on the loneliness of the unhappy potato, Don Oickle does not pursue the peculiar implications of these vain potatoes wanting to be devoured. Obviously in Oickle's universe, as is likely in ours, vegetables exist to be eaten. The ludicrous vanity of potatoes fantasizing their ultimate appearance — baked, fried, or instant — is not fully explored when Edgar gets his wish and wins a contest at a country fair. The triumph frees him from his sense of inferiority, but what happens to prize-winning potatoes? The analogy can only go so far, leaving a story necessarily incomplete and unsatisfactory, for what child identifying with Edgar wants to be eaten?

*Don't Eat Spiders* is far more successful in respecting a child's relation to the text, and exploring the meaning of eating and being eaten. Robert Heidbreder's rhythmic nonsense poetry is reminiscent of Dennis Lee with its attention to Canadian place and detail ("The Casa Loma Dragon" and the polar bear at Churchill, Manitoba) as well as its belief that fear and food are the two children's topics always popular, especially in conjunction with a few naughty words. So "the bare bear fell / on his big bum bum" and "Ellie the Elephant" ends with "YUK!"

Some poems are essentially children's jokes as in the ending of "Hippopotamus":

but you don't see wheels  
on a Hippopotamus —  
UNLESS SHE'S ROLLER SKATING!

Some poems work through titillation, exploring the unacceptable, as in the title poem where the child ignores the father's warning and eats a spider, a brave act of defiance and curiosity that leaves him miserably transformed. Adults never answer children's questions — had Daddy explained why he should not eat spiders, would the child have listened? We will never know, but the child spider certainly gives us sufficient reason not to indulge: "Cause if you eat spiders / You might eat ME!" Always the child reader is made part of the text: the dinosaur bird who gobbles children in "Bird's Nest" is looking for him; the child trapped inside a polar bear in "Polar Bear Snow" appeals for help; "Here Comes the Witch" and "The Giant Snail" both approach the reader. In all of these poems, the child is either eaten or barely escapes being eaten. Comedy results from the expression of the unspeakable fear. Only "Sticky Maple Syrup" reverses the pattern, as Heidebreder explores another childhood food fear, the unacceptable but avoidable dilemma of making a mess. In the poem the mess has spread "From sea to sticky sea." Karen Patkau's illustration gives us a child in bed being rolled by splendid waves of syrup. The speaker vows never to be trapped by a "grizzly bear who's hungry / For my maple syrup feet" and thus finds justification to do the politely taboo, lick up maple syrup "Wherever you may be."

Elizabeth Cleaver's *The Enchanted Caribou* raises the issue of definition. Although children are implied in Cleaver's notes on how to construct shadow puppets, the book is a children's book only

through our mistaken assumption that children alone want to read books with illustrations. If that is true, so much the worse for the adults, for *The Enchanted Caribou*, both prose and illustration, would seem to fit Carlyle's view of the true book, the one in tune with the spiritual nature of the universe, the one that inspires us to wonder and a recognition of order. If citing Carlyle seems incongruous in a review of children's books, we should recall that Carlyle bitterly lamented that in his time this true seeing was frequently relegated to the world of childhood. Yet Cleaver's story about artistic creation and the power of language should be appreciated by adults too. Her spare prose and black and white illustrations create a permanence of this tale about the caribou, a feeling about the significance of all our actions quite different from the silliness of *Edgar Potato*. Children deserve more books like *The Enchanted Caribou* and fewer like *Edgar Potato* with its implicitly trivial concept of children's literature. There is nonsense and then there is meaningful nonsense, the story that takes us beyond sense into wonder and poetry. A book just good enough for children is not good enough.

ADRIENNE KERTZER

## POET-CONFESSOR

L. R. EARLY, *Archibald Lampman*. Twayne, n.p.

L. R. EARLY'S *Archibald Lampman* is the first book-length critical study of one of the most important and interesting figures in Canada's literary history. Early's book is a well-written and generally intelligent work, providing many valuable insights into Lampman's poetry. However, Early's study is also limited and deficient in a number of important

ways that give it preliminary rather than a definitive status.

Early's first biographical chapter is one of the weakest in the book. It consists of a largely pedestrian summary of facts about Lampman's life and literary career. Early has not adequately related his subject to the socio-economic and cultural matrix of late nineteenth-century Canada. Neither has the critic made a sufficient attempt to analyze Lampman's character and motivations, to probe into the more intimate areas of his life, such as his relationship with Katherine Waddell. These shortcomings result in a rather stodgy account of an extremely interesting man. They likewise leave us inadequately prepared to understand the relationships between Lampman's poetry and his life, a possibly serious deficiency in dealing with an artist who wrote largely in the Romantic "confessional" mode.

Early's next chapter deals first with the influence upon Lampman of English Romanticism, the critic stressing the central importance for Lampman's verse of Wordsworth and Keats. Early is certainly correct in seeing these two poets as decisive for Lampman's art, and he discusses the various aspects of their influence in an intelligent, informed manner. However, the critic's stress here and throughout his book upon the significance of the Romantics for Lampman is unfortunately at the expense of a proper appreciation of other influences upon the poet. Early says nothing concerning the possible impact upon Lampman of the New England Transcendentalists, who surely form a bridge both historically and geographically between the Confederation poets and the English Romantics. Early also underestimates and sometimes unjustly stigmatizes the influence upon Lampman of the major Victorians. For example, the poet doubtless derived his ideas about elective sex-

ual affinity at least partly from Browning, while Tennyson was an obviously significant and often beneficial influence upon Lampman's poetic style. In "The Story of an Affinity" and elsewhere, there are a number of striking passages that recall the Laureate in their cadence and/or their felicity and exactness of descriptive phrase:

The meadow with its braid of marguerites,  
That ran like glittering water in the wind  
He passed unseen. The tireless bob-o-link,  
Poised on the topmost spray of some young  
elm,  
Or fluttering far above the flowered grass,  
Showered gaily on an unobservant ear  
His motley music of swift flutes and bells.

Finally, something should have been said about Lampman's relationship to late nineteenth-century Aestheticism, to the "fin-de-siècle" temper.

Early's next five chapters deal successively with Lampman's nature poems, his verse devoted to political and social themes, his love poetry, and the last pieces written during the years 1896-99. In general, Early displays an intelligent, judicious, and cultivated mind. His analyses are almost always solid and helpful, and provide frequent insight. For example, his brief discussion of "the image of a prolonged high noon" as it relates to some of Lampman's early nature poems is excellent. So is Early's treatment of "The Story of an Affinity," a neglected piece in which the critic discovers much to merit respectful attention. For instance, Early finds in the poem a rich mythopoeic synthesis of redactions of the Odysseus story and Biblical/Miltonic accounts of man's fall and redemption. Sometimes, however, Early's discussions would have benefited from being pushed further, from more intellectual risk-taking. The critic might also have paid much more attention to Lampman's consummate skill with metre, sound "colour" and the like: while Lampman's "paint-

erly" bent is obvious in his verse (an aspect of his art to which Early does more than justice), the poet was likewise masterful in handling the "musical" aspects of his form.

Early's commentaries upon Lampman's best-known works vary in their value. The critic's treatment of "Heat" is adequate, but he fails to combine his own good insights with those of previous critics to synthesize a definitive interpretation of this rich and complex poem. Early might, for example, have pursued my own previous hints about the influence on "Heat" of Coleridge's theories concerning the imagination. The critic obviously dislikes "At the Long Sault . . .," and to me he does this fine and moving poem a major injustice in attempting to dismiss it as conventional and largely lacking in significance. On the other hand, Early's analysis of a piece he finds inspiring, "The City of the End of Things," is excellent. His treatment of the poem in terms of psychological forces that shape civilizations is illuminating indeed. He is less successful in dealing with "The Frogs." He could have said more about the complex implications of the poem's central symbol (the frogs for example combining a sexual/Dionysian with a spiritual/Apollonian significance), and have noted Lampman's echoing of Tennyson's "The Lotus-Eaters."

*Archibald Lampman* is by no means unworthy as the first full-length study of an important Canadian writer. The deficiencies of Early's work stem in part from a certain intellectual narrowness and naïveté, and doubtless also from the restrictions of the Twayne format. Both of these impediments to Early's expression of his very real critical gifts can fortunately be remedied in the future. Early is capable of writing a major book on Lampman, and it is to be hoped he

will do so after further thought and study.

JOHN OWER

## CONSERVATISME

ROBERT LALONDE, *Une Belle journée d'avance*. Seuil, \$14.95.

MONIQUE LAROCHE-THIBAUT, *Amorosa*. Boréal, n.p.

JACQUES SAVOIE, *Le récif du prince*. Boréal, \$10.95.

CES TROIS ROMANS étant parus presque au même moment, et comportant en commun certains traits thématiques et stylistiques, on peut, avec prudence, les lire comme témoignant, dans une certaine mesure, de l'état du roman québécois de l'époque, voire des valeurs et questions qui travaillaient alors la société québécoise. Le trait commun principal nous semble être — malgré l'apparente hardiesse de thèmes comme l'inceste et l'avortement — un conservatisme idéologique et stylistique: par certains de leurs aspects thématiques ou stylistiques ces romans manifestent un attachement à des valeurs traditionnelles.

Par exemple, *Une Belle journée d'avance* et *Le Récif du Prince* comportent le thème de l'amour conjugal fortement valorisé (on ne sait si le "je" et la "tu" du premier sont mariés, mais ils forment un couple qui tient à durer, puisqu'ils s'évertuent fort agréablement à fonder une famille). Tout dans *Une Belle journée d'avance* chante le couple "je" et "tu," son amour, son bonheur; mais aussi ceux des parents du "je," Gertrude et Maurice, qui s'aimaient tant qu'ils ont tenu à mourir ensemble. D'autres couples dans ce roman (Rachel et Léopold, Malvina et Sam) sont malheureux parce qu'ils n'ont pas su vivre l'amour et le bonheur conjugaux, fait qui valorise encore ceux-ci. Dans *Le Récif du Prince* Tania écrit une lettre à son mari Fran-

coeur: même si elle lui raconte son aventure avec un autre, Tania y dit toujours plus fortement son amour pour son mari, et on sent que le couple se reformera, plus solide que jamais, quand Tania reviendra. A cette valeur traditionnelle de l'amour conjugal, s'ajoute le thème de l'amour et de l'unité familiaux. L'héroïne du *Récif du Prince*, Vassilie, longtemps amoureuse de son père, sent à la fin du roman que celui-ci appartient inéluctablement à Tania. Vassilie part donc en France décidée à découvrir l'amour et la sexualité avec l'amant que Tania vient d'y quitter; mais on sent qu'une fois que Vassilie aura triomphé des problèmes que lui imposent ses rapports avec ses parents (amour incestueux pour le père, sentiment d'infériorité par rapport à la mère), la famille connaîtra un nouvel et plus heureux équilibre. "Je" et "tu" dans *Une Belle journée d'avance* veulent fonder une famille; en outre, le narrateur veut renouer avec ses parents décédés, qu'il aime d'émouvante façon. "Je" écrit un livre dans lequel il raconte, à l'aide de sa "mémoire imaginante," la journée, voire le moment de sa propre conception, allant jusqu'à s'identifier au désir qui habite ses parents, au baiser qu'ils échangent, à leurs salive, sueur, souffle; il se dit oeuf dans le ventre de sa mère et raconte même sa fécondation par la blanche masse de sperme paternel! Il recrée ses parents jeunes, beaux, désirants, amoureux — comme lui-même; c'est à dire qu'il en fait à la fois des parents et son frère, sa soeur.

*Amorosa* valorise implicitement le couple et la famille en dépeignant avec une ironie mordante une société dans laquelle ils sont difficiles à créer et à vivre, *problématiques* dans plus d'un sens. Dans le premier chapitre, une jeune femme raconte à la première personne sa brève liaison avec un homme égoïste et dur qui l'a abandonnée dès qu'elle s'est découverte enceinte, ce qui amène la femme à

se retrouver dans une clinique d'avortements clandestins avec quatre autres femmes. Les quatre chapitres suivants racontent à la troisième personne l'histoire des autres femmes pour expliquer comment elles en sont arrivées là: "L'Elégante," suite à un viol; "La Tanagra" parce qu'elle ne veut pas subir les contraintes de la maternité (l'enfant semble impossible dans l'univers de la mère, puisque celle-ci habite le bordel que fréquentait son père, avec qui elle a connu une longue liaison incestueuse, avant que la mort du père et sa ruine n'ait obligé sa fille à y travailler; c'est là qu'elle a rencontré son amant, bellâtre louche qui ressemble beaucoup au père disparu...); "La Boutonneuse," femme laide mais riche doit se faire avorter parce que sinon son mari divorcerait (homosexuel, il l'a épousée pour son argent, ne lui a fait l'amour qu'une seule fois, et ne tient nullement à devenir père); "La Grosse Toffe" se fait avorter par révolte contre son statut de femme-prisonnière au foyer. Les hommes apparaissent donc les principaux empêcheurs du bonheur conjugal et familial, mais non les seuls.

Dans ce dernier chapitre, le premier personnage reprend la narration et relate son avortement cauchemardesque. Ce roman présente une vision d'ensemble négative de l'avortement clandestin, aussi bien en tant qu'intervention qu'en raison des mobiles et circonstances qui amènent des femmes à y avoir recours. On ne saurait dire toutefois qu'il valorise l'avortement légal, qu'il n'évoque point. *Amorosa* se présente surtout comme un conte philosophique illustrant la vérité d'un passage de Laborit placé en exergue, et selon lequel la liberté, le bonheur n'existent pas; ce roman jette un regard sans complaisance sur la société contemporaine.

Si *Le Récif du Prince* et *Amorosa* utilisent le thème contemporain de l'inceste

de façon un peu racoleuse et commerciale, le premier emploie bien le thème de la famille médiatique: Tania et Francoeur travaillent pour une chaîne de télévision et souvent ne sont vus par leurs conjoint et enfants qu'au petit écran! La contemporanéité de thèmes tels que l'inceste, l'avortement, et l'influence de la télé font peut-être partie de la dimension commerciale de ces romans, terme utilisé ici avec une valeur descriptive plutôt que péjorative; cette dimension commerciale fait partie du conservatisme de ces romans, en ce sens qu'elle témoigne d'une conception peu avant-gardiste du livre en tant que marchandise à vendre plutôt que texte à structurer à des fins purement esthétiques. Cette dimension commerciale n'est pas absente d'*Une Belle journée d'avance*, roman québécois publié en France et soigneusement conçu pour plaire au marché français. Il y a, bien sûr, la thématique, chérie des Français, de la nostalgie et de la recherche du passé et de la magie de l'enfance. En outre, ce roman comporte fortement des traits qui, selon Jacqueline Gérols (*Le Roman québécois en France*) sont attendus du roman québécois par le public français. *Une Belle journée d'avance* offre l'exotisme de la nature et des personnages canadiens: lacs, forêts, ours, cerfs, un métis bon sauvage, une "sauvagessse" à la sexualité libre et dévorante. Gérols démontre qu'outre l'exotisme géographique et humain, le lecteur français recherche dans le roman québécois un certain exotisme stylistique: ce roman comporte des recherches stylistiques intéressantes — le "je" se scinde en deux puisque le "je" qui écrit "le livre" y confie la voix narrative au "je" d'une autre époque de son existence, quand il n'était que désir de ses parents, oeuf de sa mère, ce qui permettra la scène inusitée présentant la fécondation et ses suites de l'intérieur. La focalisation multiple est menée avec habileté et permet

aux différentes histoires — les deux principales (celle du "je" et du "tu" au présent; celle, en 1946, des activités de Gertrude et de Maurice le jour de la conception du "je") et les secondaires (celles qui arrivent aux divers personnages, y compris un chien dont les sensations et la psychologie sont longuement analysées) — d'alterner sans transition, mais sans confusion.

A d'autres égards toutefois, l'écriture d'*Une Belle journée d'avance* obéit au conservatisme esthétique: c'est vrai des effets d'exotisme canadien, de l'emploi d'images-clichés telles que celle du "soleil or fondu" répétée à satiété; et de l'ensemble de l'effet-poésie provenant des techniques d'évocation du monde naturel et humain, techniques qui font une large place aux images-clichés. L'écriture des deux autres romans est encore plus conservatrice, nonobstant la présence des thèmes de l'inceste et de l'avortement et, dans *Le Récif*, un épisode agréablement bizarre dans un théâtre abandonné. Ce conservatisme stylistique fait sans doute partie de la dimension commerciale de ces romans (au moins Lalonde a-t-il compris qu'un habile mélange de recherches et de tradition scripturales attirerait plus de lecteurs que le conservatisme pur) tout comme la langue de ces romans, où règne presque exclusivement un français international.

Rien d'étonnant à ce que ces trois romans manifestent un certain conservatisme idéologique et esthétique à une époque où le conservatisme politique triomphait dans les principaux pays occidentaux. Sur le plan esthétique, *Une Belle journée d'avance* est de loin le meilleur; tous pourraient s'avérer pédagogiquement utiles dans des universités canadiennes (je songe aux anglophones dans les remarques suivantes): celui de Savoie pourrait fort bien être étudié en première année, celui de Larouche-Thibault en deuxième année, et celui de Lalonde

en troisième ou quatrième année, par exemple.

NEIL B. BISHOP

## IMPERFECT CONQUESTS

J. L. LEPROHON, *The Manor House of De Villeray*, ed. Robert Sorfleet. *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, no. 34, \$6.00.

MME E. BERTIL, *Le Tour du Québec par deux enfants*. *Liberté* 163 (February 1986), \$8.00.

FROM SEVERAL POINTS of view, these two books have much in common. Both are short novels; each takes up the whole number of a periodical which otherwise normally publishes shorter pieces of criticism and creative writing; both are supposedly written by women; and both deal with national issues pertaining to Québec. The two novels also deal with the pressure of historical realities on the everyday lives of relatively uncomplicated people. Leprohon writes about these realities in English in a romance set in the later eighteenth century, and Bertil does so in French in a satire on contemporary linguistic issues in Québec.

Elsewhere, the differences between the two books are striking. If anything, it is not the century between their compositions that sets the books apart, but their respective tones. Leprohon's book is one of the earliest Canadian novels in English. It appeared serialized in the *Montreal Family Herald* in 1859 and 1860, and its pages are replete with the quiet romanticism and the gilt-edged feelings of affection and loyalty that coloured the frontier rainbow dreams of colonial Canada. Bertil's book (if, in fact, Bertil exists) is a late twentieth century allegorical satire about language, class, social pretensions and the vanity of national dreams. The contrast in genre between

the two books is therefore almost absolute.

But despite the contrast, the two books share one powerful idea. They both deal strongly with the desire for cultural survival of a vanquished race against which a conquest was never anything more than military. In the background is the common historical theme that the conquest wreaked by one culturally and politically sophisticated race on another leaves all but its immediate military problems unresolved.

The theme of the imperfect conquest is dominant in both books. In *The Manor House of De Villeray*, the theme is responsible for many of the types of characters and many of the circumstances behind the novel's plot. In *Le Tour du Québec par deux enfants*, the theme is the source itself of the dream of the Québécoise grandmother (exiled in Manitoba in childhood) of someday finding again "le coeur vibrant du Québec." This search for the vibrant heart of the province is the central and unifying idea of Bertil's book. The perfection of the hopes, dreams, and desires of the characters of both books throws into relief the utter imperfection of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conquests of European wars which provoked them. In the name of their respective glories, the imperial powers tried to subjugate one another's settlers in the various New Worlds scattered about the globe, and a battlefield won was so often a cultural war born.

And yet the stories of these two novels have little in common. *The Manor House of De Villeray*, written by a Montreal-born woman of Irish-Catholic descent, and published a century and a quarter ago, is a sad love story of yet a century earlier. The fall of Québec to the English is its background. Its intrigue is the parentally arranged engagement of a beautiful young aristocrat, the

newly orphaned seigneuresse Blanche of the fief of De Villeray, to a sincere young French officer, Gustave De Montarville. The problem of the lovers is that Blanche feels that she does not yet know how to love De Montarville, and she wants to learn how before she marries him; and he, in the meantime, falls desperately in love with the *paysanne* Rose Lauzon, whom Blanche has brought up as her sister and social equal. Rose reciprocates De Montarville's feelings, cruelly torn by divided loyalties to mistress and lover. In the ensuing struggle, true love wins out. Injured in a useless duel over Rose's honour at the moment that the battle of the Plains of Abraham is fought, De Montarville recuperates and marries her. He and Rose board a French vessel carrying away the departing conquered local administrators of New France to permanent exile in France. Blanche, her beauty now disfigured by an attack of smallpox, remains alone in the conquered colony, and will later leave most of her manorial possessions to the children of De Montarville and Rose. In the context of the background colonial war, though permeated by the gilt-edged emotions of the romance, Blanche's stock nineteenth-century character does achieve epic proportion, however little. The personal human condition is symptomatic of a much larger universal quest. Blanche turns Leprohon's novel into something far more significant than historical romance itself. The dream of a nation dies as its courage is born, and Blanche's character manages to put the message across.

By contrast, *Le Tour du Québec par Deux Enfants* is a satiric spoof, and is biting in spite of its broad comedy. The novel has supposedly just been written by Mme E. Bertil and published as a separate number of the periodical *Liberté* in the face of a most urgent need to educate school-aged Québécois children in patriotism. The young Québécois have

supposedly lost their patriotism under conditions that the mock preface does not clearly explain, but that the satire of the following main part of the work identifies as the post-independence referendum torpor that has settled on the province.

The name E. Bertil is a configuration of the letters of the title of the periodical, and the one lonely entry for the surname in the Montreal telephone books does not answer to the existence of an author. The story of the novel by this probably anonymous author is that of a St-Boniface boy Julien, aged twelve, and his sixteen-year-old sister Sophie who are first orphaned of their parents and later also of their grandmother who harbours them. On her deathbed, the grandmother who was born in Quebec expresses her dying wish to the children that they should not wear their lives away in futility trying to be francophones in Manitoba. She urges them to go East on her small legacy in order to find "the vibrant heart of Québec . . ." where they can be their national selves in peace. The last wish is also the old lady's last spoken phrase. The children's father was killed in their yet younger days because he couldn't understand an anglophone foreman's warning shout to avoid a moving steamshovel, and the two children set out for Québec to avenge the destiny of their father's incomprehension.

The journey that leads Julien and Sophie from St. Boniface to Winnipeg and Ottawa by Via Rail, and then from Ottawa to Trois-Rivières, the Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean, the Gaspé Peninsula, Québec City, and then finally Montreal in a variety of hitchhiked and other benevolent vehicles, is peppered with viciously satiric encounters. All the English-Canadian and Québécois national types come in for a beating.

The monsters up to the Ontario border are practically all Anglo-Saxons. First

there is the collective anglo figure of the bilingual Via Rail in which everybody, including the French-Canadians, speak only English. There is also Mary Bordeleau, the anglophone widow of a Franco-Ontarian who belonged to a generation of francophones for whom marrying English was a step up on the social ladder. In a taxi ride from the Ottawa CN station, Mary robs Sophie and Julien of the last of their grandmother's money for no other reason than to make their search for "the vibrant heart of Québec" as painful as possible.

Once across the border in the promised land of post-referendum Quebec, Julien and Sophie meet the figures (sometimes real people) and types who survived into the 1980's out of the 1970's and 1960's. There is the New-New Left Catholic priest who preaches the jargon of "l'épanouissement" and "la libération de l'ego," and who lives his "mammalized" religion in nude romps with his married friends. By way of the statues of the famous Curé Labelle in St-Jerome and of the rebel Louis-Joseph Papineau in Montebello, the children arrive at Repentigny between Montreal and Trois-Rivières. There, Sophie and Julien are undertaken as a cause by a collection of Rotarians for whom advertised charity is a handy ladder for social climbing. With their clean-cut accountants' looks and their bitchy well-dressed wives, the Rotarians resemble a gathering of the Quebec Liberal Party.

As their quest for the vibrant heart of Québec becomes more and more known, Sophie and Julien become famous and make the newspapers. They end up in suburban Outremont in the heart of Montreal, the poshest French residential area in the whole of Quebec, where Mayor Jerome Choquette, who was Minister of Justice in Robert Bourassa's government during the FLQ crisis in 1970, receives them at a couple of extraordi-

nary receptions. In attendance are no less than the editor of *Liberté*; the former editor of *Le Devoir*, Jean-Louis Roy; Camil Laurin, the author of Québec's language Bill 101; Pierre Trudeau; and one of Québec's earliest independentists, Pierre Bourgeault. In the near-distance, during the last open-air party for Sophie and Julien, an English-speaking Greek immigrant couple, with their six French-speaking children, cannot understand why all those Frenchmen immigrated to Canada if they wanted to speak French (under Bill 101, immigrant children have to go to French schools).

Although neither *The Manor House of De Villeray* nor *Le Tour du Québec par deux enfants* will create new directions in English-Canadian and Québécois literature, they are nevertheless symptomatic of a number of literary currents. It is the first time that *The Manor House of De Villeray* is published in English under a single cover, and its appearance in a critical edition suggests an uncompromising interest in the English Canadian literary past. Sorfleet's editing is pragmatic and wise, and his introduction is excellent on the text, the romance, and the history of the novel. The edition of this little novel, which was published in a French translation as early as 1861, reveals a whole aspect of the literary sensibility of English Canada in the face of Québec history in the last century.

*Le Tour du Québec par Deux Enfants* also bespeaks a kind of revelation. National destiny like all destiny appears a little senseless. The distinctions between the good, the bad, the beautiful, and the ugly are considerably blurred. In this satire, there is a prevailing feeling of the imminence of chaos, and the satirist's yardstick is disturbingly obscure in the background of humanity's uncorrected foibles.

ANTHONY RASPA

## DRAMA SUMMARY

ELAINE F. NARDOCCHIO, *Theatre and Politics in Modern Québec*. University of Alberta Press, \$21.00.

IN HER "INTRODUCTION," Elaine Nardocchio claims that *Theatre and Politics in Modern Québec* "is intended as a general source book and ready guide" which "strives to provide a systematic and informative overview of the socio-political nature and evolution of theatre in French Québec." She should have added that it is written for students who do not read French and know nothing about Québec. French professors, drama scholars, and theatre professionals will find very little of interest in this brief study.

Chapter I, "Politics, Religion, and the Early Theatre: From New France to Early Canada," sketches the history of francophone theatre from "Le Théâtre de Neptune" (1606) through the 1930's. Professor Nardocchio has obviously read the extensive corpus of Québec theatre history. However, in attempting to summarize a vast amount of material, the author has written a thumbnail sketch which does not do justice to the subject. Her short, simple sentences and short, choppy paragraphs give the impression of research notecards shuffled and written up in (more or less) chronological order. In this background chapter, she describes the Catholic Church's power over the cultural life of New France, the amateur nature of early French-speaking theatre, and the reliance on the continental repertoire. In tracing the growth of indigenous francophone theatre, she points to the nineteenth-century vogue of historical dramas and to the nationalistic tendencies of French-Canadian playwrights.

Chapter II, "The Duplessis Era: From the Dark Ages to a Coming of Age,"

concentrates on theatres, actors, directors, and playwrights leading the French-Canadian drama movement in the forties, fifties, and early sixties. Nardocchio describes the formation of various theatre companies as a necessary first step toward the professionalization of theatre in Québec. Once there were trained actors, directors, designers, etc., the stage was set for dramatic authors like Gratien Gélinas, Félix Leclerc, Eloi de Grandmont, Paul Toupin, Jacques Languirand, and Marcel Dubé. At a time when the conservative government of Maurice Duplessis, together with the Church, was fighting a rearguard action against the forces of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization, French-Canadian theatre reflected the tensions and conflicts which accompanied social changes.

Chapter III, "The Quiet Revolution: Nationalism and Québec Drama," summarizes the cultural ferment of the sixties, linking political change and theatrical activity. Nardocchio catalogues the theatre groups and experimental companies which were important in the sixties, comments on the form and content of a number of plays, and then spotlights Robert Gurik, Françoise Loranger, and Michel Tremblay. Professor Nardocchio seems more comfortable dealing with the politically charged plays of the sixties. The plot summaries of this chapter will make interesting reading for those unfamiliar with the material.

Chapter IV, "Theatre in Modern Québec: Permanence and Change," documents the explosion of theatrical activity in the seventies. Amateurs, children, feminists, revolutionaries, poets, and theatre professionals were writing and performing plays in school gymnasiums, summer theatres, cafés-théâtres, and theatres all over the province. Nardocchio generalizes about the form and content of the new Québécois theatre and then analyzes the work of Jean Barbeau and

Jean-Claude Germain in more detail. Although noting the anti-feminist tone of *Citrouille*, Nardocchio chooses to gloss over Barbeau's misogyny. Because this chapter brings the history of Québec theatre only up to 1980, it seems somewhat incomplete. The contributions of the Théâtre expérimental des femmes, the Nouveau Théâtre expérimental, Marie Laberge, Jovette Marchessault, René-Daniel Dubois, Normand Chaurette, and others are neglected. While Professor Nardocchio never claimed that her study was a comprehensive guide to theatre in modern Québec, one must question the decision to draw the line at 1980.

A more serious criticism must be made of those who should have proofread the text. This slim volume contains an unacceptable number of spelling mistakes, inconsistencies, and missed accent marks. There are over forty typographical errors. The first page spells "Québécois" with a mistake: "Québècois." On some pages, one name is spelled two different ways: "Roulx" — "Roux" (p. 25). French words, names, and titles are mangled so badly that a francophone reader could take offence. On page 83, for example, Jean-Claude Germain's *Si les Sansoucis s'en soucient, ces Sansoucisci s'en soucieront-ils?* is written *Si les sousoucis s'en soucient, ces sancousis-ci s'en soucieront-ils?*

Anglophones with an interest in Québec and a reading knowledge of French should not bother with *Theatre and Politics in Modern Québec*. Those who cannot read the superior works of Québécois drama, historians and critics will be disappointed by Professor Nardocchio's study. It is not the "lively" and "timely" "indispensable" guide promised by Eugene Benson's "Foreword."

JANE MOSS

## PAST FORMULA

JOY FIELDING, *The Deep End*. Doubleday, \$19.95.

CHRISTOPHER PAWLING, ed., *Popular Fiction and Social Change*. Macmillan, £4.95.

WHY WOULD SERIOUS SCHOLARS waste their time studying "minor" authors like F. Pohl and C. Kornbluth who wrote science fiction in the 1950's or "trash" like domestic stories in low-priced women's magazines when they could be studying seventeenth-century poetry, a far more academically respectable and professionally rewarding endeavour? The eight British lecturers in sociology, communication studies, and English featured in *Popular Fiction and Social Change* argue that traditional literary criticism is too restrictive and needs to be supplemented. Pawling points out:

To the disinterested, non-literary specialist the neglect of those texts which have captured the interest of wide sections of the reading public must seem a little strange. . . . literary criticism should be looking forward to the moment when it is able to account for the whole of literary culture, and not just that segment which has been canonised within the academic institution.

*Popular Fiction and Social Change* begins to redress that critical imbalance by focusing on general trends and specific authors or works in science fiction, romance, thrillers, best sellers, and fantasy fiction.

One of the challenges inherent in editing any collection of disparate articles is finding a coherent framework. *Popular Fiction and Social Change* holds together because all of the authors examine their subjects from a shared theoretical assumption:

popular fiction both reflects social meanings/mores and, perhaps more importantly, *intervenes* in the life of society by organising and interpreting experiences which have previously been subjected to only partial

reflection. Thus, to 'understand' popular fiction is to examine it as a form of cultural production and as a *process of meaning creation* which offers a particular way of thinking and feeling about one's relationship to oneself, to others, and to society as a whole.

Each author, therefore, attempts to show how the main characters and plots in their genres both reinforce and undermine social realities. For example, Rosalind Brunt explains the appeal of Barbara Cartland's romances by examining the tension between Cartland's overt affirmation of traditional sex roles, love, and marriage and her covert indictment of the harsh economic realities women face.

Unfortunately, the strength of Pawling's collection — its emphasis on popular culture as a complicated ideological process rather than a unidirectional product — is also its weakness. Surely we know by now that fiction is not a simple reflection of reality. We need to go beyond this essential but elementary assumption to explore new questions. Most notably, we need to study the interaction between readers and texts. In his useful and clearly written introduction, Pawling indicates that he deliberately chose to omit analyses of readers' interpretations. I think that decision was a serious theoretical error. One of the authors included in the volume, Bridget Fowler, perfectly summarizes the problem of ignoring readers: "A problem exists, clearly as to how precisely these stories are *interpreted*. When we say . . . that a story really deals with the problem of social order, or conflict, is this how the readers perceive it?" Rather than deal with this dilemma, Fowler backs off with a bland acceptance of ignorance: "We do not yet know what assessment of the stories is made by the readers nor how far the general world-view of the authors becomes part of the mental apparatus of

the readers." It is not sufficient to admit our ignorance: we must do something about it. How can one seriously study "a process of meaning creation" without examining the key recipients/creators in that process?

Joy Fielding's seventh novel, *The Deep End*, is a suspense novel that could very well be a subject for Jerry Palmer who contributed the article on thrillers to the Pawling collection. Applying his analysis to her novel is an interesting exercise because it reveals a problem with both Palmer's analysis and Fielding's novel.

In *The Deep End*, Joanne Hunter's orderly life is falling apart. Her husband has left her; her teenage daughters are being difficult; her best friend is seriously ill; her beloved grandfather is fading away in a nursing home; and, to top it all off, she is getting threatening phone calls from the Suburban Strangler who warns her that she is the next victim. No one, including the reader, quite believes her about the phone calls and Joanne herself wonders if she is going crazy.

Fielding is a skilled storyteller and she sustains suspense, enlivened by touches of humour, throughout the novel. After an awkward, overwritten first chapter, the narrative goes into a smoothly written fifteen-chapter flashback before returning to the present for the remainder of the story. Fielding handles these transitions well, incorporating even flashbacks within flashbacks with ease. She capably creates a pervasive mood of suspicion so that the reader shares Joanne's apprehensions about nearly everyone she knows or meets.

So far Fielding conforms to Palmer's definition of a thriller: thriller suspense consists of experiencing everything from the point of view of the hero; the hero never starts the action; he always reacts to prior aggression; the hero undertakes to solve a heinous, mysterious crime like murder which is a major threat to the

social order. On the next criterion, however, Fielding and Palmer part company: the hero is distinguished from the other characters by his professionalism and his success. Palmer comments: "Professionalism consists of the capacity for planning, in a flexible manner, for learning from experience, for improving fast on the basis of experience." While Joanne Hunter develops these characteristics by the end of the novel, initially she falls far short of being a hero. In a thriller, we are supposed to side wholeheartedly, exclusively, with the hero but Joanne's fumbling, apologetic lack of self-confidence so annoys the reader that empathy is difficult. By the time she has misplaced her keys and set off a false burglar alarm time and time again, the reader is ready to join forces with the Suburban Strangler. Fielding has written about this type of rather brittle, self-pitying woman before; she needs to move on and create a strong female hero from beginning to end.

On the other hand, Fielding's characterizations reveal the problem with Palmer's criterion for a thriller. Does his use of the term "hero" mean that, by definition, thrillers can only feature male main protagonists? If he were to reply, "Of course not, I used the term generically to include females," then we must question whether or not the model itself, and not just the language, is sexist. It could be that Fielding and other women thriller writers are altering the genre by creating more fallible human heroes and heroines in the place of the superheroes who have reigned supreme before. Fielding gives as much time and space to developing her heroine's relationships with friends and family as she does to generating suspense. This, too, could be a revision of the old thriller formula with its emphasis on "action." If "professionalism" means being flexible and learning fast from experience, I would urge both

Fielding and Palmer to be more "professional" — to infuse their insightful, competent work with new perspectives and life.

MARGARET JENSEN

## ITALIAN-MADE

JOSEPH PIVATO, ed., *Contrasts*. Guernica Editions, \$14.95.

THIS COLLECTION OF TEN critical essays by Italian-Canadian authors proves to be an invaluable contribution to research in Italian-Canadian writing; they provide a wide spectrum of perceptions into what has become, in the last decade, an important field of Canadian Studies. The essays cover many literary, social, and thematic concerns, but their methodology is predominantly comparative since Italian-Canadian writing is strongly influenced by English, French, and Italian literary traditions. Even though the critical approach which Pivato adopts is the most appropriate one for tackling the thematic and linguistic complexities of Italian-Canadian writing and placing it in a world context "which transcends the parochial, the provincial and national boundaries," it does not seem to justify his generalization that "The narrow environmentalist biases of current Canadian literary criticism are not supported by the essays in this collection." Canadian criticism has, in the past decade or so, been experiencing a radical transformation from traditionally privileged thematic and sociological concerns, to structuralist and post-structuralist approaches which are often influenced by European and American literary theories that transcend any "narrow environmentalist biases." The very openness of Canadian criticism towards new and experimental writing practices has created a literary space where a wide variety of

texts, including ethnic ones, are given full critical attention. Indeed, had the situation of current literary criticism been the narrow environmental one which Pivato makes it out to be, his volume *Contrasts* would never have been published.

Pivato's opening essay provides a useful excursus into the works of the major theorists of comparative criticism. Among these is E. D. Blodgett's *Configuration* (1982), one of the first studies to open the way for serious critical examination of ethnic literature. Pivato's diachronic account of comparative criticism begins in the 1890's with Charles G. D. Roberts, whose poetic skills enabled him to render the original French works into faithful and literally valid English versions, and closes with Ronald Sutherland's and D. G. Jones' work in the 1970's and 1980's. Pivato's view is that until the 1980's Canadian literary criticism had been dominated by 'anglocentrism,' but that this was a historical phase which critics had to go through and come to terms with before minority ethnic literatures could begin to be taken into consideration. So when Pivato attacks such texts as John Moss's *Patterns of Isolation* and Laurie Ricou's *Vertical Man/Horizontal World* as "narrow readings of Canadian writing" because their emphasis fell on English works, he is reading these critical texts from a mid-1980's and not from an early 1970's point of view; the two literary historical contexts are very different. In the early 1970's ethnic writing had yet to find the voice it has found in the 1980's, and so it was not in a position to receive the critical attention it is receiving today.

One of the most famous and accomplished Italian-Canadian writers today is Frank Paci, whose trilogy on the Italian immigrants has perhaps been one of the most influential contributions to the recognition of the ethnic dimension in fic-

tion. In his article, "Tasks of the Canadian Novelist writing on Immigrant Themes," Paci emphasizes the importance of the particular as a vehicle to understanding the universal, the microcosm which reflects the macrocosm. By choosing an image of three concentric circles to illustrate his thesis, he places the tasks of the novelist in general within the wider one; in a smaller circle one finds the tasks of the Canadian writer, within which is enclosed the final circle of the writer tackling immigrant themes. All three circles are fluid and overlap one into the other, but only through the outer circle one can reach the inner one, and vice versa. This image is a revealing one because applied to Paci's writing it is self-reflective: he is at the same time a writer, a Canadian, and an immigrant committed to building up a realistic account of characters within a specific social and historical context. For Paci the major task of a novelist is to 'present reality,' but in his concept of reality traditional definitions are stretched in order to embrace concepts of fantasy and the marvellous, so that it becomes a form of realism which reaches the depths of human consciousness. Paci recognizes that the strongest influences in his works have been Margaret Laurence, whose novels he deeply admires and from whom he has acquired the concept of 'compassion' as a guiding principle when creating his characters, and his ethnic origins, which inspired his three novels, *The Italians*, *Black Madonna*, and *The Father*. His background provided him with such important themes as the self-sacrifice of first-generation immigrant parents, the inevitable clash between the old world and the new world expressed through the conflict between two generations, the simplicity of a peasant culture as opposed to the corrupt sophistication of an Anglo/American one, the problem of ac-

quiring fluency in an alien language and the strength of family ties.

C. D. Minni's article, "The Short Story as an Ethnic Genre," shows how some of the characteristic features of short story writing are typical of ethnic fiction as well. Minni sets up a series of correspondences between the short story and ethnic writing, the most important of which are the presence of marginal people who are lonely, nostalgic, feel exiled from their roots, experience identity crises, suffer from feelings of inexplicable regret, and have different values and viewpoints from the norm. The most common theme is usually alienation or the corollary one of characters who have different emotional terms of reference. Minni's contribution is particularly useful in a Canadian literary context, where the short story genre is diffuse and where an ethnic dimension is just beginning to show. Minni's range of examples, drawn from the works of Robert Kroetsch, Caterina Edwards, John Metcalf, Anne Hébert, Benato Donati, and others, clearly situates Italian-Canadian writing as an ethnic genre within a wider context of anglophone and francophone writing and, ultimately, within an international literary tradition.

An original structuralist approach is taken by Roberta Schiff-Zamarro who isolates the figure of the mother in Frank Paci's *Black Madonna*, evaluating her importance in a community (like the Italian) woven together by the unit of the family. Schiff-Zamarro analyzes the binary structure of *Black Madonna* in which the two conflicting and parallel relationships of father/son and mother/daughter predominate, and she explores the latter on two levels: on the first one she sees the relationship as a quest for self-identity which the daughter Marie achieves through a gradual process of rejection/acceptance of her mother. On a second and more symbolic level Marie's

quest is seen as a search for the great Mother figure, or the female principle, which was overshadowed by the advent of the patriarchal order. Patriarchal dominance came about with the rise of Judeo-Christian societies, when a radical subversion of the Great Goddess myth took place. At this stage of its historical development the figure of the Great Mother had a threefold nature: she was a white goddess of birth and growth, a red goddess of battle and love, and a black goddess of death and divinization. In Christian mythology the triple goddess is supplanted by a triple god, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the person of Mary, mother of God, survives. Mary is now identified with the figure of the Great Mother, and her black connotation derives from the Hecate phase connected with death and the underworld. In Paci's novel *Assunta* is the Black Madonna, the mother who is also a monster who becomes an obstacle in Marie's quest for an Anglo-Canadian identity and physical appearance.

In their article "Death Between Two Cultures: Italian Canadian Poetry," Alexandre Amprimoz and Sante Viselli analyze dominant images of death and departure, suffering and blood, in some of the most prominent Italian-Canadian poets like Pier Giorgio di Cicco, Fulvio Caccia, Mario Fraticelli, and evaluate their attempts to transform the values of their native culture into a new literary language. The authors illustrate their thesis with examples from many poems which touch the depths of pain, loss, and suffering, experienced by a generation of immigrants who are forced to leave their beloved mother country and venture to a new land where the unknown language isolated them in an existence whose principal metaphor was one of emotional suffering and physical sickness.

One of the most acclaimed Italian-Canadian poets to emerge from this fertile ethnic context is Mary di Michele. Robert Billings examines the cultural and social contexts which led to the birth of an Italian-Canadian group of poets in the 1970's and 1980's, identifying the important influence which Roo Borson, Susan Glickman, Bronwen Wallace, and Carolyn Smart had on them, and locates Mary di Michele's development as a poet, the first one being her "academic, objective phase" when she wrote *Tree of August* (1978). This collection of poetry shows the author's search for her own voice and form, and she is successful in finding it in those poems which deal with her Italian family. In some of these earlier poems one finds the germs of her future writing, personal events presented in a straightforward manner and bathed in the light of emotions. Her later collections, *Bread and Chocolate* (1980), and *Mimosa and Other Poems* (1981), find her exorcising her family ghosts and coming to terms with her experience as a first-generation Italian immigrant daughter, and all its ensuing conflicts and strifes. Di Michele uses the technique of identifying the past and the present with the third and first person voice, thus giving a dialogic structure to her poems where the self either reflects itself in a series of fragmented and alternating visions, or is split into the vision of two sisters whose dialectic relationship becomes the dramatic narrative of her poems. Her later collections, *Necessary Sugar* (1983) and *Moon Sharks* show a movement to a confessional form in the key of feminist awareness.

In "The Italian Writer and Language" Fulvio Caccia applies to minority literature a trilinguistic model borrowed from Henry Gobard, to reveal the complexities of a writer's relationship with language. The three languages are the vernacular, which is of rural or eth-

nic origin, vehicular language, which belongs to the social infrastructures in which the subject is situated, and mythic language, which belongs to religion and archetypal structures. The distribution of these languages varies from one social group to the other, and they play an important role in the development of a writer's poetics.

The context of Quebec as a historical, cultural, linguistic, and literary space in which a great number of Italian writers must come to terms with in order to be able to create their own literary tradition is dealt with by Antonio D'Alfonso and Filippo Salvatore in their two useful articles which close the anthology.

Exile is the dominant condition which characterizes all immigrants and has featured in Italian literature since Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy*. Pivato outlines the most important Italian authors who have dealt with this issue, and then focuses on the different ways in which Italian-Canadian writers have grappled with this concept. For Romano Porticari, who lives and writes in British Columbia, exile means the detachment from home which is associated with an idyllic childhood. Canada thus becomes the land of adulthood, reality, and disillusionment. Marie Ardizzi's protagonist Nora in *Made in Italy* needs to keep alive an illusory internal subjective reality connected with childhood in order to be able to survive in a harsh exterior reality. However, for Ardizzi the ultimate condition of exile is the breakdown of communication between an inner reality which has not been able to adapt itself to and change with the times of an outer reality. Pivato concludes with the observation that a significant shift is beginning to take place in Italian-Canadian writing which no longer sees the New World as a land of exile, but as a Promised Land that has freed immigrants from poverty and has given them

a new home. Pivato quotes Robert Kroetsch's statement: "We haven't got an identity until somebody tells our story. The fiction makes us real." As linguistic and cultural barriers between the old world and the new world are beginning to break down, Italian-Canadian authors are putting together for the immigrants and their children an identity and a new sense of reality toward which they have been grappling for decades.

Pivato's collection of essays closes with a bibliography which shows how diversified Italian-Canadian writing has become. There are three language lists, one for works in English which is also the longest one, one for works in Italian, and a third one for works in French. There is a final list of literary and historical studies published both in Canada and in Europe, which provides the researcher with useful background on the subject.

GIOVANNI BONANNO

## DISCOURS-FLEUVE

NADINE MACKENZIE, *Le coupeur de têtes*. Saint-Boniface, Manitoba: Éditions des Plaines, \$7.95.

GILLES VALAIS, *Les deux soeurs*. Éditions des Plaines, n.p.

CES DEUX LIVRES canadiens-français hors Québec s'ajoutent à la presque cinquantaine de livres déjà publiés par les Éditions des Plaines et nous font comprendre que la francophonie canadienne, hors Québec, est bien vivante, en voie de s'affirmer toujours davantage. C'est certainement quelque chose dont il faut se réjouir et les Conseils des Arts provincial et fédéral font bien d'appuyer ce mouvement de leur aide financière. C'est en la pratiquant que la culture se renouvelle et se développe.

Des deux livres, et ceci malgré tout le féminisme que je partage avec Nadine

MacKenzie (sauf en ce qui concerne son apparent mépris pour la femme au foyer) et taut d'autres, je préfère celui de Gilles Valais. Valais, qui avait déjà publié un récit intitulé *Les deux frères*, est sans aucun doute à présent le meilleur des deux écrivains. MacKenzie qui a pourtant, elle aussi, déjà publié plusieurs ouvrages, n'a pas encore réussi à se débarrasser d'un certain style un peu maniéré et précieux. Ce style ressemble à celui qui anime parfois les émissions de Radio-Canada, pour laquelle MacKenzie travaille. C'est un style un peu trop enjoué, malicieux, méticuleux (oh! ces passés simples et ces subjonctifs de l'imparfait!), bref, artificiel. En écriture, ce style va contre l'attention du lecteur, contre son plaisir du texte. Du moins, c'est là mon avis.

MacKenzie a, dans *Le coupeur de têtes*, suffisamment de bons éléments pour un roman d'initiation solide. Il s'agit dans son récit d'une femme dans la quarantaine, en instance de divorce, forcée de retourner sur le marché du travail, avec toutes les difficultés qui s'en suivent: recherche d'un emploi qui lui permettra de s'occuper quand même de ses deux enfants, timidité à vaincre, confiance en elle-même ébranlée par le fait que son mari se soit tourné vers une femme de carrière plus jeune qu'elle... en plus du divorce lui-même avec ses aspects dégradants y compris la guerre autour de la garde des enfants. MacKenzie a donné à cette femme une amie solide, prête à la soutenir, sorte de guide vers une vie nouvelle.

Mais au lieu d'écrire un roman d'initiation, qui certes aurait pu intéresser au moins un public féminin, MacKenzie, pensant peut-être que cela serait trop simple, introduit dans son histoire un "coupeur de têtes," jeune homme fou qui se dit homme d'affaires mais est en vérité escroc, menteur, obsédé sexuel, pervers animé d'une étrange foi reli-

gieuse et, de plus, assassin de femmes seules. Ajoutez-y un mari égoïste, des policiers maladroits et vous vous trouvez devant une histoire rocambolesque à souhait qui vous distraira peut-être pendant quelques heures, mais qui n'est pas vraiment, et ceci est dommage car Nadine MacKenzie a certainement du talent, une oeuvre littéraire.

Notons en plus qu'il y a certaines coquilles dans ce texte dont la présentation paraît pourtant à première vue claire et soigneuse: transféré au lieu de transféré; cueillers au lieu de cuillers; une sonnerie qui résonne au lieu de sonner tout simplement etc. Cela fait tache dans un livre agréable à l'oeil. Il est regrettable que les Éditions des Plaines n'aient pas pu éviter de telles erreurs. Et ce qu'il y a de bizarre, c'est que dans *Les deux soeurs*, livre que je trouve donc meilleur, je n'aie rien détecté de tel.

Deux nouvelles constituent le recueil de Gilles Valais, *Les deux soeurs*. La première, du même titre que le volume, conte, un peu à la manière de Gabrielle Roy (celle de *La petite poule d'eau*), l'histoire et le développement de deux jeunes filles du Nord manitobain. Chacune a un talent: Martine chante et coud à merveille, Gemma est intelligente et studieuse. Mais les deux vont abandonner toute idée de carrière personnelle pour se consacrer l'une, Martine, à un mari professeur, l'autre, Gemma, à leur père devenu sénile. Et Martine, qui avait autrefois détesté les aspirations intellectuelles de sa soeur, subit maintenant les discours de son mari, alors que Gemma, qui n'avait pas voulu être ménagère, est devenue la garde/cuisinière/infirmière d'un vieux malade. Deux sorts étranges, observés par un narrateur sensible et discret qui n'émet aucun jugement.

Le personnage de ce narrateur permet une écriture assez proche du monologue retours en arrière, les questions parfois laissées sans réponse. Le lecteur ou la

intérieure, donc une écriture qui coule, favorise la description et la réflexion, la lectrice peut y mettre du sien, les personnages prennent forme dans son imagination, puisque rien de trop précis ne lui est imposé.

Dans la deuxième nouvelle, "Lettre de Maud," Valais a opté pour la forme épistolaire. Maud écrit à Steve, camarade d'études, mentor. Elle ne sait pas vers quel pays lointain celui-ci est parti, mais elle retrace pour lui, pour elle-même et pour nous les principales étapes de sa propre vie. Fille d'immigrés européens, elle a fait, contre la volonté de sa mère, des études, s'est éloignée de sa petite ville natale où "trop de dimanches avaient tendu leurs fils d'araignée." Elle a travaillé, voyagé, regardé le monde avec curiosité.

C'est un monde où elle, en tant que francophone, est minoritaire et où d'autres minorités — russes, ukrainiens, mennonites, huttérites, doukhobors — se doivent de lutter contre l'assimilation que leur imposent les anglophones. C'est cette lutte précisément qui rend chaque groupe fier de son état, de sa langue, de ses coutumes, de sa religion. Pour Maud, la "résistance à l'assimilation" des franco-manitobains se résume par le fait que la conclusion d'une chanson apprise au pensionnat, "... leurs enfants élevés par leurs ennemis..." ne pourrait jamais s'appliquer à eux. La chanson fait plutôt allusion aux

compatriotes qui vivaient dans les Etats... ils parlaient une langue mêlée, portaient des vêtements extravagants, se bourraient de saucisses et de whisky, peut-être même n'avaient-ils plus de religion... ils étaient assimilés, des bâtards, c'était fini, on pouvait leur appliquer cette conclusion...

Maud affirme qu'on peut jouir d'être une minorité, y trouver une source d'inspiration et d'enthousiasme. Elle observe le rôle que jouent les initiatives personnelles dans cette lutte constante, l'import-

tance des écoles et de la radio franco-phones, ainsi que des "vieilles vertus."

Venue de la région de Winnipeg, ville dont le nom, comme nous l'apprend Valais, signifie "eau boueuse," Maud va se rendre dans l'Est du pays, faire la connaissance d'un Québec où elle se sentira déplacée, étrangère et où elle va donc se rendre compte que le Manitoba est son pays. Y retournera-t-elle ou bien finira-t-elle par se laisser assimiler par le monde québécois? Valais ne nous le dit pas, nous laisse libre d'imaginer la suite.

La forme épistolaire, tout comme le monologue intérieur, permet de nouveau un discours-fleuve, avec rapides, chutes, affluents. Valais utilise les deux formes avec aisance et un évident plaisir qui finit par devenir celui du lecteur. *Les deux soeurs* est un beau livre, un de ceux qui font que les Éditions des Plaines méritent notre respect et notre intérêt.

MARGUERITE ANDERSEN

## ON STRATEGIES

ROBERT KROETSCH & REINGARD M. NISCHIK, eds., *Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature*. NeWest Press, \$21.95; pa. \$11.95.

SERIOUS READERS OF Canadian literature have cause to be grateful to Robert Kroetsch and Reingard Nischik for focusing attention in *Gaining Ground* on significant studies of the subject currently being produced by European scholars. Although it has been an open secret among academic specialists for the past decade that the study of Canadian literature is a minor growth industry in European universities, this is the first book to describe and illustrate the phenomenon in a reasonably comprehensive fashion. And it must be said at the outset that the book is a good one: divided into two sections, it not only offers a

timely survey of the state of Canadian literary studies in about twenty European countries, but also presents evidence of the scope and maturity of scholarly interest in the form of seventeen critical essays.

In "New Horizons: Canadian Literature in Europe," Dr. Nischik explains the genesis and development of Canadian literary studies in the countries where it commands the most attention: France, Italy, and West Germany. She points to the success of individual scholars in these countries in initiating and developing courses for high schools and universities, up to the graduate level, and in special projects, such as Walter Pache's development of an inter-library loan base for Canadian journals at Cologne University, and the marathon translation work done by Amleto Lorenzini in Rome. She also notes the growth of Canadian Studies Centres such as those at the Universities of Bordeaux, Dijon, and Rouen, the proliferation of Canadian Studies Associations, and the increasingly frequent conferences on both general and specialized aspects of Canadian writing.

There is also a useful survey of Canadian Studies in the United Kingdom; and we learn that, curiously, British scholars seem more interested in French-Canadian writing than in Anglo-Canadian literature, a situation that is reversed in France. There are briefer descriptions of the interest in Canadian literature in Scandinavia, the Low Countries, Austria, Switzerland, and Eastern Europe, with names and university affiliations of prominent scholars. There is also a 300-item bibliography, divided by scholars' nationalities and entitled "European Publications on Canadian Literature," which gives an indication of the range and focus of European scholarship in the last ten years or so.

Early in her survey, Dr. Nischik offers perceptive observations on the nature of

current European scholarship. She points out, for example, that since Canadian literature is a foreign literature to European readers, it has rarely been seen in the thematic context often favoured by Canadian critics, and can never, of course, be "regarded as a means of 'seeing ourselves.'" Instead, "the critical approach . . . has often been more textual. Individual works have been regarded as aesthetic artifacts rather than as sociological and socio-psychological documents," and the prevailing critical trend is to analyze narrative strategies, or more generally, to look at structural and technical aspects of the works. European critics also favour subjecting Canadian works to comparative or generic study: "more distant from the works in point of language, cultural background, and personal concern, European scholars have felt freer from the beginning to put specific Canadian works into a larger international context than has been the habit in Canada itself."

The critical approaches found in the essays included in this collection give credence to Dr. Nischik's observations. (It should be pointed out here that the editors made no restrictions as to subject matter or approach when they contacted potential contributors.) Twelve of the seventeen essays offer either a close analysis of text or narrative technique, or subject the creative works to a comparative or generic consideration, while three others straddle the two approaches, adapting elements of each as they help to illuminate particular works.

*Gaining Ground* begins and finishes with remarkably strong essays. Simone Vauthier's "The Dubious Battle of Story-Telling: Narrative Strategies in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*," which opens the volume, is in one sense the ideal critical study. Through incisive analysis and lucid presentation it provokes the reader not only to reread the novel carefully,

but to rethink the larger question of effective narrative strategies in fiction. Problems of authority posed by the co-existence of two narrative strands in the novel, for example, are examined in a closely reasoned and convincing analysis of Findley's complex narrative techniques. A later essay in the collection, Walter Pache's "'The Fiction Makes Us Real': Aspects of Postmodernism in Canada," examines the related narrative experiments of Robert Kroetsch (particularly in *The Studhorse Man* and *Gone Indian*) and George Bowering (in *Burning Water*). In doing so, Pache argues that "the rejection of literary conventions, patterns of thought, and old value systems clearly implies more than a new structure for the narrative text. It becomes a means of giving a new 'voice' to Canadian fiction." Vauthier would undoubtedly agree.

Other explorations of narrative technique in the work of contemporary Canadian novelists (a group the European critics overwhelmingly favour), include studies of Rudy Wiebe by Wolfgang Kloos, "Narrative Modes and Forms of Literary Perception in Rudy Wiebe's *The Scorched-Wood People*," and Pierre Spriet, "Structure and Meaning in Rudy Wiebe's *My Lovely Enemy*." The latter essay is intriguing for its insights into the relationship between Wiebe's latest novel and earlier works in terms of "the rejection of rational sense which informs *My Lovely Enemy* . . . [and] the refusal of logical or conventional meaning detected" elsewhere in his fiction. In another essay, "Narrative Technique in Aritha van Herk's Novels," Reingard Nischik offers a rather tentative comparison of techniques employed in *Judith* and *The Tent Peg*; while Michel Fabre looks in detail at some of the short stories of Mavis Gallant and their "complex juxtapositions of points of view" in "Orphan's Progress," Reader's Progress:

Voice and Understatement in Mavis Gallant's Stories." Both Paul Goetsch and Coral Ann Howells examine the fiction of Margaret Atwood. Goetsch's essay, "*Life Before Man as a Novel of Manners*," is a lucid interpretation of one of the novel's central hypotheses, that "even in a so-called liberated age, every kind of human relationship, including sexual, is subject to rules." Howells takes a different approach, revealing ways in which "contradictory discourses [involving fantasy and reality] generate multiple meanings" in Atwood's text in *Surfacing* and *Bodily Harm* (as well as in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*).

Criticism of French-Canadian writing is represented by only two essays: Rosmarin Heidenreich's "Aspects of Indeterminacy in Hubert Aquin's *Trou de Mémoire*" and Cedric May's "Form and Structure in *Les Iles de la nuit* by Alain Grandbois." Noncontemporary literature in English receives almost as little attention, although Karla El-Hassan's essay on Leacock, "Reflections on the Special Unity of Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*" is interesting for its treatment of the *Sketches* as a precursor of "the linked short stories or short story ensembles which at present are very common in Anglo-Canadian literature"; and Rudolf Bader's study of Grove, "Frederick Philip Grove and Naturalism Reconsidered," offers some provocative observations on *The Master of the Mill*.

The final essay in *Gaining Ground*, Eva-Marie Kröller's fascinating study entitled "Nineteenth-Century Canadians and the Rhine Valley," is in its way as striking as Vauthier's opening piece. A refreshingly original study, it charts the patterns in reactions and attitudes generated by visits to the Rhineland by a number of prominent nineteenth-century

Canadians, beginning with Joseph Howe in 1838. The essays offers a backdrop to contemporary pieces such as Layton's "Rhine Boat Trip" and Gallant's stories in *The Pegnitz Junction*; but equally important is its testimony to the long-standing tradition of intellectual exchanges between Canada and Europe. It is a tradition to which the essay, and *Gaining Ground* in its entirety, make a valuable contribution.

STANLEY S. ATHERTON

## VOICE OF ONE'S OWN

SUSAN MUSGRAVE, *Cocktails at the Mausoleum*. McClelland & Stewart, \$9.95.

A PRECOCIOUS WRITER who published in the *Malchat Review* (*sic*, from the McClelland & Stewart publicity) at seventeen and issued a volume of poems at nineteen, Susan Musgrave at 35 has already written a dozen books and made a notable contribution to Canadian poetry. It hardly seems necessary for her publisher to re-issue or "roll over" the earlier verse of such a productive poet in supposedly "new" collections. Eight of the poems in *Cocktails at the Mausoleum* appeared in *Tarts and Muggers* (1982), which itself mined four of her earlier volumes — but at least that identified itself as "Poems New and Selected," which this does not. A browser who gets inside the meaningless cover and the inaccurate back-cover blurb will not learn of the overlap until page 151 (the last page).

So much for the publisher. The poet one encounters here is partly the resultant of previous selves (sea-witch, man-burier), partly an evolving persona, humanized by time and pain, that I think will prove more sympathetic and likeable than either. At first Musgrave practised a kind of West Coast necromancy in words, stirring a blend of dreams, moon,

fantasy, and native lore. Like most styles and spells, these worked at some times and not at others. Set next to the present volume, *Songs of the Sea Witch* (1970) looks obscure and overly dependent on snake-slime, while *Grave-Dirt and Selected Strawberries* (1973) invokes a power of Haida material — at its worst a kind of easy *shtik* — without managing to transmute it into poetry. Yet *Entrance of the Celebrant* (1972) is clearly the work of a genuine talent, at least in “Birthstone” and “Dog Star,” which are made of typical under-thirty Musgrave materials: night, spirits, dreams, and death. “Facing Moons” introduced the “moon of constant sleep inside / sleep, moon that I am,” which rarely sets for her.

These preoccupations culminate in *The Impstone* (1976). “I was born with / witch-power and / two wings,” she writes: “Somebody cut them off” (“All Will Fall”); “The old frog-moon / lays her eggs in my heart,” says the persona of the fine “Mourning Song.” Otherwise, though, sorcery does not correlate highly with equality, which is found instead in humane and intelligible work like “O Grave Where Is Thy Victory” and the beautiful “Chiaroscuro.” *A Man to Marry, A Man to Bury* (1979) is a similar *mélange*: Musgrave often writes of dreams and moons, but only “Woodcutter, River-God and I” turns magical subject into magical artifact, while “A Curious Centurion” and the strong, cold “Fishing on a Snowy Evening” succeed without recourse to the preternatural. Here she breaks through the type-casting and finds a second voice.

In the present collection, the moon-witch of the western isles still dreams, but generally that mode is less important now; Musgrave continues to broaden her appeal. The first section, for example, “Coming Into Town, Cold,” documents the Canadian encounter with Latin, es-

pecially southern cultures. Here — and to some extent elsewhere in the volume — the crucial polarity is not nature/supernature but self/other, and I would argue that the most patently autobiographical poems — or even parts of poems — are the least successful. The section’s title-poem and “Supposing You Have Nowhere to Go” are particularly limited by chit-chat about the poet’s age, financial problems, and low opinion of Miami; they are lineated journal entries. (Of the eight poems that I wish she had withheld, five are lessened by this kind of self-indulgence.) On the other hand, where she submerges herself in the human condition, as in “Hunchback on the Buga Road,” “Ordinary People,” and “The Unconsidered Life,” she is a poet.

I am the bride with  
worms around her heart  
and a skull bursting with goodness  
like a church goblet.

This is not the “I” of “I’m over twenty-nine.”

These are three of the nine poems (in this collection of five or six dozen) that I would use to convince anyone of Musgrave’s talent. Three more are “roll-overs” from *Tarts and Muggers* (the four “timely” Queen Charlotte Island poems all appeared there), so there is no point in discussing them here. The last three touchstones are the title-piece and two poems in the final section. “Cocktails at the Mausoleum” is both a typically wacky piece of Musgrave fantasy and her Ode to Melancholy; cocktails taste better at the mausoleum, but death stares from the bottom of the glass.

I decided long ago  
that death was not serious, but now  
with a jewelled hand something tugged,  
and I felt the cold earth  
rising to meet me.

Finally, when “you” (a late entry)

“sucked the spicy liquor from my / last small breath,” drinking intertwines with the other kind of dying — shades of John Donne. Beyond the literary echoes, Musgrave’s own maturing voice is clear:

I was  
thinking of love spent, and grief that  
gropes slowly like a tendril. . . .

“I Do Not Know . . .” (etc.) is a remarkably successful “exorcism” of (we learn from Musgrave’s notes) Howard Nemerov’s “Death and the Maiden.” Nemerov himself — or Roethke or Hughes, other objects of homage — would not spurn such a phrase as “a compass of blood in the heart’s / wreckage,” though it is not all that good. Both this and “You Didn’t Fit,” however, seem to me deeply humane poems about coming to terms with parents, time, madness, and self. In the first, shrinks try to “cut the / stubborn mother from my womb”; in the second, the poet’s vivid dream of her father’s not fitting his coffin becomes a symbol for both of their lives: “neither of us fit.” Here Musgrave has outgrown the cuteness and extrahuman obscurity that marks some of her young poems. “I Do Not Know” is a paring down to essentials:

I think of the choices we made  
along the way, how things  
came to pass, or happened,  
what brings us finally together.

The years will make sense of it.

These are not her most “poetic” lines, but they make immediate contact, with the warmth of a sympathetic friend who has been through it.

When Musgrave is off, she is usually, I suggested, being merely personal, though once, in “Eaglet Tricks,” she seems too imitative. Her other weakness is too little detachment from prose — i.e., insufficient revision — which shows up as flaccid diction in, for example, “Three

Witches Go for Lunch in Elora.” Her ear is not flawless; she needs to judge, to edit, to purge, as every good poet does. Robert Graves, to whom she once made a pilgrimage, would be one healthy guru in this respect. Another she long ago chose herself — in “Skookumchuk” from *The Impstone*:

I guess it’s in  
my blood  
to want to be like  
Emily Carr

It takes some work to move that desire from the blood to the hand. What is clear is that in Musgrave’s case the result will be worth the effort. One could do worse than be the Emily Carr of poetry.

RICHARD BEVIS

## VAN LIT

GARY GEDDES, ed., *Vancouver: Soul of a City*. Douglas & McIntyre, \$24.95.

ALLAN SAFARIK, ed., *Vancouver Poetry*. Polestar, \$12.95.

THE EDITORS OF BOTH these Vancouver centennial anthologies, according to their introductions, seek the city’s identity in its literature. Geddes, through a selection of poetry and prose, tries to capture the “soul of a city”; Safarik, through poetry, the city’s “heart and pulse.”

Geddes begins his search for the city’s soul with himself. His account of his Vancouver roots and subsequent writing career in his introduction, however, is more concerned with his own identity than Vancouver’s, and since he includes in his anthology numerous writers whose roots lie elsewhere, his emphasis on the importance of Vancouver origins is as irrelevant as it is self-indulgent. When he turns to other writers he singles out those who, he finds, share his own “half urban pastoral, half Bosch nightmare” vision of the city, a judgment that leads

not to close analysis of the writing in the anthology but to asides on Social Credit anti-intellectualism and the role of the writer in such a milieu. Brief concluding references to the city's one hundredth birthday and probable literary future do not compensate for the lack of focus throughout.

The anthology itself, striving for comprehensiveness and popular appeal, achieves only length and unevenness. The ninety selections are grouped thematically under nine eye-catching headings such as "Real Estate in Paradise" and "The Race that Never Ends," the latter dealing with the city's ethnic communities. Too many prose selections, like Sir Robert Borden's telegram expressing his party's racist labour and immigration policies, consist of brief one- or two-line excerpts wrenched from context and offered with unhelpful or no editorial comment. Other selections, such as the excerpt from Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and stories by Jane Rule and Audrey Thomas, seem to owe their inclusion to their writers' reputations rather than to their portrayal of Vancouver. Reputation and popular taste seem to have influenced the choice of poetry as well; it ranges in quality and tone from the sentimental rhetoric of Pauline Johnson to the social criticism of Al Purdy, so that the reader must sift through much second-rate material to find the worthwhile.

Geddes' inclusion of Pauline Johnson and Eric Nicol brings to mind R. E. Watters' similar concessions to popular taste in his *British Columbia: a Centennial Anthology* (1958), but Geddes' slapdash editing falls far short of Watters' more scholarly approach. Whereas the opening section of Watters' anthology consists of journal and newspaper excerpts covering British Columbia's first hundred years, only a few scattered selections in Geddes' — such as Yun Ho

Chang's memorable account of his life in turn-of-the-century Vancouver — offer glimpses of an older city. Unlike Watters also, Geddes provides relatively little bibliographical information: his 'notes on contributors' list titles and give some bibliographical data, but seldom identify the work from which a specific excerpt is taken, or supply its date.

Since the material in the anthology is arranged thematically rather than chronologically and since portrayals of early Vancouver are rare, the city shows little sense of passing time. All too often it lacks a sense of place as well, since Geddes has chosen a large number of works that explore the human psyche (usually the writer's own) in a generalized or interior setting that could be anywhere in the modern world. Thus Vancouver seems to have no real identity at all.

Safarik's "informal history" of Vancouver poetry, on the other hand, provides structure and focus for his quest for the city's identity. Beginning in the 1910's with the founding of the Vancouver Poetry Society and ending in the 1970's with a list of currently active poets and publishers, Safarik's introductory survey is objectively, although somewhat awkwardly, written and appropriately illustrated in the anthology by the first Vancouver Poetry Society Chapbook (1925), the Ryerson Poetry Chapbook of 1936, and individual poems of previous and subsequent decades. As the poetry evolves from late Victorian to modern and postmodern, so the perception of the city varies from, for example, the First World War fervour of Alice M. Winlow to the post-Second World War detachment of Tom Wayman.

Safarik's flexibility in handling the historical structure keeps the anthology from becoming a dry academic document. After the 1930's he modifies strict chronology to bring together poems treat-

ing a particular time period or subject, such as wartime Vancouver as experienced by Al Purdy and Joy Kogawa, or Oakalla by Bill Bissett and Peter Trower. More importantly, an underlying concern with "the human condition" in the city supplies the selections with a common theme which gives coherence to the changing poetic styles and accounts for the presence of "historical curiosities" whose subject matter, despite the mediocre verse, reveals the long tradition of social criticism in Vancouver poetry. Another editorial plus is a sense of humour: poems by Al Purdy and Red Lane admirably demonstrate that good poetry can be both funny and serious.

The main flaw in the editing lies in the sometimes sketchy documentation. The Vancouver Poetry Society Chapbook concludes with a brief account of its publication and a briefer reference to the immediately following Ryerson Chapbook, but since no comparable note concludes the latter, the reader has only the 1936 date after Anne Marriott's poem to mark the end of the sequence. Dates of composition and/or of publication of individual poems, and birth and death dates in the notes on contributors, are also lacking. Despite these flaws Safarik's anthology is a worthwhile centennial tribute to Vancouver. His workmanlike approach to his subject offers more convincing and satisfying insight into the city than does Geddes' egocentric randomness — and at a fraction of the price.

MARGARET DOYLE

## STILL HERO

WILLIAM R. HUNT, *Stef: A Biography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson*. University of British Columbia Press, \$29.95.

WE ARE FREQUENTLY TOLD that we no longer have heroes. The explanation may be that people's expectations are no

longer what they once were. Too often venerated figures, when subjected to close scrutiny, prove to have feet of clay like the rest of us.

Polar exploration once seemed majestic in the symbolic struggle of man against the elements, an *in extremis* laboratory in which true mettle could be tested. Unfortunately various reappraisals of the great figures associated with it have revealed undignified competitiveness and back-biting. It has seriously been questioned whether Frederick Cook ever scaled Mt. McKinley and it was not Robert E. Peary but his Black companion, Matt Henson, who actually reached the Pole — information that Peary's family strenuously tried to suppress.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879-1962) was subjected to prolonged harassment during his lifetime, but he has been fortunate enough to find a biographer who has managed to defend him without tendentiousness. William R. Hunt tells his story in a reassuringly low-keyed way. "Stef" was born in Manitoba of Icelandic parents who soon moved to South Dakota. At the University of North Dakota Stef was known as a bright, outspoken student — so outspoken that it was suggested by the authorities that he move somewhere else. At Harvard he became interested in anthropology, and in 1906 he was assigned to the Anglo-American Polar Expedition in which his task was to make an ethnological study of the Mackenzie River Eskimos.

His great advantage was that he was willing to accept the Eskimos on their own terms and to learn from them. Unlike Peary, he took the trouble to learn their language and, despite his dislike of seafood, he accustomed himself to a fish diet and mastered their hunting techniques. Above everything else, he observed every aspect of their culture with meticulous attention. As a result he returned from his first visit to the Arctic

with the conviction that attention should be paid to its people and their resources rather than to exploration alone.

On his famous journey of 1909, accompanied by Rudolph Anderson (later his implacable enemy), he discovered the Copper Eskimo people of Victoria Island. These people used copper implements, and their colouring was much fairer than any Eskimos yet encountered. He was intrigued by the possibility that they might be descendants of the Viking colony established in Greenland in the Middle Ages.

When Stef returned to New York his account of Eskimos with blue eyes and rusty hair was greeted with derision in many quarters, but this discovery made him into a celebrity. It initiated a series of books and widespread lecture tours which continued for the rest of his life. Hunt does not make it sufficiently clear how valid his views were.

His subsequent forays into the Arctic were to prove just as controversial. The most notorious of these expeditions was the Karluk disaster of 1913. The expedition, sponsored by the Canadian government, set out to make a comprehensive survey of the central arctic coast as well as to explore *terra incognita*. Stef really worked best on his own, and the preparations for the ambitious undertaking were somewhat chaotic. The expedition divided into two sections, the northern group headed by Stefansson, supported by a brigantine originally used for fishing. While Stef went ashore with a hunting party near Port Barrow on the western Arctic, a fierce storm blew up, the Karluk went adrift, and in the ghastly months that followed, the ship was sunk and most of the members of the crew died. Stef was accused of hiring inexperienced men and taking on an unseaworthy vessel. In defence of Stef, Hunt maintains that he had the best and only men and equipment available.

The issue that roused most ire among Stef's critics was his espousal of "the friendly Arctic" which became something of a crusade with him. After five and a half years of continuous polar service during which he had lived on game and fish and had discovered approximately 100,000 square miles of unknown territory, he claimed that living in the Arctic presented no difficulties so long as one adapted to the habits of the natives. His opposition came from white supremacists and those who feared that his common-sense approach would undermine the myths of arctic heroism. Hunt could have made much more of Stef's prescience.

His book is disappointing in its lack of psychological analysis. There must have been something about the man that made it difficult for other people to work with him. At times Hunt admits that he showed poor leadership and irritated his men unnecessarily by his arrogant attitude. Was he a man of real probity? Why did he never acknowledge his Eskimo child? Hunt maintains a polite distance from his subject, even careful not to become involved in the disputes of long ago. His book does not make exciting reading and the maps are not sufficiently detailed. Nevertheless, it is a sober, sensible book, and Stef would undoubtedly have been pleased.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH

## RUNE-WRITER

DAVID WILLIAMS, *Eye of the Father*. House of Anansi Press, \$12.95.

THIS NOVEL COMPLETES Williams' *Lacjardin Trilogy*, which also includes *The Burning Wood* (1975) and *The River Horsemen* (1981). The stories and characters of all three novels are discrete, the novels being linked only by the central importance of symbolic patterning in each and by their settings, although only

one part of *Eye of the Father* is actually set near Lacjardin Lake.

Of the three novels, this last is the boldest in concept and execution. Williams' story is surrounded, most often ironically, with large figures and patterns from Norse mythology. One-eyed Othin (Odin) is omnipresent, and almost equally important are Sigurd, Loki, and Baldr, who give their names respectively to the three major divisions of the novel. Williams also begins each of these three parts with a runic letter, the ancient meaning of which suggests the central significance of the action within that part. Hence, in the first part the rune denotes *man*; in the second part the rune suggests *necessity, compulsion, and distress*; and in the final part the rune designates *homeland or native land*.

The story itself concerns the life and death of Magnus Vangdal, the 'father' of the title, as well as the bewildered struggles of his wife and two daughters and, subsequently, of his grandson to come to terms with this man who has marked all of their lives so viciously. It is the story of a young man, born in Hardanger, Norway, who, after being seduced by an already pregnant girl, Gyda, flees his homeland to escape being forced into marriage. His exile takes him to New York, to Duluth, Minnesota, and eventually, after gambling away his father-in-law's farm in central Minnesota, on to the Lacjardin district of Saskatchewan, and finally to Rosslund and Trail, B.C., where he dies.

Before marrying Hilda Gunnar, all of Magnus' experiences with women convince him that women are deceitful, so he is unable to accept that his wife is indeed faithful to him and that his daughters, Sigfrid and Christine, are actually his. His early experiences warp his character until he incessantly brutalizes his wife and all those around him as he drinks, gambles, whores, and searches for

the elusive fortune that he believes he will discover in 'Amerika.'

The ironic overtones of the Norse myths begin to assert themselves when Magnus assumes the surname Sigurdson and climbs through a circle of fire to rescue Hilda (Brynhild?), whom he then marries in order to get her father's farm. Although he may have started life with the potential of Sigurd's son, he quickly is turned into a Loki figure and wreaks destruction within his lower abode. This irony ends with Magnus' death from cancer of the bowels, penniless after years of mining for gold in the Rosslund mine.

The real tragedy of the story lies with the patient, self-sacrificing Hilda, who gives up all her own aspirations to her love of Magnus and who gets nothing but heartache and loneliness in return. Her story, told in a moving, unself-grieving first person, is a memorably powerful one, and one effect of it is to make the subsequent accounts of Christine Goodman, Hilda's younger daughter, and of Wayne Goodman, the grandson, somewhat pale by comparison.

It is Wayne's story, though, that completes the overall design of the novel. He is a young professor of Icelandic at the University of Saskatchewan and is driven, as his mother and aunt have been, to come to terms with his dead grandfather. He even considers a trip to Trail to somehow confront Magnus, but he grows to realize that such a quest would be fruitless. He and his wife, Karen, discover their capacity for love while adopting a child, and this new awareness allows Wayne to lay the ghost of his grandfather to rest. After a remarkable scene in which Wayne hallucinates that he sees the old man in the form of Odin, hanging by his feet and writhing in agony because of the wound in his side, and turning his vacant eye socket toward Wayne, Wayne is able to accept his own responsibility for main-

taining love in his world and to stop using his grandfather as a sort of scapegoat for his own weaknesses. In a climactic passage near the end of the novel, Wayne says, "Karen, I don't need to go to Trail. My grandad's not there. He's waiting in the book I have to finish. He's sure to see me get my share of pain. But maybe we can see to it that our son gets none."

If Williams' *Eye of the Father* is the book that Wayne has to finish, then truly Wayne has found his grandfather and, in doing so, has also achieved a sort of rebirth, a life of his own beyond his grandfather's 'eye' that has not been possible for his mother, his aunt, or his grandmother. The Baldr figure of the last section would seem to sanction this optimism since Baldr was, in the Norse myths, the primary figure in the rebirth of the gods. It is as though Wayne himself becomes the Odin figure, writhing on the world-ash tree Yggdrasil, reaching in his agony to the ground to pluck up the runes that will restore him and give him even greater wisdom. Hence, are the runes that begin each section of the novel those that Wayne has secured and articulated?

It is impossible for any brief comment on Williams' novel to do justice to its richness of texture and its imaginative force. For example, one immediate problem that faced the author was that of how to have Magnus tell his part of the narrative when the character at that point knew no English. Williams solves this problem by giving us Magnus' recollections and his dialogue with other West Scandinavian speakers in English, but using blanks to indicate actual English words that Magnus hears but cannot understand. Such presentation leads to considerable humour in scenes such as Magnus' encounter with the immigration officer at Ellis Island after his ship has reached New York.

The techniques of the novel, as well as its Norse trappings, provide considerable and unusual challenge to the reader, but the result, as with Williams' other novels, is that the reader comes to feel an active participant in the creative experience of the novel. It is as though the reader, too, is struggling to take up and compose the runes which lie on the ground for the taking.

WILLIAM LATTA

## BONDS OF DIGNITY

M. G. HESSE, *Gabrielle Roy*. Twayne, \$30.00.

PROFESSOR HESSE'S BOOK is a useful introduction to the works of Gabrielle Roy for those who know nothing about the author and her writing and who read no French. It is written in English and all quotations are in English, with the original French provided in the notes.

"The Development of a Writer" gives a very brief outline of Gabrielle Roy's background and career. There follows a chapter on "The Urban Novels" (*Bonheur d'occasion* and *Alexandre Chenevert*) and one titled "Idyllic Interludes," which presents *La Petite poule d'eau* and *Cet Été qui chantait*. Mention is made, in the latter chapter, of the children's stories, *Ma Vache Bossie* and *Courte-Queue*. "A Pilgrimage to the Past" is a study of *Rue Deschambault* and *La Route d'Altamont*. "An Artist's Credo" is devoted to *La Montagne secrète*. *La Rivière sans repos* is treated in a chapter titled "Worlds in Conflict." *Un Jardin au bout du monde* and *Ces Enfants de ma vie* are grouped together under the rubric "The Canadian Mosaic." The six-page "Summary" is a brave and by and large successful attempt to put into focus some of the themes discussed in the body of the text. The bibliography is very brief and selective but the choices are reliable.

A closer proofreading would have uncovered the occasional lapse. Gabrielle Roy's death is duly noted but at another point she is said to be leading "a life devoted almost exclusively to her art."

Each chapter consists for the most part of an account of the critical reception of the works in question and a detailed plot summary. There is some room, however, for analysis and commentary. The importance of the themes of childhood and memory is well illustrated in the discussion of *Rue Deschambault* and *La Route d'Altamont*, there is a sensitive presentation of *La Petite poule d'eau* and *Cet Été qui chantait*, but the comments on *Alexandre Chenevert* are disappointing. Hesse does not appreciate the revelation and transformation at Lac Vert and misses the profound message concerning the individual's opportunity for self-discovery and regeneration. The chapter on *La Montagne secrète* affords Hesse an opportunity to discuss Gabrielle Roy's understanding of the artist's vision and role in society. The artist's calling imposes a solitary life and, yet, one that ultimately creates bonds of solidarity with the reader.

The brevity accorded each text is more cruelly felt in some cases than in others. The two pages dedicated to *Ces Enfants de ma vie* are simply too few to yield anything but the most superficial plot summary for one of Gabrielle Roy's truly impressive works.

Hesse correctly emphasizes Gabrielle Roy as the Canadian writer most concerned with the Canadian mosaic and unreservedly sympathetic to Canada's new settlers and the homeless. The "stranger" is, for Gabrielle Roy, a metaphor expressing the human condition. Hesse makes the point directly: "It is meaningless to speak of 'strangers' for it applies to no one or every one."

In the summary, the author of this study places Gabrielle Roy in the con-

text of French-Canadian literary history but stresses the universality of her writing. Her works are concerned with human dignity and the ideal of fellowship, and her characters embody the struggle for the realization of that dream. Hesse repeats Donald Cameron's observation that what one finds in Gabrielle Roy is wisdom, in spite of the fact that she is an intuitive, rather than an intellectual, writer.

Hesse notes that Gabrielle Roy's works which take place in the past are primarily idealistic and utopian, whereas the ones situated in the contemporary period are mostly "realistic." She presents Gabrielle Roy's fiction in terms of a series of dualities — the ideal and the real, the prairie and Quebec, life and death, self and others — but there is, nevertheless, an essential, underlying unity. One finds, in the final analysis, a bond between the author and her readers that extends beyond that relationship to represent the link between the individual and his fellow man.

This volume does not so much constitute an addition to the increasingly varied critical material on Gabrielle Roy as an opportunity for English-Canadian and American readers to acquaint themselves with one of Canada's best writers. Mordecai Richler once commented sardonically that Canadian literature is the only world literature to be read exclusively in Canada. Any serious attempt to remedy that situation should be welcome.

PAUL SOCKEN

## SHALLOW GRIEFS

DAVID GILMOUR, *Back on Tuesday*. Coach House, \$12.50.

IMAGINE A DILUTED mixture of Lowry's *Under the Volcano* and Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* and you have the

feel of David Gilmour's first novel, *Back on Tuesday*. After a disagreement with his ex-wife J., Eugene, the self-pitying narrator, steals his five-year-old daughter Franny from school and flees with her to Jamaica, where in a long drunken night of wandering from bar to bar he reveals his sorry life story of self-destructive self-indulgences. Like all the anti-heroes of this kind of male romance, Eugene is a childish and violent misogynist who proves incredibly attractive to women. He had to work hard at driving J. away — through a string of affairs with beautiful women — but is now hurt at having succeeded. In the course of his Jamaican dark night of the soul, another attractive and successful woman offers herself to him. It's all too predictable. He knows all the stories have already been written and he will never be as important to anyone as he wants to be: "You're not the new kid on the block anymore. There's no reason to believe that the next one will be different from the last one." Even his jaded nihilism has been anticipated. As J. has explained to him: "No grief, no matter how shallow, lasts forever."

This is a defensive book. It has all the answers. Anticipating the objection that there are no characters, it explains that characters are nothing but fictions, roles assumed and cast off like costumes. Anticipating the objection that nothing happens, it makes that disappointment its central theme: "It felt as if I'd spent my life stealing out of white rooms to walk down dark roads — and every time I'm convinced that some night I'm going to stumble across something, a happiness as big as the sun. But it's a lie of course. There's nothing out there." There is nothing here but patterns of words and images, some *fin de siècle* world-weariness, some Wildean wisecracks, some muted adolescent angst — and a lot of anxiety of influence.

What else could you expect from a novel about two English students, whose happy memories include meeting in Shakespeare class and studying together for a Chaucer exam? The novel even parodies its immersion in a sea of cliché. When Lily, Eugene's latest conquest, asks what he is writing (in response to a lie that impresses even him — he has told her he is here to write a book), he answers: "it's about a guy who comes to the tropics and loses his marbles." Lily offers: "Like what's his name's book." "Yeah, exactly," he answers. Even that criticism, then, has been denied me. He has said it before I could. This is like what's his name's book. And it's not a bad approximation. Gilmour handles pacing well. *Back on Tuesday* is sensitive to language, drunk on images, steeped in literary traditions (chiefly American and European) — but it has nothing to say.

Trapped in the narrator's solipsism, Toronto is reduced to "an ugly house on an ugly street" and Jamaica, to the expatriate's nightmare in paradise. This is a determinedly "universal" novel, locating its universalism in the consciousness of the middle-class 1960's male, for whom life's greatest tragedies have been the death of John Lennon and the pressures to grow up. Using the combative language of this genre of fiction to describe his decision to phone J. and give up Franny — "There comes a time when you've got to stop ducking and take a punch and Tuesday morning, that's when I took mine" — he finds, in an appallingly inappropriate simile for the 18 hours of his self-induced ordeal, that "We must have looked like war veterans, J. and I." A lot of talent has produced an empty book.

DIANA BRYDON



## DUST BOWL TO NEVER LAND

ANDREAS SCHROEDER, *Dustship Glory*. Doubleday, \$19.95.

*Dustship Glory* does not bear the slightest taint of pedantry, yet it is one of those rare, fine novels from which we learn much, and learn it joyously. Subtly, we become aware, as we read and reflect upon Andreas Schroeder's perfectly proportioned documentary novel, that we have grown because our awareness of many things has enlarged — of parochial things, including the life of Finnish immigrants to North America, the conflicts among constituent groups of rural communities, the vast scope of the Prairie (which Schroeder captures in powerful sea imagery) and its effect on the spirit, the struggle to survive on the Prairie through the twin plagues of dust bowl and Great Depression, bureaucratic insentience, and compassion. Above all, we finish *Dustship Glory* knowing more about catholic matters — about the human soul, about marriage, love, and friendship, about pride, untutored genius, even monomania — than we knew before.

Schroeder's protagonist is a representation of the historical Finnish-Canadian Tom Sukanen, who actually did spend the Depression years in southern Saskatchewan building and all but putting the finishing touches on a sizeable seaworthy freighter a nightmare away from the sea. The novel's documentary format is a series of interviews with family, friends, and acquaintances of Sukanen (through Schroeder's fine sense of language, each speaks in an appropriately distinctive voice), interspersed among chapters of sensitive interpretation and description by the omniscient investigator. The pattern permits the illusion of more or less objective reporting, and

the "true" Tom Sukanen emerges slowly from the happy patchwork of contradictory perceptions of him, as well as from his own myriad eccentricities. "The man's a harmless eccentric, . . . and this one's a natural born frustrated engineer to boot," insists Thorndike, one of the few sympathetic neighbours, with an English tolerance for eccentricity. "Aw, let's face it," comments Clay Jackson, a local with an opposite view, "he weren't nuthin' but a ringading nutcase." The broadly comic chapter comprising an interview with Avro Sukanen, Tom's puffed-up, malapropian nephew, is alone worth the price of the novel as he discusses his uncle's "abominational" behaviour approvingly.

At face value, Sukanen's actions tend to support a derogatory view of him. As an immigrant to rural Minnesota, Sukanen, who is nothing if not direct, gets into difficulty with the law by accidentally breaking the back of his partner in an icy marriage as he claims what he assumes to be his conjugal right. Whatever that says about him, his trek to his new home in Canada tells volumes. Always a navigation buff who wears a compass around his neck, he walks, swims, and shoulders his way the six-hundred miles to Manybones, Saskatchewan, across roads, fields, and rivers in a line astonishing for its unswerving perfection. We trifle with such men and their dreams only at our peril.

The interview technique also allows Schroeder to achieve effective dramatic irony. For example, to one of the informants, Margaret Hollington, Sukanen's naming of his fantastic ship *Sontianen*, Finnish for "dung-beetle," is a question of "cheap theatrics," designed by the obsessive old crank to play all of the local people for "monumental fools." We know that there is more to it than orneriness, however. We have been present at the moment when, having himself just

come through a tornado that kills a neighbour's family, he comes across a dung-beetle that he cannot destroy by smothering with sand, stomping, or burning; so closely (and rightly!) does he identify with that indomitable little survivor that on the instant he decides to name the cargo steamer — in which he has invested his soul — for it.

Our admiration for Sukanen grows over the course of the novel in spite of, sometimes because of, his detractors. Next to him they are small people who exist or go under without vision. More and more he comes to acquire — to us, not to them — the stature of Old Testament prophet. In that hellish time and place, unwashed and increasingly unclothed, railing madly against women and the government, he is utterly in his element. Almost infinitely resourceful, he makes do with practically anything. While all the others are cursing the ravaging locusts, he finds them a blessing: "I have-it now lunch any time I hungry." Able to trade, scavenge, invent, build all he needs for the ship, he knows to smear himself with horse manure to keep off the flies, and to lubricate his pathetic deadman winch, with which he must inch the vessel fifteen miles to the nearest water, with the grease of crushed snails and slugs.

But his greatest invention is the dream of the freighter which his attackers see as a threat to their sense of order and even his defenders cannot begin to understand. "A ship in a dust-storm. That's the kind of sense he wanted us to believe," complains the irate Mrs. Thorn-dike. Yes, we come to realize, and that is the only kind of sense that makes sense in the central circumstances of their lives. "Much Madness is divinest Sense," as Emily Dickenson told us. His belief that government relief is to be avoided because it contains poison may be metaphorically true. And he does have an

ingenious plan to get his ship to the sea. With the mystical star chart he has drawn on the ceiling of his poor tower-house, with his treasured compass, it does not matter that he is planning to sail his mythic Crockerland on the Arctic Sea or to the Sea of Malagar in the southern hemisphere or back to Finland. Once you "Demur — you're straightway dangerous — / And handled with a Chain —." It only matters that the *Sontianen* is a-building when nothing else is a-building among those God-forsaken coulees and prairies, and that one dream soars where no other can kick free of the sand, and that Andreas Schroeder shows us that so well.

ALAN SHUGARD

## FROST SHADOWS

RICHARD LUSH, *A Manual for Lying Down*. Wolsak & Wynn, \$7.00.

PATRICIA YOUNG, *Melancholy Ain't No Baby*. Ragweed, \$8.95.

COLIN MORTON, *This won't last forever*. Long-spoon, \$7.00.

DALE ZIEROTH, *When the Stones fly up*. Anansi, \$8.95.

THE COVER OF COLIN MORTON'S *This won't last forever* bears a photograph of a typewriter festooned with icicles. This may not be a common sight in Canada, but for an outsider like myself it suggests a lot about a country which is so arctic as to seem almost mythical. Whereas the dominant images in Australia are the sea, the bush, and the desert — all hot and highly coloured — Canada seems to live in the shadow of frost, threatened by the blank erasure of snow.

When the frost strikes, though, it can be the same in both countries. Richard Lush's collection starts with a series of poems detailing the breakup of a marriage because of a lesbian relationship. The hurt, the bewilderment, and the

anger are caught in poems which evade self-pity. Lush's strength is in building pictures, in subtle and economical dramatisations of complex situations in non-dramatic language:

This is a name day and  
sleet begins to tick at the window.  
The kitchen woman whispers, "I'm sorry."  
Man and child leave. And there are  
no words for what has happened.

The awareness that no words will really do causes Lush to be wary of their seductions, frugal in his choice. The result is an eloquent plainness which is sophisticated and very assured. This transforms vulnerability into poignancy, in a poetry where glimpses reveal more than acres of gazing.

The poems of Richard Lush that I find least satisfying are those exploring a new love. It seems hard, today, to write fully satisfying love lyrics. Perhaps it always was. Colin Morton does his best, but his efforts just go to prove how difficult it is without the conventions that sustained earlier love poets. His poems seem superfluous: if the relationship is as good as they suggest, then it is a lot better than the poems. It may be another case of there being "no words for what has happened." But Morton has other strengths. "Waking up in the 1960s" will chill the blood of anyone in their forties with its acute hindsight; and his playful way with language produces a hilarious variation on Hamlet's soliloquy:

To be or not to be: that is the quickstep;  
whether 'tis nobler in the minimum to  
suffer  
the slip-ups and arsenic of outrageous  
foundlings  
or to take armistice against a seam of  
trout. . . .

"Inventory" and "Poem without Shame" are among a number of other poems which show a lively and quirky talent whose curiosity about language is also a

way of seeing things freshly. Although it is an uneven book, its title *This won't last forever*, while true, is unnecessarily deprecating.

Patricia Young's *Melancholy Ain't No Baby* ranges less widely. Like many other women poets, she writes about what is close up, so close to home that many men cannot even see it:

The absolute terror  
of living like this. With food on the table,  
wine in the fridge, a good man in my bed.

Her perspective illuminates common experience, not only from a woman's point of view but also from a child's. Men write of their love with a gratitude that sets it aside from the business of living. But for Patricia Young love is something which presents its own problems — children, purpose, identity — and has to be coped with daily. Moreover it is imbricated with the one language which has to make do for all things. Her poetry is lively, unsettling, and very attractive.

Dale Zieroth's *When the Stones fly up* is, from an outsider's point of view, the most obviously Canadian in setting and topography. Yet for me it is the least rewarding. Strangely, these poems about childhood on the prairies are little different from many others about childhood in small country towns in very different parts of the world. "1956: The old Lutheran pastor" — one of the best in this collection — could as readily have been written in South Australia, where there is a large German emigrant population. These poems delineate the new trans-national imaginative territory — nostalgia, which is much the same everywhere and, by definition, offering little that is new. Which goes to show that being faithful to local detail is not enough, unless that faith is tempered by a radical curiosity. Zieroth is not untouched by that, and some of his poems explore behind the scenery of the scene. But Pa-

tricia Young's view of domesticity is not only closer to home, but also far less familiar and more exciting.

ANDREW TAYLOR

## OVER & OVER

BARBARA K. LATHAM & ROBERTA J. PAZDRO, eds., *Not Just Pin Money — Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia*. Camosun College, \$12.00.

RICHARD THOMAS WRIGHT, *Overlanders*. Western Producer Prairie Books, n.p.

THESE TWO BOOKS appear to have little in common and essentially this is true. *Pin Money* is entirely about women's experiences in British Columbia; *Overlanders* is 99.99% about men's experiences in the Gold Rush days. *Overlanders* is more or less a continuous narrative based on diaries, news items, and letters; *Pin Money* is a collection of papers given at the Women's History in British Columbia Conference in 1984. *Overlanders* is more sure of its goal and for that reason is more successful; *Pin Money* editors admit that "its audience is neither homogeneous nor predictable." Still, since both deal with history, I found reading them together enlightening if only because the fact that history is largely a male account of the past is the *raison d'être* of *Pin Money* and is self-consciously alluded to in *Overlanders*. More about that later.

I read *Pin Money* first and went through various stages of deep interest, annoyance, and frustration. It is a very uneven collection and it is far too long. I am beginning to have doubts about the academic habit of publishing conference papers anyway. Orally presented papers that anticipate audience participation are different from articles or essays prepared for journals. But perhaps the biggest problem is that the editors, in this case, have included materials that differ

greatly in quality and kind. The so-called "essay" on women MLA's, for instance, is not an essay. It consists of brief biographies with photos but lacks focus or analysis; "Postscript: Women in Whose Honour B.C. Schools Have Been Named," described as "tables" by the author and "preliminary results of a project" (though I don't know how it can be both pre- and post-), seems inappropriate in this collection because it is without context. Other essays suffer because they repeat the obvious. Perhaps the authors would respond that what to some is obvious is news to others, but (although my knowledge of women's studies is not profound) I came across little that surprised or informed me. What I kept hoping for and all too often didn't find was interpretation or analysis or any sort of theoretical approach to the material. A lot of groundwork has been done (and must continue) but where do the historians go from there? What do they make of their findings? Now that there is proof that women have been exploited, disenfranchised, abused, denied fundamental rights, have most often done this or that depending on race and class and era, what comes next? Do women just go on collecting more and more data?

The essay "When You Don't Know the Language . . ." on the history of Native Indian women, was one of the essays that for various reasons was worth publishing (which is not to say others were not worth presenting at a conference). Mitchell and Franklin alert the reader to the importance of an analytical approach to historical information. "Critical assessment" and "new directions" are announced as goals by the authors. The remark that "matriarchies were concocted by males to provide justification for the way the world is and ought to be — truly patriarchal and male dominated" challenges assumptions and sug-

gests a re-evaluation of research already done. Pazdro's "From Pastels to Chisel: The Changing Role of B.C. Women Artists" places her biographies in a wider context: "The question that is more important than the individual achievements of these women artists is why they have been misrepresented and ignored and what this treatment reveals about art history."

Margaret Conrad in her introductory essay "Sundays Always Make Me Think of Home . . ." (are the often incredibly long titles another indication of the origin of the material?) remarks that "Virtually every historical topic is evaluated differently when seen through the eyes of women." I wondered if I was too conscious of this when I was reading *Overlanders* but, like a bolt from the blue, Richard Thomas Wright reveals his sensitivity to the implied criticism in that view and interrupts his narrative to lecture a bit on it. He is somewhat exercised by the attention given "Catherine Schubert's travel" (an overlander or just the wife of an overlander?) and remarks "if she is given heroine status for walking the plains while pregnant, the same status should be accorded many other Métis and Indian women." But surely that principle applies equally to the men. What these mostly white, male overlanders have done is nothing more than Métis men or Indian men have done — in fact they have done it often enough to be guides for the white men. The two paragraphs which follow are uncharacteristically muddled including puzzling and gratuitous remarks like that on the relationship between men (Overlander? Elizabethan? Victorian?) being "a cultural bonding that resulted in a certain amount of homosexuality that was not 'buggery'."

Fortunately Wright avoids philosophizing in most of the book. He succeeds quite brilliantly in weaving together the

many accounts left by overlanders into a continuous and engaging story. There is bound to be a certain amount of repetition — men knee-deep in mud dragging oxen to firm ground, mosquitoes, rain, snow, hunger — they were the common lot but personalities do emerge. For Nova Scotians the narrative by Joseph A. Wheelock of Bridgetown (typo in book) will be of special interest but it is also among the best. The amazing and perhaps amusing conclusion to the typically five- to seven-month arduous adventure west was that relatively few of the men actually ended up panning gold. The expenses of the overland route came to about one hundred dollars but, ironically, the mining tools were the only articles "found to be unnecessary."

KATHLEEN TUDOR

## EXCESSES

PIER GIORGIO DI CICCIO, *Post-Sixties Nocturne*. Fiddlehead, \$6.95.

BRUCE WHITEMAN, *The Invisible World Is in Decline*. Coach House, \$6.95.

STEVEN SMITH, *Blind Zone*. Aya Press, \$8.00.

THERE'S NO POINT in mincing words: Pier Giorgio di Cicco's latest collection (his tenth since 1977) is disappointing. Quality is not necessarily contingent upon lack of quantity — there is no guarantee that those poets who publish very little will be the best — but there is a danger in publishing too much too soon without giving the work a chance to "set" so the author can evaluate it as objectively as he can. Writers are not to be castigated for a large output, only a *poor* one.

When I reviewed *The Tough Romance* a number of years ago, I said that di Cicco's work had "both the strength of sincerity and the integrity of talent." The same can not be said about *Post-*

*Sixties Nocturne*. The post-sixties post-mortems (the book could well be subtitled *Baby Boomer's Lament*) are, for the most part, too commonplace to be interesting. Di Cicco is self-conscious, aware that he's a poet with a capital P. He writes out of a fashionable and now, for him, habitual pose: that of the poet as hip-talking seer and social critic.

He also has an annoying tendency to jump from one idea, one image, to another without providing adequate bridges for the reader. For example:

Who would want to brave things in the  
cold? How many  
jackasses does it take to have lunch and  
report on the  
latest Salt Talks?

We saw Peter Pan flying low on the land,  
and Popeye and  
Daffy Duck crying like madmen in the  
comic book sky.

Surprising and difficult leaps are not uncommon in contemporary poetry (Erin Mouré's work comes immediately to mind), and there's not a thing wrong with them — so long as they make sense. I suspect that in di Cicco's case the leaps are indications of a lack of craftsmanship.

Di Cicco can *sound* good, but if one takes the time to look at what's being said, one notices a conspicuous lack of meaning:

I pretzel my fears, I have and always  
will like some mad rover. I hear the  
gong tonight, as any other night —  
the cold, the shallow winter air. . .

Pretzeled fears, mad rovers, gongs, cold weather — where is the connection here, the unity?

And then there's the "cuteness" with which the book abounds:

I have two hundred dollars in the bank  
and  
think of writing about Charleston. The  
bank

teller tells me my account is on hold. I  
explain to her that I'm learning Martian  
dialects  
and live on Mars.

As for di Cicco's juxtaposition of slang and the sublime (the coarsely colloquial and the lyrically elevated), it makes for some wonderful lines when it works — which it often doesn't, mainly because of the problems discussed above.

Perhaps the biggest flaw in *Post-Sixties Nocturne* is the rampant excess: too much of too much. Di Cicco has an energetic imagination, but it needs to be channelled into more carefully revised and edited writing.

Bruce Whiteman's *The Invisible World Is in Decline*, a sequence of 39 prose poems, is in some respects as excessive as di Cicco's book. Whiteman relies on an overwhelming dose of scientific jargon, reminiscent of Christopher Dewdney (who, incidentally, edited this volume), to hammer home the point that the self in modern society is being smothered by the world's "invasion" — information overload. Bio-babble, techno-babble, babble of all kinds — language becomes an alienator. All this terminology is effective, up to a point. It forces the reader to experience the confusion and frustration the poet is trying to convey. However, a whole book of this is tedious, contrived, and unrelentingly intellectual.

It is dangerous for a writer to let language dominate so completely. For instance:

Its spherical harmonic is a rational integral  
homogeneous function of the three variables  
of sex,  
birth and death. At any given point  
equidistant  
from its centre a man has the blessed  
impression  
of stillness in the midst of a polymorphous  
promiscuous rattletrap universe.

Or how about:

He was responding like a remote-sensing  
device to

the black quadrilateral suggestiveness of the earth and an image from heaven relayed by the trigonometry of direct triangulation. The multitudinous layers of the Homeric city rose like increasingly decadent elaborations of an inhuman perception. But like all memory it culminated in death and total loss, a whiteout.

After reading this type of thing, I am inclined to agree with Whiteman when he says "Language is over all our heads." It sure is in this book.

In *Blind Zone* by Steven Smith language is once again seemingly more important than what is being said. Gertrude Stein would be proud of Smith's "portrait" for Steve McCaffery,

portrait is a/ is a picture/ is a stephen/  
pic  
ture a stephen/ a source/ a sound/ a source  
be  
yond/ is a sound beyond source/ beyond  
pictur  
e/ beyond a sound/ beyond imagining/ an  
image

and John Cage would probably emphasize with the inspiration behind the two poems dedicated to him: "This Is a Poem About Sound," which is a blank page, and "alterations" which I quote in full: "pr\*p#r!d p=&n%." (No, these are not typographical errors.)

And a whole *host* of bad writers could use the opening of the "white cycle" sequence as justification for publishing their own work: "anyway / (a new white yawn) / wishing / you want negatives / many say hand / see a hand here / writing."

So very little goes such a long way: 64 pages to be exact.

EVA TIHANYI



## HUMANE VISION

SHIRLEY NEUMAN, ed., *Another Country: Writings by and about Henry Kreisel*. New West, \$19.95/9.95.

THIS BOOK HOLDS OUT three different kinds of interest to its readers. First, but not necessarily most important, is the sampling of Henry Kreisel's uncollected creative writing, some juvenilia (poems, short stories, fragments from a novel) by the young internee of the 1940's, a radio play from the 1960's, and a couple of short stories from the 1980's. Second is an assortment of literary, cultural, and social criticism. The most interesting, witty, imaginative, and wise is by Henry Kreisel himself: essays, letters, and talks which explore the problems facing an immigrant writer in the Canadian cultural scene and which range over a variety of authors, Canadian and European, whose example and inspiration helped Kreisel to find his own voice. More familiar fare, by comparison, is the selection of critical articles by other scholars who offer explications and assessments of the whole body of Kreisel's achievements as a writer.

The third focus of interest — and this is what makes the book worth reading and re-reading — is the bringing together of a rich selection of autobiographical materials which dramatize for us in detail and vividly the life, especially the inner life, of a remarkable man who, over a period of forty years, has made a major contribution going beyond literature and criticism to his adopted Canada.

The earliest writing certainly remains juvenilia in its naiveté and technical awkwardness. But it is nevertheless admirable for its precociousness, the product of an adolescent Austrian Jew, fugitive from Nazism, eagerly struggling to express himself in the unpropitious conditions of internment, and driven by a powerful urge to do so in a foreign lan-

guage whose literature he had barely begun to discover. What the fiction shows most clearly is Kreisel's early commitment to the study of human character in situations of stress, where moral and spiritual challenges are encountered, and powerful basic emotions are endured. His attraction to the simplicity and clarity of fable is also evident, as is his reliance on symbolism and symbolic action to manifest inner reality. Indeed, although the later stories and novels demonstrate a much greater control over the techniques of realism, like their predecessors they continue to suggest to the reader that verisimilitude, the carefully constructed persuasiveness of observed details that ring true, is for Kreisel not a virtue to rank with the kinds of moral truth that a shaped tale can communicate. Reading early or late Kreisel we often find ourselves wanting to suspend our disbelief for the sake of what we can learn about the human condition.

It is this sacrifice of superficial consistency for underlying power that tempts Kreisel's critics, and even Kreisel himself, to be apologetic sometimes. They seem to believe that there are ways of approaching the novels and short stories that will remove a recurring sense of uneasiness with the realistic texture. But the limitations even of mature works like *The Rich Man* and *The Betrayal* are simpler to ignore than to argue away, just as those who find the Biblical parables illuminating and moving are unlikely to question whether dialogue or settings are entirely convincing. It is not by accident that the two principal models Kreisel found to help him enter the stream of English language writing and Canadian literary culture, Joseph Conrad and A. M. Klein, also pay only lip service to the conventions of realism.

Understandably, Klein had more to offer than Conrad, though Kreisel ponders with insight the different motives

and methods that brought that great Polish predecessor into the heart of English literature. "Conrad's solution of how to deal with the raw materials of his experience could not be mine. It was A. M. Klein who showed me how one could use, without self-consciousness, the material that came from a specifically European and Jewish experience." How quickly and fully Kreisel seems to have recognized the necessity for him to become Canadian without ever abandoning the "strength and vividness" of his deepest roots.

It is Henry Kreisel's personal story, sketched in, supplemented, recapitulated, consolidated in section after section dating from the 1940's to the 1980's, that *Another Country* tells so eloquently. The intense, idealistic Jewish refugee boy clings to his sense of the value of art and literature as the expression of the greatness of the human spirit, in the confines of internment in England and Canada; freed, he plunges into the stream of Canadian social and cultural life and against all odds swims strongly to the top of the educational system; he achieves success as a creative writer and as a professor and active citizen of the social and academic community. All the while he never forgets the dark forces of evil which decimated Jewry and drove him and his family into exile, which nearly destroyed civilization, which at times appear all too close to doing so still. And all the while he studies, compassionately broods over, keeps flowing freely, the deep stream of human passions, especially the need to give and receive love, which is the only real counterbalance to that evil. It is a voice concentrated by the painful experience of absolutes in the crucible of modern times, but speaking a powerful affirmation, that reaches us clearly and simply from the life and work of Henry Kreisel.

F. W. WATT

## ANYBODY HOME

BYRNA BARCLAY, *The Last Echo*. NeWest, \$19.95/7.95.

NANCY BAUER, *Wise-Ears*. Oberon, \$12.95.

THESE TWO NOVELS struggle with important themes, but are ultimately unable, as Columbus failed to find his short-cut to the Orient, to find a direct route to the heart. For opposite reasons, having to do with density and craft, the two authors recognize their countries on the map but don't quite take us there. It is feminine territory, fertile land staked for storytelling, populated by women with the energy and temperament to give and sustain life.

*The Last Echo* is the sound of hooves beating on the wooden floors of a burning house as the horses of Revelation are translated into lemmings rising from the ashes of the old world to scamper off to the new. It is also heartbeat, the impetus to undertake and survive the quest for new beginnings in the New Jerusalem. Byrna Barclay's novel, legato movement in *The Livelong Quartet*, the story of Swedish settlement in a Saskatchewan town, is the synthesis of Genesis and Revelation, symbolic language recording the transplanting of hope in the Promised Land. Certainly this is not an original response to the prairie which, more than any other region in Canada, seems to have inspired in writers an archetypal response, the language and metaphor of traditional mythologies.

At the centre of this novel, a songspiel in the oral tradition of Homer and Chaucer, rich in humour and visual detail, is the earth-mother refracted in the colours of four Swedish daughters, mares with the strength and grace of Biblical horses. Their song is re-creation and it bubbles from instinct.

Inside the music box; a ring set with three runic stones. I hold it up to the sun

but it does not catch light. Stone is only stone in Livelong. I slide it on my wedding finger, twist and turn it, making a wish: "Canada. Now I am for that place."

Barclay's prose is rich in sensual detail. It has the line and colour of paintings by Breughel. What is missing is the deeper resonance that comes from a closer identification with the intelligence and feeling of her characters. Somehow we are distracted by the wealth of gorgeous detail, the wood carving and embroidery that catches the eye and disengages the heart and intellect. They are colourful shapes in a fairytale gestalt, passionate and real as far as we are allowed to penetrate the surface of intuition. We just want to know them better. There is such a richness in this prose, we are left with a longing to know one heart carved in a proliferation of singing clocks.

*Wise-Ears*, a novel by Nancy Bauer, is very nicely gift-wrapped in fine paper with an appropriate cover painting by Maxwell Bates. Inside, there is something breakable, the glass heart of a middle-aged woman seeking her own truth in the kind of therapeutic activity our culture seems to oblige us to undertake. Sophie espouses good causes and continues to fret over children who have already dropped their first feathers and gratefully flown the coop.

Much of this novel is excelsior shaved to protect its fragile centre. Unfortunately, like the stuffed lives of women like Sophie, much of it is banal, the spinning of threads that lead nowhere near the truth. Sophie's letter-writing and forays into the kitchen are self-conscious attempts at creativity. We feel sorry for her but find ourselves dozing off into that good night as she avoids her real rage and pain with the usual anodynes.

Occasionally we jerk awake long enough to wish her off her broadening derriere as her sexless soap opera lists

off into dreamland. The only perk is a son who just might liven things up by coming out of the closet and enraging his male parent. Unfortunately, just in time, he switches the channel to redeeming heterosexuality, saving Sophie and letting us lapse back into lethargy. Good old Edmund.

The novel reads like one of Sophie's projects, activity contrived to take the edge off boredom. We never get to her heart of darkness, so busy are we ticking off the daily lists.

On 8 and 9 June, Sophie sat at the kitchen table all morning worrying. What kind of project could she do that would make sense at the end of July? On 20 June she sat again now desperate. Redecorating was out. Some self-improvement project? Lose weight? Swim every day? Memorize poetry? Learn the names of wildflowers? Crochet an Afghan, maybe a crib-sized one. Somehow none of her ideas seemed important enough to justify the build-up she had given her project.

Amen.

LINDA ROGERS

## ART WEST

MARILYN BAKER, *The Winnipeg School of Art*. Univ. of Manitoba Press, \$16.50.

BRUCE HAIG, *Paul Kane Artist*. Detselig Enterprises, \$10.95.

THESE BOOKS ARE historical accounts of how painting can develop and grow in a pioneer setting, where populations are small and resources seemingly nonexistent. The first, by Marilyn Baker, is a sort of expanded catalogue, which documents the founding and development of the Winnipeg School of Art from 1913, when it was founded, to 1934, three years after Lemoine Fitzgerald became its principal. The occasion for publication was an exhibition, "The Early Years" (held in 1977), which not only gathered up the work done by Winnipeg artists during

the first twenty years of the Winnipeg School, but also set out "to investigate the relationship between art education and the art produced at that time." It also includes biographies of all the students and teachers who studied and taught at the school during those formative years. Not less interesting are the notes about the citizens who were associated with the school — men and women who must have believed in the possibility of art, even in a remote provincial city whose chief concerns were money, wheat, and settlement. I happen to have been one of the children who attended Saturday morning classes in 1927-28, and I still remember a beautiful Christmas card from Lemoine Fitzgerald, who, if he did not actually teach my class, must have at least visited it.

Predictably, the first directors of the school were British or American, and Lemoine Fitzgerald, appointed principal in 1929, was the first local and only second Canadian artist to head the school. The other Canadian was Franz Johnston, a member of the Group of Seven, who had been principal from 1921 to 1924. Fitzgerald was no jumper-onto-band-wagons; although he had managed to study in New York for a year and to travel all over Canada and the United States, he came back to paint the snow-filled backyards and sun-glittered roofs of Winnipeg, and to exhibit the work of Arthur Lismer, Lawren Harris, and J. E. H. Macdonald. At a time when Canada was still very much of a colonial outpost and a country with no flag of its own, he believed that these painters would stimulate the students, and their work would help them to realize the possibilities of their own Canadian subjects. In 1932 Fitzgerald joined the Group of Seven and remained the principal of the Winnipeg School of Art until 1949. Among the students who attended the Winnipeg School are such well-known

artists as Philip Surrey, Charles Comfort, William Winter, and Irene Hemsworth. There are many others, illustrators and teachers, who — judging by the paintings reproduced here — deserve to be better known than they are: Cyril Barraud, Beth Ballantyne, Lars Haukaness, and George Overton.

This is a rich book, full of interesting and important facts and beautiful illustrations, but it suffers from the attempt to do too much — to be both an all-encompassing history and a contemporary tribute, as well as a catalogue and an interpretation. The double column layout and the fitful organization make it hard to read and follow, and the frequent lapses into newspeak with the use of such words as “art-wise” and “upcoming” are unforgivable. Yet in spite of these faults, *The Winnipeg School of Art* provides a wonderful source-book for future researchers, and impresses all of us with the stubborn and persistent belief in art and art education that prompted the citizens of Winnipeg to set up, to struggle for, and to support a school in the wilds and isolation of their prairie city. That is what civilization is all about.

And civilization takes courage to achieve. Paul Kane, as he emerges from the pages of Bruce Haig’s *Paul Kane Artist*, must have had plenty of courage of the physical sort to follow the route that Haig traces. Published under the auspices of the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, this study is one of a series, “Following Historic Trails.” Haig, an explorer and former teacher, is the founder of a program which gives students the opportunity to follow historic trails as part of their curriculum. Indeed, this book is mostly a well-researched, carefully annotated map of Paul Kane’s routes. With the help of Haig’s maps, the art explorer can figure out just when and where Kane found his encampments, canoes, buffalo and Indian subjects be-

tween 1846 and 1848 when he made his western journeys.

Unfortunately, from my point of view, the author’s technical interests and travel routes largely overshadow the human aspects and psychological motivations of Kane’s journeys. One is left with a compass, a how-to-follow Kane, and a lot of fragmentary bits of information which somehow never come together to show us either a man or a painter. One is also left with a sense of wonder that Kane accomplished these difficult forays into what are still today impenetrable, mountainous, and mosquito-ridden wilds; and also amazement at how the author followed him there. Haig is certainly a courageous explorer, but it takes a different kind of courage and a more enduring imaginative effort to make a writer.

MIRIAM WADDINGTON

## TRIAL BY EXPERIENCE

ANNE MARRIOTT, *Letters from Some Islands*. Mosaic Press, \$8.95.

LEONA GOM, *Private Properties*. Sono Nis, \$6.95.

ANNE MARRIOTT’S BOOK is divided into five sections. Two are single works; the other three are cohesive groups of poems. Marriott is particularly concerned with travel and landscape. But travel inevitably reminds her of the British Columbia she has left behind, and of her childhood there, as in “The Danish Sketches” of the first section, where vivid scenes of Denmark often lead to meditations on Canada and the past. Marriott seems to have taken the theory of the objective correlative to heart (she began writing in the 1930’s when it was so influential). Place for her becomes a set of metaphors for emotions or relationships, and this prevents the travel poems from becoming mere postcards or anecdotes. One divi-

sion of the book is actually called "Notes and Postcards," but — to take the first poem and the last — in "Ironwood: East of Indio" a desert tree becomes an image of the self after a trial by experience, and in "The Black Rocks of Oregon" harsh imagery of sea and rock is emblematic of grief and loss.

Trial by experience: Marriott counts losses in this book. The loss of youth, the loss of love. A vanished marriage haunts the poems. Marriott's experience as a human being and artist has not made her glib. The poems are direct in style and feeling; vulnerable. Not confessional in any sensational way. The reader is moved aesthetically — by diction, line sense, and above all imagery — and emotionally. The poems in the "Travels in North America" section are especially intense. "Summer Rivers" and "Interstate Five," elegies for lost love, are noteworthy: they work through their correlatives in a perfectly natural (perfectly artful) way.

There are failures in the book. "Golden Gate Libretto" provides some snapshots of San Francisco that do not seem important enough. And the title sequence, a kind of poetic diary kept while waiting for a love letter, does not work as a coherent sequence. There are too many gaps, too much brooding and anxiety rendered in flat lines. Recurring motifs (dreams, sea images, architectural metaphors) try to bind the poems together, but there is not enough context. Waiting for a letter is a kind of plot, but not a very tight one. Fortunately, the book can survive a weak section: on balance, its strengths are conspicuous.

Leona Gom has written so well about her background in rural Alberta that we might overlook her range as a poet. She is also a brilliant satirist and a sophisticated student of urban life and its discontents — and of suburban life, too. *Private Properties* begins with a section called "... keeping in shape." Aerobic

dancing, trendiest of trends, is an excellent vehicle for Gom's satire. The practice embodies some common obsessions among the upscale: appearance, fancy clothing, the quest for self-improvement. The aerobic poems modulate into comments on home-owning, marriage, and investments. Gom has just the tools for dealing with these topics: understatement, overstatement, and the revealing metaphor (arthritis as a symbol for an aging house) used in the right proportions.

The middle section, "... a better revolutionary," deals with women's issues: rape, toxic shock, pornography, battered wives. The humour of the first section fades, of course, but the satirical gift does not. My problem with some of the poems is that they seem willed rather than imagined. I am thinking particularly of "Aprons," "Matricide" (about witches and misogyny) and "Grade Three" (where a child learns that men create art while women create crafts). I am more convinced by poems like "Silver Wedding Anniversary" and "The Neighbour" (about a voyeur), poems in which Gom has created convincing characters as well as typical situations. The last poem in the group, a witty reply to the question of "What Women Want," is not about characters or even a situation, but it shows Gom's sharp wit:

not much/everything.  
 a bra not as sadistic as it looks,  
 peace on earth, not getting our periods  
 in rush-hour traffic, a few good friends,  
 remembering our postal codes,  
 the elimination of rape, growing old  
 without poverty, wearing sleeveless blouses  
 and unshaved armpits and not caring,  
 children by choice, never having to fake  
 orgasm or interest in hockey, work  
 we enjoy, size twelve thighs,  
 crossing off everything on the list,  
 that's about it/that's a beginning.

The mixture of seriousness and humour is just right.

In the final section, "... warm vinegar," the poet indulges herself a bit. The humour grows raucous in the three poems about mice that turn up in odd places, and "Dogfood" makes comedy out of the possibility of eating man's (humanity's) best friend. There are poems that seem quite personal in spite of the overworked second person narration. This section is not so unified as the others, but its contents fit the concerns and tones of the rest of the book. The last poem, "Growth," suggests that the book as a whole is an affirmation of life in a society whose obsessions range from the trivial (aerobics) to the deadly serious (the abuse of women). Leona Gom takes the measure of these obsessions very intelligently, giving due weight to each.

BERT ALMON

## CASTLES OF CHILDHOOD

LOUISE MAHEUX-FORCIER, *A Forest for Zoe*.  
Trans. David Lobdell. Oberon, \$12.95.

Deep in the heel of the Italian boot, somewhere between the port of Bari and the city of the tarantella, at that point where there is just enough room to turn around between the shores of one sea and those of another, a tiny village languishes beneath the hot blue sky, out of sight of both bodies of water. . . . The name of the village is Alberobello.

THIS IS THE WAY her story "should have begun," thinks a young woman writer struggling with a personal narrative taken over by the obsessive presence of her childhood friend Zoe. Because of Zoe, the conventional introduction with its romantic cliché of the young couple honeymooning in Italy is abandoned. The fictional narrator's unsuccessful attempt to write the traditional romance allows Louise Maheux-Forcier to exam-

ine the process of writing a novel — a theme that has become a commonplace among new works of fiction.

The nature of narrative is not, however, the essential subject of this slight novel, published in 1969 in French as *Une Forêt pour Zoé* and winner of the Governor General's Award for fiction in 1970. Like a work of Marie-Claire Blais or Alice Munro, it is an exploration of nascent sexuality. In a series of impressionistic tableaux, it looks back on the protagonist's erotic encounters with other women — her eccentric piano teacher Mia, her convent friend Marie, her photographer friend Isis, and especially her childhood love Zoe, who hovers over all Thérèse's relationships. In her disembodied presence, Zoe represents the authentic life that Thérèse cannot live. At the end of the novel, a red-headed doll resembling Zoe, symbolic relic of Thérèse's childhood, is found by her husband in Thérèse's bed.

Maheux-Forcier's first novel *Amadou* was published in 1963, followed in 1964 by *L'Île joyeuse*, and in 1969 by *Une Forêt pour Zoé*. The author described the latter as the centre panel of a triptych having a single theme or obsession, and this central novel takes the exploration of sexual attraction back into early childhood. In *Amadou*, Maheux-Forcier insisted on the novelty of her subject, quoting Tagore: "Le chant que je devais chanter / N'a pas été chanté jusqu'à ce jour"; the love of Nathalie and Anne is not represented as abnormal. For Anne, the narrator's fifteen-year-old lover, evil lies only in acting against her own nature, while good is doing what her whole being desires. The presence of male lovers in the novels, especially of Stéphane in *L'Île joyeuse*, indicates that these are not exclusively lesbian relationships, and a walnut tree in *A Forest for Zoe* symbolizes Thérèse's enigmatic voluptuous nature: "I am like the walnut

tree whose twin blossoms borrow their gender from both sexes."

Thérèse, like Anne, extols pleasure, but sees that "once it has been sanctioned and sanctified, once it has received society's blessing," it becomes a fraud. She is acutely aware of hypocrisy, as are the other protagonists of Maheux-Forcier's novels and the author herself. Life, says Maheux-Forcier, "est un tissu d'apparences derrière quoi la réalité se cache," the writer's particular virtue being that he tries to tear off that mask. When published in 1969, *Une Forêt pour Zoé* was a more daring protest against sexual hypocrisy than it seems now when Thérèse (in the 1986 translation) protests:

I can't stand the thought of people marrying. I can't stand the thought that the pleasures of the bridal chamber should be extolled by the very ones who denounce them outside that sanctified setting, though they may date from the period in early childhood when it would have been unthinkable that they should be sanctified at all.

Maheux-Forcier's revelations of the reality behind the mask make her a social satirist in the classical sense.

It is hard to classify these slight novels, or to see them as resolving the problems encountered by modern writers in handling fictional narrative. On the other hand, Maheux-Forcier's style is at once lucid and lyrical. It is beautifully rendered into English by David Lobdell, leaving the reader with the haunting sense of the loveliness of irrecoverable childhood evoked in one of the thematic poems that separate the chapters:

In the light of the setting sun  
the queen sat weeping  
before the ruins of the castle.  
Someone said to her:  
You have a hundred castles  
More lovely than this one.  
The queen spurred her mount  
and fled the scene with a wail:  
More lovely than the castle of childhood?

MARGARET BELCHER

## IN PRINCIPIO

DOUGLAS LOCHHEAD, *Tiger in the Skull: New and Selected Poems, 1959-1985*. Fiddlehead/Gooselane, \$12.95.

RAYMOND SOUSTER, *It Takes All Kinds*. Oberon, n.p.

PATRICIA DEMERS, ed., *The Creating Word: Papers from an International Conference on the Learning and Teaching of English in the 1980s*. Univ. of Alberta, \$24.95.

"IN THE BEGINNING was the Word," says the Evangelist. Ever since they invented literature, poets and story-tellers have been pleased to see themselves as imitators of God the Creator, at whose Word chaos became a universe. The conceit is easy, but these three books show that acting on it may be a different matter.

Raymond Souster, in *It Takes All Kinds*, makes, or remakes, a world by dumping a load of empty words into it. In a ramble called "Parts of a Year: Entries From an '84 Engagement Calendar," Souster complains, apparently of his own lot in life:

Some days you scribble down three poems,  
then you may have to wait  
a whole miserable week  
before the next one's given you.

And he announces that, as an infant:

the first short cries I gave  
my purest, truest poem.

Perhaps the thrice-daily scribbles and babyhood wails are poems to Souster and his nearest and dearest, but to strangers they are mental meanderings, unburnished by craftsmanship, emotional intensity, or evidence of thought. The Toronto street poems, the baseball poems, and some of the soldier poems have a little life, partly because of Souster's ability to quote speech and partly because they relate to concrete things and specific events. But most of the effusions in *It Takes All Kinds* are flaccid. Clichés blur

description and deflate passion, exclamation marks replace emotion, and Souster's careless use of specific terms would weaken even newspaper prose. His lack of thought shows up embarrassingly in "Full Moon," in which his subject is an Alex Colville serigraph the actual title of which is "New Moon" (Souster also describes the "Full Moon" as "scythe-like") and in "The Regina Manifesto: A Found Poem," where Souster takes credit for the poetic qualities of a document that is a stylistic descendant of evangelical preaching and the King James Bible.

Souster would "give my eye-teeth right now / just to have written any stanza / of *Tantramar Revisited*." His envy of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts contrasts with Douglas Lochhead's sense of involvement in literary continuity. In a poem from *High Marsh Road* (1980) republished in *Tiger in the Skull*, Lochhead shows his connection with tradition:

the total glimpse of it [truth] as Roberts  
took to Tantramar.using his telescope  
his eye revisited.now I search the  
same dikes for details of shore-birds.  
the weirs hold straggler ducks.it is  
good to have such footsteps

...

Charles G.D.

Roberts, pince-nez and tails, flies  
like an angel by Stanley Spencer over  
this place

The poems in *Tiger in the Skull* are carefully crafted, the centrifugal force of thought and emotion almost, but never quite, escaping the centripetal control of form and technique. Like Roberts, Lochhead has the rare ability to write simply about ordinary things and yet provoke the reader to new insights and emotions. Perhaps the most amazing feat of this sort is "The soft doves appear," in which image-making and description gently force reconsideration of, yes, pigeons. Lochhead's poems about romantic or sex-

ual love are, thanks to his technical control, tense with emotion.

*The Creating Word* consists of eleven intellectually uneven and tenuously related conference papers. "The Teaching of Poetry," by Robin Skelton, and "Creative Writing: Can It Be Taught?" by Rudy Wiebe, seem unpremeditated and solipsistic. John Dixon and Martha King write about teaching "language arts" to youngsters to enhance psychological development. Kenneth Smillie puts into perspective the craze for computer-assisted learning and "computer literacy" in elementary and high schools. Rowland McMaster and Norman Page both write brilliantly, McMaster about *Great Expectations* and Page about *The Mill on the Floss*, but their essays are almost unrelated to the stated topic, as is Susan Jackel's "Canadian Literature in the Secondary Curriculum," a well-documented and insightful history and description of, and prescription for, the teaching of Canadian literature in Alberta schools.

The first three essays in *The Creating Word* are thoroughly researched and carefully considered responses to the topic by scholars of international standing. In "Construing and Deconstructing," M. H. Abrams relates the philosophy of Jacques Derrida to the radical skepticism of David Hume and rehearses J. Hillis Miller's reading of Wordsworth's "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" to describe and demonstrate deconstructionism. Then, in outlining his reservations about practising and teaching deconstructive criticism, Abrams explains even more clearly the nature and uses of this discipline. Louise M. Rosenblatt calls deconstructionists "basically anti-humanist" in "The Literary Transaction." By disregarding the emotional impact and human interest of literature, she argues, they disregard the reader. In Rosenblatt's view, a work of literature is "evoked" by

the reader in "transaction" with the text, rather than inherent in the text itself, although she tries to dissociate herself from the subjectivism of reader-response theory. Rosenblatt articulates her position skilfully, but she is not a careful writer. She uses "inner ear" to mean "the mind's ear," and her metaphors confuse her to the extent that she wants readers "to handle . . . reverberations" and to range around a fulcrum while bringing circles of contexts to bear on an aesthetic event.

"Rhetoric and Rightness: Some Fallacies in a Science of Language," by Jacques Barzun, begins the book. Barzun argues that there *are* objective standards for English that must be both observed and taught if English is to continue its course as "the most flexible as well as the richest language on earth." He recommends standard Latin-based grammar, conscious vocabulary development, and the teaching of students by instructors who are themselves competent writers. "Rhetoric and Rightness" could replace "Politics and the English Language" on university reading lists; Barzun's recommendations are much like Orwell's, but he is a learned man, his arguments are logical, and his essay is itself a model of effective organization and clear writing. As for literary theory, Barzun says, "Paradox is piled on pedantry when those who undertake to expound literature decline to make themselves understood." "Rhetoric and Rightness" gets to the heart of "the Creating Word," and it is by itself worth the price of the book.

LAUREL BOONE



## LA VUE COMPARATISTE

MAX DORSINVILLE, *Le Pays natal*. Nouvelles Editions Africaines, \$12.00.

CET OUVRAGE, COMME l'annonce l'auteur, est un ensemble d'essais ou d'articles (13 au total dont 5 parus dans *Canadian Literature* et constituant autant de chapitres divisés en trois parties de fort inégale longueur) regroupés sous le signe thématique du Pays natal. Conseil: pour ne pas être déçu, prendre dans son sens le plus fort la remarque de l'auteur en la Préface: "Ces essais . . . sont des instances dialectiques forcément soumises aux temps forts ou faibles de leur parution initiale." Entendre par là que l'unité et l'équilibre de l'ensemble paraîtront peut-être peu évidents à certains.

La première et la deuxième parties, respectivement consacrées aux Antilles et à l'Afrique, le chapitre II ("Québec noir") de la troisième partie et enfin la Postface ("Le mythe du nègre dans les littératures américaines") semblent les plus directement pertinents au sujet évoqué par le titre et tel qu'on s'attend à le voir abordé dans un ouvrage publié aux NEA; le reste de la troisième partie, de loin la plus étoffée est consacré uniquement au Québec et accuse davantage son âge.

On comprendra que nous dispensions sous peine de faire de l'"auto-allumage critique" d'évaluer les chapitres V et VI qui sont eux-mêmes des comptes-rendus parus au demeurant dans *Canadian Literature* (Summer 1974; Spring 1980).

Sur les Antilles, c'est Césaire qui sert de référence centrale, avec les notions de Retour et de Pays natal et le phénomène de la "réception" cher aux comparatistes. S'étant d'abord démarqué avec force de R. Wellek dont il rejette avec raison les a priori culturels occidentalistes rédu-

teurs, l'auteur estime nécessaire de privilégier, pour l'étude des littératures du Tiers Monde, une approche critique tenant compte des facteurs historiques et socio-économiques (en particulier la Décolonisation, la Guerre Froide, le sous-développement) qui président à leur émergence.

De la dépendance économique conjuguée à la servitude linguistique, naît chez l'écrivain colonisé la prise de conscience de l'exil qui le tient éloigné de son peuple: il se mute bientôt en "bouche" des malheurs de sa race (par exemple Césaire dans le *Cahier*). Indigénisme, Afro-cubanisme, Négritude sont autant d'étapes sur le chemin de cette prise de conscience qui débouche sur l'écriture tiers mondiste au centre de laquelle joue la thématique du retour que l'auteur voit comme un parallèle du mythe de la chute dans la pensée occidentale. Ici, recours comparatiste quasi inévitable sur le plan où se situe Dorsinville à Defoe et Conrad dont les héros se rachètent, se "blanchissent" par la traversée et la mise en valeur du désert noir. L'enfant prodigue noir — et l'auteur le démarque fort heureusement en fin d'essai de l'enfant du mythe biblique — l'enfant prodigue noir, rentré au pays doit, pour être authentique, assumer à la fois son acculturation (par la colonisation) et le malheur de son peuple opprimé à l'intérieur d'une esthétique "justifiable de la matière de son art et du vécu qu'il traduit," en d'autres termes, une esthétique de l'authenticité et de l'existence. Mission malaisée que l'auteur illustre de façon convaincante par des exemples tirés de divers corpus (Caraïbes, Afrique noire, Amérique latine, et surtout Césaire dont le *Cahier* est abondamment utilisé).

On aimera le détour par le mythique (le mythique fondateur de R. Wellek) au coeur d'un essai qui pose l'histoire contemporaine comme fondement de la

seule distinction qui soit opératoire lorsqu'il s'agit de littératures du Tiers Monde: celle qui existe en littératures dominées et dominantes. Dans "Pays, parole, négritude" un parallèle aujourd'hui fort documenté est établi entre la poésie de la Négritude et celle du Québec, nées toutes deux aux mêmes sources de l'exil et de l'aliénation, toutes deux braquées sur la notion de pays à retrouver et à libérer, toutes deux déçues et repliées maintenant (cas de Chamberland, Préfontaine, Césaire à l'appui) sur des "redites" et sur "l'hermétisme et l'intériorisation finale de l'engagement." Un tel jugement paraît excessif, quelque quinze ans plus tard, aussi bien pour Césaire que pour la poésie québécoise, si diverse et si dynamique. Et si "redites" il y a, il semble bien que ce soit Senghor qui s'y livre, et précisément parce que sa Négritude reste étonnamment indéçue par l'échec politique et socio-économique des indépendances.

La question de la réception de Césaire au Québec, abordée dans deux essais, repose sur les mêmes prémisses: la situation historique existentielle de colonisé commune au Québécois et à l'homme noir. Mais la réception critique (universitaire en gros) reste loin derrière la réception des écrivains: Vallières, Miron, Préfontaine, Chamberland, J. G. Pilon ont lu Césaire qui est un phare pour la génération du malaise québécois. L'accueil réservé à Césaire s'explique clairement, selon l'auteur, dans une approche comparatiste. On retiendra surtout la très pertinente observation — qui demanderait à être développée — sur la récupération, par tout langage critique spécifique à une culture, de l'objet de réflexion qui a son origine dans une autre culture. C'est là, à notre avis, tout le problème de la pertinence de l'outil critique blanc tel que le pose une grande partie de l'intelligentsia négro-africaine d'aujourd'hui (cf. Mudimbé, etc.).

A l'Afrique (Tiers Monde) revient la portion congrue (18 pages seulement) de l'ouvrage. Sur la toile de fond de l'exil vécu, soit comme privation et éloignement du retour, sont affirmées la continuité africaine et la pratique salvatrice du "marronnage." Ce cantique nous paraît un peu chargé de parti-pris euphorique et ne rend pas à Depestre ce qui lui est dû, à savoir l'idée de "marronnage idéologique." L'Afrique est vue ensuite successivement comme asile fécond pour les écrivains haïtiens qui y trouvent refuge vers la fin des années 60 (essai no. 2), puis comme terre de l'ambiguïté culturelle, religieuse, politique (essai no. 3) à travers quelques grands romanciers noirs d'expression française et anglaise. Sur le Québec (troisième partie) des réflexions aujourd'hui fort connues sur nationalisme et littérature, parallèles Québec-Tiers Monde, recentrement du théâtre québécois contemporain et problématique du livre québécois.

Dans la Postface l'auteur retourne au projet initial pour conclure sur l'évidence que l'image juste et réelle de l'homme noir s'écrit en Afrique dans le roman africain et non dans les Amériques jugées incapables de concevoir le vécu noir en dehors du mythe raciste.

Pour conclure à notre tour: un livre dont la lecture est utile et dont les effets sont le mieux perceptibles lorsque l'auteur explicite un point de vue comparatiste sur l'écriture négro-africaine ou antillaise. Par contre on trouvera sans peine que le fil thématique qui relie ces divers essais est par endroits bien ténu, ce qui enlève à l'unité et à la force de persuasion de l'ensemble. Par ailleurs, on regrettera vivement l'absence d'une bibliographie ou même d'un index des noms cités.

C. BOUYGUES

## STUFFED WITH LEGENDS

ANTONINE MAILLET, *The Devil is Loose!*  
Philip Stratford, trans. Lester & Orpen  
Dennys, \$21.95.

THE DUST JACKET describes *The Devil is Loose!* as "a rollicking tale of smuggling and romance." Set in the era of prohibition in the early 1930's, the story centres on the bootlegging activities of the "smuggleress" heroine, Crache-à-Pic, mistress of the *Sea Cow*, and her arch-rival Dieudonné whom she invariably outwits. Acadian New Brunswick is evoked in a roll-call of place-names: Grand-Digue, Pré-d'en-Haut, Champdoré, Bois-Joli, Cocagne, Village-des-Trois-Maisons, Anse-aux-Outardes, Sainte-Marie-des-Cotes; with on the horizon the "faraway islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon," source of the fine wines and cognacs destined for the tables of the President of the United States or Chicago gangsters. Crache-à-Pic is described in Harlequin romance terms — "a long-legged girl with a turned up nose, a mane of windswept blonde hair, and a pair of blue eyes that would take your breath away," who, however, "spat and swore like a man."

Maillet self-consciously uses folkloristic material, style, and structure, "the old storytellers' sacks stuffed with legends of the sea." The narrator, Clovis-à-Clovis, "Clovis-son-of-Clovis-the-blacksmith," learned "the trade of story-telling from the forge, instead of blacksmithing," the forge being the centre of village gossip and legend. "Old Clovis knows words. . . . Knows them as well as the fleas in his shirt." There is much emphasis on oral tradition:

It was Old Clovis told the story to my father. He remembered it all happening. But they say that when he cocked an eye at the ways of the world his left pupil was

more elastic than his right. Not only that, but his tongue was so rough and his gullet so rasping that words lost a vowel or two, or got their consonants jumbled as they came through. In passing it on to me, my father had no choice but to plane the sentences down and scour the phrases clean of moss and verdigris. And now I in turn pass on this true story to you, stripped of all verbal ornament or twist of wit.

Maillet's diction is not "stripped of all verbal ornament"; on the contrary, she often strains for literary effect: "the red ball leaps to the eastern horizon and strikes the sea like a gong." The book seems overwritten. Repeated motifs, such as the veering of the weathercock signaling a change of fortune, or the reiterated phrase "The devil is loose!" after awhile become tiresome and heavy-handed. The "ballet" of the cows in the nuns' pasture, drunk on bootlegged wine and cognac from St. Pierre, should be funnier than it is. Maillet falls between two stools — the straining after literary effect, cleverness, showing off as a writer; and the straining after authentic folklore and oral tradition. The book is pulled between the two styles and becomes artificial and forced.

Maillet is perhaps more effective at the pathetic than the "rollicking." Two images stand out: the homeless wanderer, Ti-Louis the Whistler, seeking refuge in a barn on Christmas Eve, being warmed and watched over by the animals; and the pièta of Crache-à-Pic protectively cradling her epileptic brother in her arms.

ROBERTA BUCHANAN

## COMIC SOLUTIONS

HOWARD ENGEL, *A City Called July*. Viking, \$18.95.

WITTY CONVERSATIONS, fast-paced action, and entertaining characters — these are the elements of Howard Engel's mys-

tery novels. Add to that a sense of place and an affection for Toronto's Jewish community, and one has mystery fiction that can interest the literary critic as well as the general reader. Four previous Benny Cooperman novels — *The Suicide Murders*, *The Ransom Game*, *Murder Sees the Light*, and *Murder on Location* — have made Engel's intuitive private investigator a Canadian institution, a sort of Canadian version of Columbo, the energetic, rather disorganized, and yet obviously good-hearted detective popularized by the American actor Peter Falk.

*A City Called July* deals with yet another crime solved by the bumbling Cooperman, whose intelligence and good humour extricate him from some difficult and embarrassing situations. Refusing to take himself too seriously, Cooperman assures the reader that "I'm a professional private investigator as well as a member of the Jewish community. It's like talking to the doctor. Practically the same thing." Nevertheless, his skills as an investigator leave much to be desired, though he is a master, when necessary, of evasive action: "I splashed my way out of there fast, nearly skinning the Olds on a silver Audi driving through the gate." Cooperman's eye for detail and ability to see the humorous side of situations keep us interested as the witty, accident-prone detective lurches from one crisis to another. This investigator likes reading mysteries because of "the way things happened bang-bang-bang one after the other. Nobody ever sits around listening to the shadows growing longer." And what Cooperman likes in his own reading is certainly found in Engel's imaginative rendering of the detective's latest mock-heroic adventure.

The story concerns the mysterious disappearance of Larry Geller, a local lawyer who has departed with several million dollars in investments, savings, and

mortgages entrusted to him by ingenuous clients. During the search for Geller, whose body is eventually discovered in a recently poured concrete footing, Cooperman interviews Geller's brothers, Nathan and Sid, as well as other members of the Geller family, and surveys an extensive network of friends linked to Larry Geller's business interests. Suddenly the investigation uncovers two other murder victims: Nathan Geller and Wally Moore, a friend and business associate. And Cooperman wonders: "What possible motive can connect a low-lifer like Wally Moore and a fancy sculptor like Geller?" Ultimately, as one would expect in this tightly plotted novel, the murderer turns out to be a family member, Debbie Geller, who has been divorced from Sid and has then turned to Larry. (Sid, fortunately, is still alive at the novel's dénouement.) Apparently, after leaving Sid, Debbie has discovered a "main chance, an entry into the big time" — specifically, Larry's plan to abscond with his clients' money. When Larry converts his stolen goods into diamonds, she murders him, leaves his body in wet concrete ("that short stopover at the construction shack") and when others become curious after Cooperman begins his investigation, murders them as well. At the end of *A City Called July*, Cooperman remarks that Debbie was "bored by the ordinary lives most people around her were living. She always had a short attention span."

That is about as far as the psychological analysis goes, but then in a detective novel anything more complex would probably be inappropriate. Indeed, much of the book seems to exist on the surface: witty, accurate, and exceedingly entertaining dialogue; details of the Jewish community that are very visual:

The place hadn't changed much since my bar mitzvah. The long pews were stained the same walnut brown as the wood trim

on the cream-painted walls. The skylight still showed symbolic beasts painted in a reedy style in faded yellow and green on the four sides of the rectangle. The ark at the front was closed and covered with a wine-coloured velvet curtain.

In the context of this world, Cooperman's reveries are ingenious and compelling. His mind, as he describes it, is "a whole graveyard of tombstones," and many of these relate to his Jewish background. His other world is North American popular culture: heartburn, television, glamour magazines, and junk food. His comments about this environment are also very funny and certainly add an absurd dimension to a rather peculiar detective story.

*A City Called July* includes several clever variations on the traditional detective novel. Cooperman discovers one clue by using the re-dial feature on Larry Geller's telephone. Larry himself finally decides to convert to diamonds, but Debbie carries the process one step further: she conceals the diamonds by freezing them in an ice-cube tray. As Cooperman attempts to unravel this "fine web of intrigue," he meets a vast array of characters — most, it seems, named Geller — who give detailed explanations of their dealings with the departed Larry. Since there is little character development, it is sometimes difficult to separate their personalities; and, since Cooperman is, by definition, not given to psychological analysis, it is sometimes difficult to know exactly what these people are like. Although the novel largely avoids stock situations, there are several: a lawyer absconding with his clients' money; a bribe (offered to Cooperman but returned); and the usual collection of characters who could be in any American police drama.

Yet the clarity of the writing and control of plot more than compensate for a few minor shortcomings. In addition to

the attractive character of Cooperman, what emerges is a warm profile of a Toronto Jewish community, a portrait one might expect more in Mordecai Richler's work than in a detective novel. Indeed, in some of its self-criticism *A City Called July* might even be considered a partial, if rather gentle, satire on that community. It is certainly no accident that *The Suicide Murders* and *Murder Sees the Light* have successfully been made into films, for Engel is a skilled screenwriter, and the devices of film—accurate dialogue, visual montages, rapidly shifting scenes—are as obvious in *A City Called July* as they are in Richler's novels. In a recent review of the film of *Murder Sees the Light*, John Cuff wrote that "it is virtually impossible not to like [Engel's] character, a round-shouldered, pot-bellied little guy who klutzes from clue to clue and solves crimes almost in spite of himself." And just as one cannot help liking Benny Cooperman, one cannot help liking this latest detective novel by Howard Engel, a novelist whose use of the detective genre comes very close to art.

RODERICK W. HARVEY

## LANGUAGES OF EXILE

HALVARD DAHLIE, *Varieties of Exiles: the Canadian Experience*. Univ. of British Columbia, \$22.50.

KERBY A. MILLER, *Emigrants and Exiles*. Oxford, \$48.95.

The language of the exile muffles a cry, it doesn't ever shout. . . . Our present age is one of exile. How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one's own country, language, sex and identity? Writing is impossible without some kind of exile. . . . If meaning exists in the state of exile, it nevertheless finds no incarnation, and is ceaselessly produced and destroyed in geographical or discursive transformations.

JULIA KRISTEVA IN A 1977 essay gives a definition of exile similar to the one Dahlie deduces from Ovid: "genuine exile is a permanent condition characterized by dislocation, alienation, and dis-possession." But he limits his study severely to "writers who have physically moved to or from Canada, as long as they have communicated a substantial imaginative or artistic perception of the realities and/or myths about Canada." Although he protests that his approach is "basically quite uncomplicated and straightforward," that last clause is fraught with problems of definition and judgment. Rather than enter the fray like Kristeva, armed with the vocabulary of current literary theory, Dahlie chooses to remain traditional and therefore risks triviality since his strictures are so arbitrarily imposed. The muddiness is apparent at the end of his introductory chapter when he explains that he has limited himself to "fifteen or so" writers, from Frances Brooke to Josef Skvorecky, but then concludes: "my major concern is more to demonstrate that the phenomenon of exile has been a frequently recurring element in Canadian literature." Beyond the level of truism, that large claim needs to be argued by more than a reference to fifteen books.

Clearly I find worrying aspects to Dahlie's methodology. When he gets on to practical criticism—plot summary then geographical mapmaking—he is solid enough, but these days one expects a livelier texture to criticism than solidity. One might begin by carping at the typographical errors, sometimes three to a page, but more disturbing are imprecisions exacerbated by orotund parsing: "Though he modifies his views towards Canada according to the fluctuations in his relationships with Emily, the outcome of the novel [*The History of Emily Montague*] dictates the centrality of this attitude in Brooke's overall vision." Dahlie

is also clearly unwilling to countenance textual play, seeing Jameson's classical allusions as "disruptions" to the narrative flow of her journal.

The earlier part of the book is more successful within Dahlie's prescriptions. An excellent survey of Duncan's British-American-Canadian novels is weakened only by the lame conclusion that "Canada remained for her . . . a little bit special." There is a good chapter on Salverson and Grove, though he might have picked up on Grove's statement that he was an exile from people who "metaphorically, spoke my language"; and he identifies Levine's "recycled" dilemmas. But Dahlie's preoccupation with author ("it is at times difficult to distinguish between protagonist and author") and place ("exiles in a sense must always create a new reality out of nothing") rather than language, is increasingly unsuited to more contemporary authors and to the conclusion arrived at rather tortuously through Lowry, Lewis, and others, that modern exile has to do with existential angst and the dissolution of nations. The approach really comes unstuck with Mavis Gallant, whose provocative notion that marriage instigates a kind of exile is ignored in favour of, again, geography; yet "it is of course individuals rather than national types that Gallant is concerned with, and therefore it is risky to generalize."

Especially in the latter half of this study one can sense a perceptive critic yearning to escape his self-spun theoretical straitjacket, particularly with the stylistically and philosophically rich fictions of Brian Moore, Clark Blaise, and Josef Skvorecky. His analysis of *The Engineer of Human Souls*, in the context of a section on academic exiles, is especially promising. I hope Dahlie goes on to write more in this vein, to consider what Lowry called "this migraine of alienation" as a controlling element in

the prose and pattern of most post-colonial novelists.

At first glance, 568 pages seem like too much blarney with which to offer the thesis that "Irish-American homesickness, alienation, and nationalism were rooted ultimately in a traditional Irish Catholic worldview which predisposed Irish emigrants to perceive or at least justify themselves not as voluntary, ambitious emigrants but as involuntary, nonresponsible 'exiles,' compelled to leave home by forces beyond individual control, particularly by British and landlord oppression." But Professor Miller weaves together statistics and ballads in a totally convincing and beguiling way. His concluding chapter on American wakes epitomises his thesis and method; Malthusian cycles are set within folk ritual and oral history, as he teases out the causes and implications of the Irish regarding the westward journey as one towards death.

The book traces Irish emigration to North America from 1600 to 1900, constantly returning to the primal myth established by the seventeenth-century Gaelic bards that Ireland was a fallen, betrayed Eden which would one day be restored. The myth was used in various ways by the Irish Catholic clergy, nationalists, Irish-American patriots, and the emigrants themselves, to justify either their successes or their failures. "Bloody Bess and cursed Cromwell," it seems, had a lot to answer for in the Old World and the New. Miller's vast research amplifies his theme always in the direction of irony and paradox, never obfuscation.

Canada appears only marginally, as in the fact of James Buchanan, an Irish-born British consul who sent 3,000 countrymen from New York to frontier settlements in Upper Canada in 1819, or the 65% of the 400,000 emigrants between 1828 and 1837 who went to Canada rather than the U.S. But, read in conjunction with Dahlie's book, it actually

gives a more complex picture of the "exile" than does the latter's literature. One sees that the potato famine, in itself, does little to explain Irish emigration. The facts, of course, continue to boggle the mind: between 1845-55, 1.5 million immigrants to the U.S., 340,000 to British North America. But Miller gives the big picture, from local agricultural booms and busts to the effects of transported nationalism in the New World. Of the last, Miller concludes that the Irish-American nationalists were lucky the Anglo-Irish War of 1916-21 happened when it did, since support, which was based on the myth of betrayal and oppression, was on the wane.

Miller rarely allows himself a stylistic flourish, preferring to balance his copious factual details with letters and poetry; but he does allow himself one delightful thrust at the very end of his exhaustive chronicle: "By 1923, except for the continuing trickle of embittered Catholic emigrants from Northern Ireland, the long, dark winter of Irish exile in America was over. The golden summer of Irish-American tourism was about to begin."

DAVID DOWLING

## STORY POSTPONED

AUDREY THOMAS, *Goodbye Harold, Good Luck*. Penguin Viking, \$17.95.

ONCE AGAIN AUDREY THOMAS creates compelling images: a man offering a woman a captured hummingbird to hold, another man tearing a tentacle off an octopus and throwing it to a girl who winds it around her wrist "like some horrible bracelet," a set of children's sandals in graduated sizes, a jar full of baby teeth, a message appearing magically on a steamy hotel mirror. Once again we move through her literary landscapes: Ghana, Galiano, Edinburgh, Greece. And

once again Thomas shows her command of a variety of styles.

George Bowering has attempted to categorize Thomas's work on the basis of style, suggesting in the Audrey Thomas issue of *A Room of One's Own* (March 1986) and in his "Introductory Notes" to *Fiction of Contemporary Canada* that some of her fiction is well crafted and satisfying, "mimetic, if not autobiographical to the extreme" and the rest "self-reflexive and discontinuous," even "daring" and "odd." Needless to say, Bowering prefers the odd to the well crafted. Using a time-honoured tactic, he creates a duality and promotes one over the other. Of course, he knows better, but is attempting a little affirmative action, trying to right an imbalance in the wider Canadian literary world where conventional writing gets more attention than it deserves. Thomas, partly because she is often experimental, partly because she was born in the United States, and partly because she writes in British Columbia, has certainly been undervalued. But it does her an injustice to suggest her work is all one thing or another.

In this collection, the overtly experimental works are, in fact, weaker than those that might be labelled mimetic or autobiographical. Take, for example, the fairy tale "The Princess and the Zucchini": the Prince is turned into a giant zucchini; the princess doesn't buy his "happily ever after" line, so she cooks him for dinner. But she's still in the kitchen, and she's not very nice. The feminist implications are far more complex than "ha, got you"; readers are intended to puzzle. "One Size Fits All," "The Man With Clam Eyes," and "Compulsory Figures" are also intellectually, rather than emotionally engaging. In *Goodbye Harold, Good Luck*, the successful stories are rather those where the idea of a single or certain reality is strictly qualified, not because the narrator is

crazy or prescient or playing games, but because of shifts in point of view, sudden insights, coincidental juxtapositions of similar messages, doubled or layered narration. Often the main narrator is a woman like Thomas, with children, with "ordinary" middle-class problems, fears, and responses.

One story, "Breaking the Ice," is superficially a "woman's magazine" story: divorced woman spends Christmas without her children, doubly depressed because a man she has recently met hasn't called. One of her daughters arrives for New Year's, so does the man with his daughter, and all get along splendidly: it would be easy to call the story banal and superficial. But like Alice Munro, Thomas is not really interested in plot anyway. The romantic conventions in "Breaking the Ice" are heavily qualified by discussions of a cat stalking birds and by the bellowing of mating sea lion bulls on the nearby rocks. The narrator insists to all who are concerned about her that she is "Perfectly all right," noting to herself that this of course means "Perfectly All Wrong." She dresses up to visit the neighbours so they won't suspect her misery. The present unhappy Christmas is overlaid by happy past memories and potentially happy planned future ones. At one point, the narrator considers phoning the man and putting him off because her daughter protests, a thought that produces the potential for an unhappy, rather than a happy ending. The happy lovemaking is overlaid by worry about "Who would leave first?" The story is built out of layer after layer of possibility, like a lacquer box, so that the story is, paradoxically, both profound and superficial. Of course, some readers will see only the happy ending; others will notice that to break ice is potentially to drown in icy water.

Another story, "Relics," begins with a gypsy telling the fortune of a woman

visiting the boarding house in Scotland where she lived when she was a student. She discovers that Morag, the woman who used to run it, has been decapitated in a car accident. Her memories of her first lovers are intermingled with her realization of how nasty she and all the students were to Morag, who scraped by, exhausted by the housework. She remembers one moment where Morag tried to talk to her, and hints at the possibility of a different story for both of them.

The title story is about a mother and daughter travelling, a situation common to several stories. In this one, the narrator, Francine, is trying to decide whether to leave her husband, a demanding perfectionist. In a hotel, where Emily, the daughter, has been taking a bath, the words of the title appear "written by somebody's finger or with a piece of soap." This handwriting on the mirror brings out the ghostly story of another unhappy couple, and, indeed, the stories of all the people in that room, to haunt the "real" story.

All the stories are haunted by what we don't see and can't know, even about the lives of those closest to us. "Mothering Sunday," reveals the dark side of mother-daughter relations, as the narrator thinks of her mother: "I have wounded her many times; she has wounded me. We don't talk about this. We send each other letters and greeting cards and presents; we worry about one another. We wonder." Sitting alone in a restaurant on Mother's Day, the narrator thinks of everything that gets left out of the myth: "No blood, no bloody Mary in the nativity accounts. Immaculate conception, immaculate delivery. We mothers know better, sitting here with our legs underneath the table, sitting here sipping our drinks, picking at the expensive food." (Note the stories crammed into the simple phrase "with our legs underneath the table.")

And so I would like to suggest why Bowering's categories don't work. Because women have been on the "wrong side" of the duality for so long, they are more concerned with what gets left out of stories, usually, than with what gets put in. But both sides need to be there:

Francine had seen a button in a women's bookstore.

THEY SENT ONE MAN TO THE MOON  
WHY CAN'T THEY SEND THEM ALL?

It was funny, but not really. Would Emily grow up hating men? The woman on the train was worried about some adult putting his arm around her daughter; what happened if the opposite were true, never a hug or a kiss?

The same pattern appears in one of Thomas's earlier stories, "Initram" (that is, "Martini" in a mirror), where a separated woman travels to Vancouver to tell her story to her friend Lydia, only to discover that Lydia has also separated. Lydia's story is "both moving and bizarre"; the narrator feels that Lydia has "put something over" on her. The narrator's story has to be postponed, and this is the emotional point of the story.

Putting in both sides, then, does not mean forging a harmonious whole, as in traditional stories. Rather it means revealing how one story exists at the expense of another — indeed, how stories proliferate, endless voices drowning each other out, contradicting each other. The vitality of this collection lies in Thomas's ability to write "mimetic" and "autobiographical" stories that constantly reveal themselves as partial, inadequate, and unresolved: that is, as "self-reflexive and discontinuous."

MARGERY FEE



## BUGS, BATTLES & BALLET

VERONICA TENNANT, *On Stage, Please*. McClelland & Stewart, \$3.95.

GREGORY SASS, *Redcoat*. Porcupine's Quill, \$7.95.

DAVID SUZUKI & BARBARA HEHNER, *Looking at Insects*. Stoddard, \$8.95.

THAT THREE BOOKS which severally feature bugs, battles, and ballet might be treated in a single commentary corroborates a fact particularly fundamental to the development of children's literature over the past few decades in Canada: authors and publishers have considerably widened their net to appeal to the diversity of interests of the television-nurtured young audiences of the 1980's. In addition to exploring diverse subject matter, these three paperbacks for young Canadians reflect three distinctive subgenres which collectively represent the major portion of books published for children today; namely, informational books, historical fiction, and realistic fiction.

*Looking at Insects* is the second book by David Suzuki and Barbara Hehner in the Stoddard Young Readers series, and like its forerunner (*Looking at Plants*, 1985), it follows a prescriptive formula which deftly balances general scientific information, intriguing details, and simple "hands-on" experiments. To the credit of the two writers (there is no indication of their respective contributions), this balance is accomplished with an ease which belies the burden of didacticism which all information books carry, and while the book's format, scope, simplified drawings, and vocabulary level indicate that the work is primarily targeted at inquisitive youngsters, readers of any age would both enjoy and benefit from the book (including parents in need of a refresher course on insects). As for the tone of the book, readers familiar

with Suzuki's engaging television persona will detect here the same blend of informed authority, gentle humour, and pervasive respect for all creatures.

The organization of the material essentially defines its primary audience, moving as it does through a general overview and description of insects, on to specifics on insect orders, including moths and butterflies, beetles, bees, ants, and finally, to a closing chapter on the "distant cousins" of insects, spiders. The book does not overwhelm the young reader with too much information (at least there is no conscious sense that this is occurring), yet it covers pertinent details such as basic insect physiologies, metamorphoses, defence mechanisms, and specialized behavioural patterns. Enveloping these scientific details is a perspective which David Suzuki seems particularly skilled at imparting: far from being the creepy crawlies of which nightmares are made, insects are a fascinating and integral part of the world around us. The acceptance and curiosity fostered in the young reader are complemented by the some 25 "something to do" sections interspersed through the book. These sections give simplified scientific practicums on things such as measuring a caterpillar's appetite or starting an ant colony, and following a tenet of all superior information books for children, include safety rules (for the protection of all participants, including the insects) and a call for adult supervision when required.

Of course all books for children must ultimately interest the child if they are going to be read, and it is instructive to see, when regarding the numerous genres which fall under the rubric of children's literature, how Gregory Sass, writing historical fiction, relies on strategies and methods unique to that particular genre to attract his audience. In *Redcoat*, Sass succeeds in transporting his reader back to the early years of the 1800's, and he

accomplishes this first and foremost by creating an eminently believable character with whom the young reader can identify. Once this identification occurs, the same historical details and background material which many young readers would reject in a history text, become integral props in a compelling story.

Shadrach Byfield is a young, idealistic Scot who, because of his family's poverty, runs away from home at age 13 to join the military and, as he himself puts it, not to return until he "had lived to be a man." By the time Shadrach does return to his Lowlands home after fighting for General Brock in a distant, cold land in the War of 1812, the young reader has accompanied him through a stint in a Dickensian-styled workhouse and the perils of his premature soldiering which features, along with numerous lesser discomforts, his capture at the hands of Indians, his being wounded and maimed in battle, and his being wrongfully flogged as a deserter.

Shadrach's progresses are no romanticized romp through the pages of history, however, and few adolescent readers (most historical fiction is written for children over 10 years of age) would miss Sass's concern with the realities of poverty, social injustice, and war. Because of his poverty, Shadrach is inexorably victimized by institutions common to any age; namely, those representing education, law, and finally, order (here symbolized by the British infantry). What the historical setting does (and this is skilfully built up by Sass's judicious use of language, topical reference points, and details of clothing and food, is to frame and crystallize Shadrach's struggles which render them at once a product of the period and a parable which carries a relevance today.

As the summary of *Redcoat* suggests, like most works of historical fiction, it is an adventure story, and like so many of

these, has war as its focus. But Sass goes beyond merely using this focus as an easy access to his young audience and Shadrach's experiences are not merely grafted onto the setting. Rather, they evolve naturally and credibly from the historical backdrop. Moreover, as implied above, both the details of plot and the development of the novel's two main characters (Shadrach's fortunes are fatefully entangled with those of a cruel and amoral acquaintance throughout the book) combine to underscore themes which transcend the immediate historical setting. Shadrach Byfield's story is, in its widest application, a quest story, and his grail turns out to be an understanding of himself, an appreciation of his heritage and family, and the knowledge that while he did live to be a man, he did so not by fighting for General Brock in Canada, but by returning to his Lowlands roots.

Veronica Tennant's *On Stage, Please* (published first in hardcover in 1977) has now been released, as the book's promotional bulletin states, "in an inexpensive mass market format" in the hope that it might "delight yet another generation of aspiring ballet dancers." That this new edition, which suffers only minimally from the compromises of inferior paper and print and which succeeds in capturing the beauty of Rita Briansky's original illustrations, should be new fare to another generation of readers just a decade after its first publication, bespeaks not only of the market realities in children's literature, but also of the fact that for serious ballet students, training begins at about age 10.

*On Stage, Please* is best categorized as contemporary realistic fiction. It is a convincing insight into the world of ballet — convincing because this is not simply an arid guidebook for aspiring ballerinas. It is, instead, an expertly crafted novel which is certain to keep the child reading, and to do so, refreshingly, not in

spite of its literary distinctions, but because of them. On a narrative level, the story traces the career of Jennifer Allen, a ballet-loving girl of 10 years, from her arrival in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, after her family emigrated from England, through the challenges, frustrations, and triumphs of the first six months of her studies at the "Professional School of Ballet" in Toronto. On a secondary level, the book treats of a theme with which most young readers can identify: the need for acceptance and to be regarded as competent. Veronica Tennant probes this theme with an eye for both the detail and the aura of the ballet world which perhaps only intimate exposure can bring (Tennant graduated from Canada's National Ballet School in 1964 and joined the National Ballet Company as principal dancer in 1965).

Jennifer Allen's favourite ballet is *Cinderella*, and it is this story which in turn metaphorically reflects her beginning career. After numerous setbacks (including the dubious ministrations of a cigar-smoking, overweight instructor in Sault Ste. Marie and an injury suffered at the school in Toronto), Jennifer begins to realize her ambitions to become a dancer guided by the advice of an older friend at the school (the fairy godmother parallel is inviting) and her own genuine love for ballet. Along the way, Jennifer experiences the inevitable uncertainties about her talents and commitment, but she presses on, learns about the discipline, perseverance, and sheer hard work required of a ballerina, until she "discovers her dream" when she is one of the two students chosen to dance in the Performing Company's Christmas production of, appropriately enough, *Cinderella*. The strength of *On Stage, Please* is that while it is informative, it is also subtly insightful, and while the young reader learns of pirouettes, barres, and pointes shoes, the plot, characters, and attendant threads of

the story are gracefully woven by Veronica Tennant to suggest resonances to which all young readers might relate.

JAMES GELLERT

## CONFEDERATION POETS

DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT, *Powassan's Drum: Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott*, eds. Raymond Souster & Douglas Lochhead. Tecumseh, \$7.95.

BLISS CARMAN, *Windflower: Poems of Bliss Carman*, eds. Raymond Souster & Douglas Lochhead. Tecumseh, \$9.95.

MURIEL MILLER, *Bliss Carman: Quest & Revolt*. Jespersen Press, \$36.00.

THAT TECUMSEH PRESS has decided to publish reading editions of the selected poems of Duncan Campbell Scott and Bliss Carman is commendable. As members of the so-called Confederation group of poets, both Scott and Carman are important figures in the development of Canadian poetry. Until now, however, it has proved difficult to locate substantial selections of their work in print. For Bliss Carman one had to go back to Lorne Pierce's anthology of 1954 or the Robert Sorfleet edition of 1976. For Scott it was a matter of using E. K. Brown's *Selected Poems* of 1951 or Tecumseh's earlier *Selected Poetry* of 1974, edited by Glenn Clever. This paucity of texts has meant that all too often readers know Scott and Carman only through a few well-known anthology pieces.

While *Powassan's Drum* and *Windflower* offer readers a generous selection of the poetry of Scott and Carman, the volumes prove far from ideal. They have been cheaply produced: the font for the Scott edition is too small for easy reading, and the Carman volume is inked so darkly that each line appears emphasized. Indeed, it looks as though Tecum-

seh Press intended the volumes as interim editions for the new reader. They were certainly not produced with the serious student in mind, since they contain neither notes nor bibliography. In Tecumseh's earlier edition of Scott's poetry, the editor at least gave some indication of the chronological progression and supplied a brief biographical note. This time the editors have chosen to present the poems in vague thematic groupings, which suggest a *fin de siècle* preciousness. Moreover, the double introductions by Raymond Souster and Douglas Lochhead are largely uncritical. Both Souster and Lochhead mention that they read Scott and Carman when they were young, and they claim to have been influenced by them, but they offer little evidence of how and why the poets remain important today. Tecumseh's decision to publish editions with no historical background may well prompt readers to ask what Carman and Scott mean to them as poets once the protective lens of "historical importance" has been removed.

By far the more interesting volume is the Scott selection, *Powassan's Drum*. The editors chose to begin with seven Indian and Metis poems which capture the plight of these peoples poised between different cultures and time periods. These poems are undoubtedly among Scott's most original. Yet when seen in the midst of the current debate about native and ethnic rights and cultures, they appear somewhat dated. While Scott sympathizes with the individual caught between cultures, he also believes in a kind of Coleridgean moral evolution. From this evolutionary perspective, the native people are seen as essentially "savage," redeemed only when they move upwards to a "higher" state of spiritual understanding. Consequently, Scott tends to undermine the essential dignity of the individual by dissolving it in a higher spiritualism, a problem for all those im-

bued with idealist or historicist perspectives.

For the contemporary reader, much of what follows Scott's Indian and Metis poems seems weak, with numerous landscape lyrics containing virtually no Canadian features; indeed, few detailed features of any kind. In these pretty but insipid poems, Scott offers pictures of the changing seasons, which then allow him, rather abruptly in most cases, to posit his intuition that a "diviner thing" or a "peace deeper than peace" exists behind "the changeful hour." These are largely amateur pieces, although a number such as "The Ghost's Story" and "Afterwards" offer some piquancy.

With poems such as "In the Country Churchyard," dedicated to Scott's father, *Powassan's Drum* begins to reveal a new direction, indicating that one of Scott's strengths derives from his handling of the longer poem in which he introduces his uncertainty about the nature of romantic absolutes. This strength develops further in "The Height of Land" where Scott, following his Wordsworthian model, finally combines his meditations with actually perceived landscape details. Here he ends with the question of whether man will eventually evolve beyond his present condition — confined to brief, ecstatic sensations about the meaning of the universe — to a comprehensive intellectual knowledge based on an understanding of divine law which allows for "closer commune with divinity." Taken as a whole, *Powassan's Drum* leaves the impression that Scott overworks the moonlight-and-roses motif, that he too often indulges in derivative language. Still, in his Indian poems, and especially with the hesitations in which he couches his later work, one feels that here was a genuine poet in the making.

In *Windflower*, however, a wholly different impression emerges: Carman appears largely as a popular versifier in love

with his own music. While it is possible at times to be caught up in his boyish exuberance about the open road, and while the swing and delight of his optimism can be enjoyed for short periods, yet to give oneself over to Carman proves largely an act of nostalgia. A surprisingly small number of poems prove worth keeping, and these are mostly poems of mood which capture Carman's own violent swings of feeling. "Low Tide on Grand Pré," "The Eavesdropper," and a few of the Sappho poems stand out as quite exceptional. All too frequently Carman's image of man's life as a journey along a narrow road hedges his vision round so that the poems cannot expand into the open countryside on either side. Obsessed with the God-figure who waits in various allegorical disguises at the end of life, Carman turns everything along the path into trite and standardized imagery. He rarely seems to look at what he describes, with the result that the symbol overtakes and overwhelms the particular.

Given Carman's enormous reputation in his own day, and the fact that he seems to be sinking rapidly in contemporary esteem, the appearance of a new biography appears serendipitous. Muriel Miller probably knows more about Carman than anyone else alive today, for she has been writing about him for most of her life. *Bliss Carman: Quest & Revolt* is intended as "a replacement" for her 1935 biography with Ryerson Press — *Bliss Carman: A Portrait*. For this new biography, Miller has collected an enormous amount of additional information about Carman's life. At times it seems as though one could retrace every foot of Carman's many journeys across North America. While Miller offers an excellent diarylike account of Carman's activities — his employment, his friendships, and his love affairs — she throws little light

on his poetry or his ideas. Indeed, the volume is almost resolutely anti-intellectual, barely mentioning the various ideas and movements with which Carman was involved. The New England Transcendental movement, for example, greatly influenced Carman's thought, yet this is only briefly touched upon. Similarly, Miller discusses at length Carman's involvement with Mary Perry King in a school of Delsartean acting, yet never describes the Delsartean methods. In looking through Miller's index for Carman's individual poems, one realizes that she discusses only a few, and says little about them.

Even more damaging for a biography, Miller so immerses herself in the details of Carman's life that it becomes difficult to gain an overview of Carman's character. One sees his proclivity for hurling himself into romantic affairs as well as something of his personal reserve, but the two fail to coalesce into a portrait of Carman. At one point Miller quotes Carman as saying that for a biography "a true photograph of the exterior person is what is needed. The pose, the bearing, the motion, the stride, the voice and tone, a trick of the eye, a habit of the hand all mean so much." Unfortunately, Miller does not succeed in creating this "true photograph," in bringing the man to life.

While her painstaking research is admirable, and her tracing of Carman's steps will no doubt be of help to future scholars, in the end, one senses that, for Miller, this biography has been a labour of love, but a love that drowns Carman the man and the artist in a sea of details. A pity, for Carman's lyricism, if it is to be appreciated today, needs new insights, new techniques for reading. That, and the highlighting of a brighter brush.

RONALD HATCH

## MURDER & LIES

ERIC WRIGHT, *A Single Death*. Collins, \$19.95.  
TIMOTHY FINDLEY, *The Telling of Lies: A Mystery*. Viking, \$19.95.

E. L. DOCTOROW ONCE SAID of fiction writers: "ours is the only profession forced to admit that it lies — and that bestows upon us the mantle of honesty." Perhaps it is the overt playing with lies and honesty, as well as with such basics as life and death, that makes the mystery story an important form of postmodern fiction. The detective story is alive and well in all its forms in Canada today, from the straightforward and gripping "good read" to the complex and intricate postmodern playing with convention.

The more popular version is most admirably represented by Eric Wright's latest novel, *A Single Death*, another story featuring Inspector Charlie Salter of the Metropolitan Toronto Police. The fine, exciting plotting is matched by delightful wry humour and complex characterization that makes you care about the major players in this drama, a drama that is as much about marriage and separation, the loneliness of life alone and the dangers of intimacy, as it is about murder and lying. For all its humour and well-crafted use of the detective story conventions, this is a novel that touches on and illuminates the major themes of most contemporary literature: gender and family relations, aging and death, generational and class conflict (within a "classless" capitalist society), the paradox of the haunting, inescapable past and yet the urgent need for a sense of history — both personal and public — so vividly sought in our postindustrial urban society.

And these too are the themes of Timothy Findley's *The Telling of Lies*. Though carefully subtitled *A Mystery*, this is a very self-reflexive, metafictional kind of mystery, sharing as much with

the work of Borges and Robbe-Grillet as with that of Wright. As the archetypal investigation of the nature and existence of lies, the murder mystery or detective story is, in fact, a very popular “marker” of metafictionality today. In other words, it is a readily recognized way of signalling to the reader the conventionality and fictionality of what she is reading. It is itself a most self-conscious genre: think of all those little ironies uttered by characters within such novels about how “things like this only happen in detective stories, never in life” — that is, art! But the other characteristic of the genre that makes it so apt for metafictional purposes is the importance it overtly accords to the hermeneutic act of interpreting. The detective story reader is the paradigm for all readers: she is a detective tracing clues. The author is both creator and murderer, according to this metaphor, which is obviously set up by a play on words: the plot of narrative and the plot to kill. In *Murder in the Dark*, Margaret Atwood spoofs this somewhat, ending with a new Cretan paradox Doctorow would enjoy: “by the rules of the game, I always lie. Now: do you believe me?”

To lie, then, is to fictionalize. In Findley’s other novels, this same equation had arisen: the debate between Quinn and Freiburg in *Famous Last Words* over the truth-status of Mauberley’s writing on the wall is carried out in these same terms that equate the act of narration or writing with that of telling falsehoods as easily as truths. In *The Wars*, photographs also partook of the same ambivalent power to reveal the truth and to lie. In *The Telling of Lies*, then, we are in familiar Findley territory, a morally ambiguous world where the past always conditions the present. The narrator is one Vanessa Van Horne, a well-known American garden designer and sometime

photographer. Her very self-conscious diary-writing, which we read, has been directly occasioned by death: the murder of pharmaceutical magnate, Calder Maddox, and the impending “death” of the New England summer resort, the Aurora Sands Hotel (conveniently, ASH for short), where she has spent almost all of her 60 summers — except for those spent in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp at “Bandung” during the war. The plot shifts between, on the one hand, Nessa’s present-time attempts to discover both Calder’s murderer and also the reason for the high-powered American governmental silencing of the murder and, on the other, her memories of Bandung, of growing up in prison, of the commanding officer, Colonel Norimitsu, who was equally responsible for her father’s death and for teaching her about compassion and the beauty of formal gardens. Throughout the narrative, Nessa is more observer than participant, as she records events with either her camera or her pen. She is a most unwilling detective, who resists engagement in the moral and hermeneutic “game” until personal devotion and friendship intervene.

She is also a most unwilling writer, a woman with a visual imagination and a finely honed sense of moral ambiguity who distrusts language, while acknowledging her reliance upon it. She writes of the brutalizing experience in the camp:

I dislike the word *unmoved*. It is like the word *hate*. They do not always tell — as words — precisely what is meant. I do not mean that Mother was cold or cruel when it came to other people’s sorrows and pain — and certainly nothing of the kind when anyone died. *Unmoved*, in prison terms, means something else; and perhaps it means something it cannot mean anywhere but in a prison. It meant, in Mother’s case — and in the case of countless others, myself included — that feeling was masked. It was not withheld. Even *masked* sounds cold. It was not.

Context is all. This remark occurs in a passage which marks the centre or core of the novel. In the context of a detective story such a passage might feel strange; yet, in *The Telling of Lies* it feels not in the least incongruous, and this probably points to the different kind of (meta-fictional) mystery which this novel represents. This passage is an extended meditation on lies and truth, death and aging, life and living — all in the context of our investment of history in places and people. The final solution to the murder too goes beyond neat plot resolution to offer a timely political (and Canadian) twist, a warning and a revenge that hover over our reading like the bizarre and mysterious iceberg which appears in July in the harbour outside the ASH.

A hermeneutic puzzle or a gripping read: whichever you see as the reason for reading detective stories, you will not be disappointed with either of these novels, different as they are. There seems little doubt, however, that *The Telling of Lies* must be read in the context of those other contemporary postmodern meta-fictions which paradoxically exploit and subvert the murder mystery conventions, novels like Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, Patrick Süskind's *Perfume*, or even Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

LINDA HUTCHEON

## MACHINE ROMANESQUE

YVON RIVARD, *Les silences du corbeau*. Boréal, \$15.95.

FUYANT UNE DECEPTION amoureuse attachée au nom de ses deux amantes François et Clara, un Québécois nommé Alexandre se réfugie dans un *ashram* à Pondichéry. Il s'y retrouve aux pieds d'une jeune "mère" qui devrait le recon-

cilier avec lui-même et avec la vie. *Les silences du corbeau*, troisième roman d'Yvon Rivard, se présente donc comme un journal en trois Carnets rédigés par Alex. Son cheminement ne sera pas solitaire mais intégré, de mauvaise grâce il faut le dire, à un groupe de disciples venus chercher quelque révélation auprès de la mère.

Apparemment c'est une double quête qu'Alexandre poursuit en sol indien: recherche de soi, surtout de son enfance en Mauricie et recherche du visage de ses femmes. En fait il s'agit d'une seule et même démarche. Alex ne cherche personne d'autre que lui-même. Son plaisir de faire la lessive et sa manie de se laver les mains sont symboliques de cette attention obsessionnelle à soi. Par là, le livre est une nouvelle prise de vue du narcissisme contemporain mis en scène cette fois dans le cadre conventionnel du trip indien. Alexandre ne s'implique dans rien mais il est complètement et détestablement centré sur lui-même. Pour la forme, il se pose toutes ces questions profondes "tout de suite les grandes questions, c'est ça la nuit" qui ont (im)mobilisé sa génération, celle qui s'interroge aussi dans *Maryse*. Cependant, il ne se penche au-dessus de ces questions qu'en autant qu'elles lui renvoient sa chère image et qu'elles s'intègrent à son introspection bien douillette.

Car Alexandre, fils de la psychanalyse et de la sémiotique, introspecte et interprète furieusement. On sent dans toutes ses interventions cette volonté globale et impérieuse de tout interpréter pour que tout ait un sens, soit signifiant/signifié/significatif de quelque chose. A la fin, tant de soupçon existentiel provoque une certaine lassitude chez le lecteur qui voudrait que le récit avance sans tout ce décodage.

Puisqu'il s'agit de sa propre aventure, il n'y a donc dans le roman qu'un seul vrai personnage et c'est Alex. Les autres

ne sont là que comme confidents du narrateur. Le style du journal est celui qui lui convient le mieux et ce sont d'ailleurs les plus belles pages du roman. Dans l'utilisation du discours rapporté, des choses vues et entendues Rivard est à son meilleur et c'est là qu'Alex est le plus en voix, quand il n'a pas besoin de briller et qu'il cesse d'interroger son miroir.

Si le personnage d'Alexandre se tient bien, il n'en est pas de même du chœur des personnages secondaires qui ne sont que des esquisses et des clichés: défroqués, homosexuel, artiste, adepte du *Yi King*. Ceux-ci sont décrits avec tous les lieux communs idoines et placés dans les situations les plus prévisibles. J'en prendrai comme exemple l'agression de Peter, l'homosexuel, et le dialogue de feuilleton qui s'ensuit entre lui et Alexandre.

Une technique répétitive utilise ces personnages secondaires comme mode de narration circulaire qui exprime les différentes opinions, les différents points de vue. Un exemple de cette utilisation des personnages secondaires comme faire-valoir du narrateur apparaît dans ces passages fréquents où l'auteur fait parler chacun à tour de rôle de façon systématique.

Au souper, le nouveau régime d'austérité à été l'objet d'une longue discussion où se sont affrontés les jansénistes et les quiétistes. Véronique a paru particulièrement affectée par la perspective d'une telle séparation. Elle ne comprenait pas. . . . Thérèse . . . l'a rassurée en disant que. . . François doutait fort. . . Louis lui a fait remarquer . . . , ce à quoi François a rétorqué. . . Hermann partageait l'avis de Mère. . . Peter a violemment rejeté la comparaison d'Hermann. . . .

Après quelques applications de cette technique, le procédé est trop apparent et le récit apparaît comme superficiellement articulé puisqu'en fait c'est toujours

Alex qui mentalement fait le tour du sujet en donnant la parole à ses propres voix intérieures. Il n'y a donc pas de dialogues mais seulement un long monologue et la typographie trop évidemment dialogique de certaines pages a quelque chose de si forcé que ni les gros caractères ni les vastes plages blanches n'empotent l'adhésion du lecteur.

Cette distanciation du trop spirituel Alex par rapport à ce qui se vit à l'Ashram nous le rend difficilement crédible quand il plonge dans son drame personnel, la seule véritable quête dans laquelle il soit vraiment impliqué. Les femmes qu'il aime il ne les rejoint qu'à travers des photos et des cartes postales où elles se fondent l'une dans l'autre pour se perdre elles aussi dans son questionnement perpétuel. L'insensibilité d'Alex se retourne alors contre lui. Sa douleur ne nous touche pas. La mémoire de son enfance en Mauricie est le seul lieu où il y ait encore une certaine émotion et de la sincérité. Hors de ce lieu d'authenticité Alex a tout le factice de sa culture spirituelle ramassée dans les proverbes et les sentences qu'il cite à tout propos.

A première lecture, le livre offre une apparence de simplicité qui pourrait épouser un dépouillement intérieur résultant de la démarche spirituelle. Cette impression ne dure pas. Sous la simplicité de la surface percent les ressorts de l'écriture qui font que le livre est trop écrit. Comme ton général, il y a un discours ironique, léger qui donne lieu à quelques réussites dans certains rapprochements inattendus jaillis de l'imaginaire cultivé et débridé d'Alex. Exemple: l'apparition impromptue de Maria Chapdelaine à la fin d'une conversation avec Thérèse:

Thérèse s'est mise à fixer un point invisible au-dessus de la table et, avant même que je puisse détourner la conversation sur un autre sujet, elle a commencé à moudre en silence les trois ou quatre mots de son

*mantra*. Elle était désormais seule, au bout de quelques minutes, je me suis retiré sans qu'elle s'en aperçoive. Maria ensevelissait sous les Avé le corps de François Paradis, ma mère séchait discrètement ses larmes en attendant le retour du printemps, le retour de mon père. . . . Si le paradis existe, ce ne peut être que pour toutes ces femmes qui prient, qui pleurent.

Au total, *Les silences du corbeau* est un roman brillant, éblouissant même par endroit comme son personnage principal. Le motif du corbeau qui traverse comme une figure fantastique les journées d'Alexandre offre un bon exemple des ressources d'invention dont Rivard est capable. Tel qu'il est, le livre demeure superficiel, une sorte de machine romanesque exacte, sans souffle et sans espace, comme un exercice littéraire. L'attention est provoquée par les variations de ton, par les changements d'interlocuteurs dans les dialogues, bref par les procédés de la narration. Mais à ce niveau, tout est contenu dans les cinquante premières pages et pour la suite du roman, la machine ronronne sur sa lancée.

JACQUES JULIEN

## HITLER'S LETTER

W. GUNTHER PLAUT, *The Letter*. McClelland & Stewart, \$22.95.

THE SUBJECT OF THIS short novel interests me very much; yet I found it disappointing. Its essential subject is Hitler's "Final Solution," the mad effort to destroy every Jew within the Third Reich. The theme is still powerful and relevant, but the action in Plaut's fiction is only intermittently gripping and suspenseful. One can seldom become wholly involved with the lives of the characters, perhaps because of their predictability and Plaut's leaning heavily on coincidence. Certainly the heroine, Helga Raben, is interesting, dynamic, and believable. Jewish by birth,

she is at risk from adolescence onward in Nazi Germany; she is in love with a Nazi army officer, Rolf Baumgarten, who from the autumn of 1939 is surreptitiously a part of an underground anti-Hitler clique.

The violence of Nazi Germany arrives early in the novel: in November 1938, during the first pogrom, Helga's father's factory is seized, her mother raped; both parents commit suicide (as did real-life friends of the author) while Helga is in England. After her return to Germany she is compelled, with her lover's help, to adopt a new identity. Soon, plausibly, *The Letter* comes into her hands. It is a memo from Adolf Hitler to Herman Göring, explicitly commanding the implementation of the Final Solution: "I want the Jews to disappear from the face of Europe." Helga smuggles the letter to Switzerland, with the aid of an American military attaché, Ken Driscoll, with whom she also falls in love; subsequently Nazi operatives attempt to retrieve the letter, fearing that if its contents are known outside of Germany, the image of the Führer may be tarnished, especially in America. The letter, deposited in a bank vault in Bern, is traced to Helga, who flees to America, where she works as a translator and propaganda agent, accompanied by Driscoll. (In the meanwhile, her German lover, Baumgarten, has disappeared into the no-man's land of Poland.) Helga is unable to arouse any American interest in the plight of millions of German Jews in Nazi concentration camps. Even an interview with a noncommittal President Roosevelt is unhelpful. Nazi agents in the U.S.A. abduct Driscoll and ship him by U-boat to a concentration camp in Germany, where he stoically endures much suffering.

In Germany, readers of *The Letter* meet, at least briefly, the major figures in the Nazi high command: Göring, Himmler, Heydrich, and Eichmann, and

although we hear much about Adolf Hitler, Gunther Plaut unaccountably never puts him on the fictional stage. In time, the whereabouts of both Driscoll and Baumgarten is discovered, creating a romantic dilemma for both Helga and the novelist. In a time-honoured tradition, Plaut solves the problem on the last page of the book. The war comes to its bloody conclusion, with, inevitably, an emphasis on the extermination of six million Jews. One would think that, after the suicide of Hitler and the defeat of the Nazis, the letter would have no further value. Not so, for Plaut has the most dedicated Nazis determine to carry on, from South America or other safe havens, the cause of a greater Germany; hence, the deification of their defeated Führer must be furthered by the seizure and destruction of the incriminating letter. I can only say here that Plaut's disposition of the letter is unsatisfying and unconvincing.

This was a novel that I could bear to put down. Only occasionally was it powerful; it lacked the passionate intensity that one might expect from an author whose family was in part destroyed by the Third Reich. (Plaut himself settled in the U.S.A. in 1935; in 1961 he moved to Toronto, where he served for many years as rabbi of Holy Blossom Synagogue.) A reader may be irritated with Plaut's frequent moralizing. He will not allow the reader to draw his own conclusions from a situation; he nudges him in the direction that he must go. In this brief illustration Heydrich is at a concert: "[His] Iron Cross . . . was earned for his valor in torturing prisoners and dispatching Jews, Gypsies and other unwanted creatures to premature deaths." Plaut's occasionally slangy style seems inappropriate to the period and the seriousness of the book.

It is inevitable to compare *The Letter* with another recent Canadian novel on the same subject, Sylvia Fraser's *Berlin*

*Solstice* (1984). If Plaut read this novel, it influenced him little. Fraser's is a much more powerful and substantial book; it has a wider focus, with a greater immediacy in descriptions of ruthlessness and cruelty, with more dynamic characterization and dialogue. Indeed, Fraser's indignation seems more intense than Plaut's. *Berlin Solstice* is also superior to Plaut's novel in its willingness to make Adolf Hitler and his associates central to the story line. These men seem here to be important to the themes and motivations, whereas in *The Letter* the Nazi hierarchy is always peripheral. *The Letter* is perhaps an exorcism of old ghosts from a distance of four decades; it has a significant value in a somewhat quiet, unimpassioned way as a reminder of a terrible period in human history, now beyond the memory of a high percentage of the population of Canada.

ROBERT G. LAWRENCE

## WRITING LIFE

JOHN B. LEE, *Hired Hands*. Brick Books, \$7.50.

MARIA JACOBS, *What Feathers Are For*. Mosaic Press, \$8.95.

IN *Hired Hands* John Lee undertakes to present a life and portrait of moronic farm hand, Tom. We follow his career from cradle to grave through a series of lyrics interspersed by a number of short prose passages headed "The Well," a structural device that refers to the initial episode of the book in which the protagonist is dunked head first into a well for peeing his bed. This, or perhaps a later episode in which he falls on his head off a roof, is the source of Tom's mental deficiency. The narrator is the son of the farmer who has hired Tom. The account seems rooted in reality, but the narrative voice does occasionally soar, perhaps inappropriately:

Poems are twisting at his head  
like fingers  
on a stem-winder  
trying to wind his life up.

The basis of this conceit is that Tom collects old clocks and watches. But this "poeticizing" does not always work. It seems more a literary indulgence than a furthering of our understanding of Tom. And this points to the main problem of the book: are we getting Tom, or are we getting an imaginative youth's romantic view of a lovable retardate? Lee wants us to have both, but some blurring of focus emerges. Sometimes Tom's viewpoint is conveyed not by his, but by the poet's way of thinking:

He remembers  
what he likes —  
not what happened  
or is  
or will be  
but what he likes.  
He is constantly  
writing and rewriting  
his life  
for he remembers perfectly  
what didn't happen and why  
and why.

By the time you have figured this out, is it really Tom's thoughts? It might be perfectly accurate, in a way, but not in Tom's way. The poem is successful when the viewpoint shifts to the observer:

When he plays harmonica  
his eyes get wild  
I've seen that look  
in a sheep's eyes  
when its head is caught  
in a fence.

So the problem is one of *distance* and the temptation to go beyond the experience itself:

Tom watches the TV  
from another room.  
He can barely see  
through the smoke from his Trump cigar  
like Hecate  
squinting through a fog.

The Hecate reference is surely unneeded.

Despite these reservations we do get a sense of Tom's simplicity and isolation as well as the affection which he inspires in the narrator/poet. Perhaps this is all we have a right to expect. There cannot be much personal interaction, given Tom's handicap. And the book is often very funny. In fact the humour is handled with complete success. Tom's failed attempt at courting and his visit to a fortuneteller in town, among other passages, are deftly executed. The book needs cutting, but its heart is sound. The illustrations by Michel Binette are fine drawings, but do not always suggest Tom's oddity.

Maria Jacobs's second collection of poems offers explorations of love, authentic or illusory, many in retrospect, of human relationships in general as well as poems of observations and fantasy. This poet's writing has a directness which is appealing. She does not indulge in verbal conundrums or brain-twisting conceits. She likes to get to the point right off, hit or miss. Her hits are very good:

I still see you  
formal blazer and tie  
my letters and photograph  
in your outstretched hand  
returning me to myself.

Sometimes she misses, as with this tangle of tropes:

With one foot firmly  
in the romantic tradition  
the other in quicksand  
we are not well equipped  
to take charge of our lives.

This poem seems to be about fidelity — about how it can get boring:

Ask anyone — me for example  
leaving home now and then  
to see what my feathers are for  
but back again inevitably  
to my indispensable husband  
ready to be grounded  
for my irrelevant leanings.

But the poem doesn't come to grips with

the real issue that underlies these vague suggestions. Yet it ends well (except for the last line):

I would fight like anything  
to be liberated  
only  
there is no oppressor.

Or else I am he.

Despite her unsureness in places, this poet is always interesting and honest. Having quoted her at her worst, it is only fair to add that certain passages more than compensate for the weaknesses. "Mid-life" complements "Straddling" and suggests that Jacobs has a deeper understanding of the long-term human commitment than she does of romantic dreams:

We search in other eyes  
since yours reflect  
what you must catch in mine:  
the shaded side, August  
gusts of resentment  
against the steady flow  
troubling our surfaces  
below which we see nothing.

This writing combines directness and simplicity with great subtlety of feeling. Jacobs's unevenness comes from her total involvement in the experiences she is depicting—she dives to the depths and comes up with mud or a pearl. The writing never takes precedence over what she is writing about. Jacobs explores her involvement in human relationships with a vitality that conveys both depths and heights. In certain passages of unaffected finesse she excels with an enviable natural grace.

ARTHUR ADAMSON



## ROMAN HEARTBEAT

ANTONIO D'ALFONSO, *The Other Shore*. Guernica, \$20.00; pa. \$9.95.

PASQUALE VERDICCHIO, *Moving Landscape*. Guernica, \$17.50; pa. \$6.95.

*the accent is Celtic,  
the "ths" are perfect*

...  
*the heartbeat, Roman.*

—ALEXANDRE AMPRIMOZ

GUERNICA EDITIONS' *Essential Poets Series* has since 1978 given Italo-Canadian poets a forum in which to exchange, give a name to, and make known their shared experience. That experience (also documented in a flurry of 1970's novels, poetry anthologies, and literary journals) can be best summed up as "the bicultural sensibility," which Pier Giorgio Di Cicco noted is shared by an ever-growing number of New Canadian writers who are scattered all about the country. Perhaps one should refer to a tricultural sensibility, taking into account Canada's two official languages.

There is no question Di Cicco's "sensibility" exists. However, here are several as yet unanswered questions with which the sympathetic reader should approach Italo-Canadian writing: who thought to impose the "Italo-Canadian" label in the first place—the group of writers who banded together, or a faceless and indifferent Canadian literary establishment? To what purpose might this literary lobby best be applied? What language should the writers speak among themselves, and in their work? Is there an Italo-Canadian tradition offering rich images through which writers may explore and express new-found identity, or a jumble of subjective experiences inaccessible to the reader who either does not understand, or wish to understand, a microexamination of cultural background.

To these questions a tremulous "It depends. . . ." The fact is, as with any art form, it is up to the individual artist to make powerful feelings as real as possible to the reader/spectator. The search for self is a necessary process through which the writer on the cultural margin passes, to fit into, or just "be," in the New World. Joseph Pivato, in an article entitled "The Arrival of Italian-Canadian Writing," quotes Robert Kroetsch's pithy comment: "The fiction makes us real." Italo-Canadian writers are and have been compelled to write about confused feelings of rootlessness, frustration, and nostalgia brought upon them by "exile," "marginalization," "invisibility," "cultural death," "assimilation," "voicelessness."

For Italo-Canadian poets in particular, the dangers of mixing poetry and polemics is the other side of the opportunity to sense a long-awaited belonging. In some unsuccessful Italo-Canadian writing, therefore, unwanted and clanking literary tropes can be found, what Pasquale Verdicchio describes as a "particular canon: . . . your mother in her mourning clothes, your father laying bricks, your first trip back to Italy." Antonio D'Alfonso suggests, "If Italian writers in this country wish to be taken seriously, they will have to work very seriously at trying to render intelligible their complex traditions not only to other peoples in this land but to themselves."

All that having been said, D'Alfonso's new book of poetry, *The Other Shore*, "A notebook without a beginning, without an end, only a flowing towards being," fails to involve the reader emotionally in the difficult struggle with dislocation, with what D'Alfonso elsewhere describes as the "search for balance between the natural and the cultural, the Old and New World, between the past and the present, between Italy and Canada. . . ." That failure arises specifically

from D'Alfonso's choice of form. Unlike the lyrical *Black Tongue* (1983), *The Other Shore* is, as the coverline suggests, a "notebook" of prose-poem perceptions organized into seven lengthy sections. The poet's *aperçus* are punctuated by haunting, grainy black and white photographs of passageways, stairs, doorways, taken by the author while in Italy. The book's divisions, it becomes clear, chart a voyage of self-discovery, starting particularly with "L'Uomo Solo," across oceans of memory and longing to homeland "Guglionesi," and back again to the inner self, "To Criticize Oneself." The voice that emerges from the diarylike entries speaks in the vernacular, and generally steers clear of poetic effects. The result is either a flat, featureless tone, in which the poet reflects to himself and to the overhearing reader

The cultures of being what being can never again be. Here or there: cultureless identity. The Italian culture: what does it mean to be Italian today if you live outside Italy? "If you don't live in Italy, you're not Italian." What does such a phrase mean?

or voluminous rhetoric. And then the sentences do not hold the obvious intensity of the poet's unreined-in emotion:

Words rot in my mouth, no text possible on the beauty of the coming to in this world. Not in Vietnam, not in Nicaragua, not in the hamburger stand as clean as a new valium container. Not in my dress you cannot distinguish from my work-clothes. Not in a flavourless stew — O melting pot of frigidity.

Furthermore, D'Alfonso's journey of discovery is frequently too personal — what with overwrought reportage of love-making, a string of dedications to friends and fellow writers, homage to certain family members — and reduces the reader to a stay-at-home voyeur, when he really wants to be on the journey too.

The poems in West Coast writer/ editor/translator Pasquale Verdicchio's *Moving Landscape* (his first collection) are admirable, especially for their emphatic visual appeal. Quick flashes of rich, intense thought are expressed in images that get to the essence of "things," as in "Fish":

Moon tears in sea skin  
converse creatures  
walled by currents  
scale senses

gills, fins motion secrets  
...

New phosphorescence  
tapering into fin lobe  
vanishes with darkness

Many of Verdicchio's poems, in fact, have a kind of picaresque quality (moving landscapes), as his gaze is fixed, and then lifted, and then fixed again on another point of the map. Startling pictures appear, as in "Barcelona":

There is no flamenco echoing in these  
streets  
any more:  
the accent is all that is left.  
Picasso women, white powdered faces and  
twisted  
eyes,  
stare and follow their noses up alleys.

Addressing the question of cultural identity, Verdicchio applies the same technique, or way of seeing, to advantage, and so we are compelled to see with him into the tableaux of present and past, "the dreams / which ancestors carved in stone / and described in jewels":

Arms of Etruscan figures  
whose loins spawned words of gold and  
silver  
from the sperm of mystery which spilled  
into the Arno and down to the sea.  
...  
their eyes closed in damp excavations,  
arms embracing the memory  
we hold of them.

The title poem, the longest and last in the collection, does battle with the complexities of belonging and yet not belonging in the New World — the Italo-Canadian (or immigrant) condition. Verdicchio laments his "ready-made history," the frustrations of "functioning as an absence," and of living in "this city, not my city, any city." He mourns, above all, the fickleness and shortcomings of language that, in the end, "must go on deceiving."

LOUISE MCKINNEY

## NOVEL HERSTORY

DALE SPENDER, *Mothers of the Novel*.  
Methuen, \$25.00.

RESURRECTING FORGOTTEN or neglected women writers and arguing for their inclusion in the literary mainstream are among the most valuable undertakings of feminist scholars. Dale Spender has surveyed women novelists before Jane Austen and produced an all-out attack on Walter Allen, Ian Watt, and other historians of the novel in English who have limited themselves to male writers. Spender's statistics are rough but impressive: well over one hundred women and only about thirty men were producing fiction from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. Her argument is chronological and qualitative as well as quantitative; why is Eliza Haywood called the "female Defoe" when she got there first with significant innovations in the novel? Why isn't Defoe the "male Haywood"? Why does Richardson get the credit for his limited male perceptions of female character in epistolary form when women had been publishing their female perceptions in epistolary form for decades?

These and other questions accompany biographical, critical, and bibliographical material on the women novelists, twenty-

two of whom are singled out for relatively detailed consideration. As well, Spender examines significant elements in the world of letters as they affected women: literacy, publishing practices, circulating libraries, access to bookstores, the making and unmaking of literary reputation. The scope of her book is ambitious.

Spender devoted "almost two years" to the preparation of this book and she thanks numerous friends and colleagues for their assistance. It is greatly to be regretted that her haste and her dependence on others have resulted in an unreliable piece of work. As a reference book, it is only as good as its many secondary sources, which range from the impeccable (Patricia Köster), to the uneven (Janet Todd), to the outdated (B. G. MacCarthy). Among other mistakes, some novels are wrongly dated, including two by Frances Brooke, lists of titles and editions are sometimes incomplete, names and titles are occasionally misspelled, reprintings of "lost" novels have been overlooked — and grammatical errors obtrude. Some standard reference works have not been consulted and much recent scholarship has been ignored; Spender has been satisfied, for instance, with B. G. MacCarthy's 1944 discussion of Lady Mary "Wroath" instead of consulting Josephine Roberts's recent work on Lady Mary Wroth. In her pages on Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*, Spender stitches together quotations and unacknowledged paraphrases from two critical sources, and, rather than going to the text of the *Female Spectator* itself, takes her Haywood quotations exclusively from those same two sources, including the ludicrous error "lubrications" for "lucubrations." Throughout *Mothers of the Novel*, heavy and uncritical reliance on an erratic collection of secondary sources, often insufficiently acknowledged, reduces the

scholarly quality of the book, while the large number of those sources casts doubt on the degree of critical neglect that Spender claims these women novelists have suffered. However, where little previous criticism is available, as in the case of Mary Brunton, that claim is justified and Spender's work is original and useful, despite her practice of "skipping" Brunton's passages of overt Christian moralizing, which Spender dislikes. And it is useful to have the full range of women's fiction — that is, the history of most of the mainstream of the English novel — brought together in one book, however tiresome the repeated attacks on male historians become. *Mothers of the Novel* serves a valuable purpose as the flagship of Pandora's fleet of reprints of novels by women currently being published — a most welcome project. One can only wish the flagship had been made shipshape.

ANN MESSENGER

## DRAMATIC FRINGE

NANCY BELL with DIANE BESSAI, ed., *Five from the Fringe: A Selection of Five Plays First Performed at the Fringe Theatre Event*. NeWest, \$6.00.

CHRISTOPHER INNES, *Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga*. Simon & Pierre, \$11.95.

CANADA'S MOST GENUINE and successful theatre festival is undoubtedly the Fringe Festival, a nine-day event in August that has been taking place annually in the Old Strathcona district of Edmonton since 1982. The festival has grown in size and popularity since its first year, when founder and organizer Brian Paisley scheduled forty-five plays in five performance areas, to 1986 when it featured one hundred and fifty plays in thirteen spaces from theatres to warehouses, stores, schools, hotels, and streets. Ticket

sales have surpassed expectations every year, from 7,500 for the First Fringe Theatre Event to 135,000 for Fringe the Fifth; each year it has doubled the number of tickets sold the previous year.

The loose organization and warm welcome to any theatre group accounts for the festival's attraction. There is no set theme or grand design, and groups are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis; they pay a small registration fee, are provided with a technician, and keep the money they take in at the box office. Such an open policy has attracted performers and companies from across Canada and abroad, and has featured plays that have gone on to play far beyond the borders of Alberta: Charles Tidler's *Straight Ahead/Blind Dancers*, Michael Burrell's *Hess*, and Janet Feindel's *A Particular Class of Women*.

This success has prompted NeWest Press to publish the collection of one-act plays, *Five from the Fringe*. The shortest and the best — *One Beautiful Evening* by Edmonton's Small Change Theatre — is from the first Fringe. It is a simple and heart-warming story about an elderly woman and man who meet at a community bingo hall; though they never win a game, they do win each other and go off arm-in-arm at the end of the night. The inherent sentimentality of such a tale is blunted by the humour and distanced by the masks and mime in the play; the only characters who speak are the announcer and some of those who do win. *Life After Hockey* is a one-man play by Kenneth Brown dealing with an enduring element in the experience of Canadian boys and men. Rink Rat Brown, a husband and father over thirty years of age, relives his boyhood days on the rink and fantasizes about taking Mike Bossy's place to score the overtime goal in the 1984 Canada Cup final against the U.S.S.R. But the play does not probe deeply enough into the

Canadian psyche and is undercut by the gimmickry of inserting the voice of Wayne Gretzky, "a godlike voice from above," and the Red Army chorus, and by a silly ending that has Guy Lafleur making a comeback with the Maple Leafs and inviting Brown to play on his line. *Cut!* by Lyle Victor Albert is an even sillier play, whose title the editors might well have applied to the play itself. Based on the premise of bringing together characters rejected from well-known plays, it might have sparkled like Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, but it does not. The rejected characters — Clyde, Prince of Denmark and Hamlet's brother; Fiddleditch, an elderly Victorian butler; Nippetitus, the sister of Oedipus; Mrs. Kowalski, the mother of Stanley; and Joey, a reject from a modern musical, *Hey, Dud!!!* (with all three exclamation marks) — have some clever and witty exchanges, but too many are predictable and derivative. The final flat joke is the appearance of Godot — an old man in baggy pyjamas who has been moaning in the wings throughout — when all the others have left the stage. Eating a cucumber sandwich, the remnant from another play, he looks out at the audience and says, "Where is everybody?" If the audience were wise, he would be referring to them.

Plays with greater possibilities than these two fantasies are two realistic dramas about the plight of the Métis and native Indians respectively. *The Betrayal* by Laurier Gareau concerns a confrontation between Gabriel Dumont and the parish priest at Batoche, Julien Moulin, O.M.I., in 1905, the year before Dumont's death. Told from Dumont's point of view, it condemns the role of the priests at the battle of Batoche, and supports Dumont's questionable belief that but for the betrayal of the clergy the Métis would have won the battle. The

French/Métis dialogue between the two men helps recreate this imagined moment in Canadian history. May we hope that Gareau or someone else will write a full-length play on Dumont as Coulter, Dorge, and others have done for Riel. *The Land Called Morning*, by John Selkirk with Gordon Selkirk, is a series of vignettes about four Cree teenagers in Saskatchewan. This is an age group of our native people not often seen on the stage. Despite the suicide of one of the characters and a sentimentalized ending, we are given a positive view of their prospects for a good life, with a little help from Emily Dickinson's poem, "Will there really be a morning," which gives an added dimension to the lyric nature of the play.

One Alberta-born playwright who has gone far from the Fringe is George Ryga, the subject of Christopher Innes's *Politics and the Playwright*, the first in a Simon & Pierre series, *The Canadian Dramatist*. Innes has written an important book that surveys Ryga's career as a playwright but also looks at his poems, novels, short stories, film scripts, and oratorios. It focuses on Ryga's changing political and dramatic vision from *Indian* (1964) to the recently performed *Paracelsus* (1986). In seven chapters Innes looks briefly at Ryga's Ukrainian origins in northern Alberta, his short stories, early novels, and *Indian*, devotes lengthy chapters to *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* and *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, and then goes on to show the evolution of the playwright's craft and vision in separate chapters on his dramaturgy, his attempts to create a Canadian mythology, and his place in the alternative theatre in Canada. Using unpublished manuscripts from the Ryga collection at the University of Calgary as well as Ryga's published work, interviews and letters, Innes gives a broad and probing portrait of the most provocative of

English-Canadian playwrights. The portrait is not always sympathetic, particularly in Innes's presentation of Ryga as the creator of his own image of the artist as martyr. "Ryga," he says, "began creating the persona of an artistic outsider, persecuted for his political convictions," and though he cites some examples from Ryga's career, they are not conclusive and may lead to an unfair questioning of Ryga's commitment to the cause of the poor and underprivileged.

Innes's analysis of the two major plays in his study are detailed and full of insight, too detailed at times. With access to the manuscripts he compares all six versions of *Rita Joe* up to the final one at the National Arts Centre directed by David Gardner, which was used for the published text. A closer analysis of that text and its impact on the Canadian stage and theatregoer would be more useful and interesting. Innes recounted in enough detail the controversy surrounding the Vancouver Playhouse rejection of *Captives* to provoke a spirited response from Peter Hay, the theatre's dramaturge at the time, in *Theatre History in Canada* (Spring 1986). Responding to Innes's chapter in that journal, "The Psychology of Politics," Hay called his rebuttal "The Psychology of Distortion." Regardless of whose version is more exact, the controversy and the image of the playwright that emerged from it "contributed to Ryga's relative ostracization in the last decade." If Hay's version of the events is correct we should look forward to a fuller account in his biography of Ryga, announced in *Canadian Theatre Review* (Summer 1979) with an excerpt, "George Ryga: The Beginnings of a Biography."

Innes uses his wide background in modern theatre to give a perspective on Ryga's dramaturgy. He shows Ryga's search for a form of his own, and discusses how Ryga's work differs from ex-

pressionism, epic theatre, naturalism, and documentary. In bringing many European and American playwrights to bear on the plays of Ryga, Innes was not inhibited by what he calls, "the pressure to limit the frame of reference solely to Canadian comparisons." But he might have made more of the French-Canadian comparisons for his purposes. He cites Jean-Claude Germain for whom, as for Ryga, "history is the self-justification of those in power." Innes, and Ryga too, might well look at other French-Canadian dramatists — Gélinas, Gurik, Tremblay, Loranger — to see how an oppressed people have expressed themselves on the stage. The feminizing of Germaine's (*sic*) proper name throughout the book, and the incorrect page reference to him in the index, suggest more attention might have been paid to models closer to home.

Nevertheless, Innes shows well the importance and development of Ryga's aim to create a Canadian myth, and how he does that, especially in his later plays, by dramatizing the working-class hero. Though that is too narrow a view, Ryga has committed himself to it in his recent plays and in his involvement with community theatre groups that have been performing and touring them in his home province of British Columbia.

Some minor shortcomings detract from the usefulness of Innes's work. He includes only one photograph, of Ryga himself, and regrets that "visual material from Ryga's Vancouver productions proved to be unavailable." This being the case, photographs from other productions would surely have been appreciated. Quotations from several sources are often included under one footnote, which makes the effort of identifying them more arduous than it should be. Innes dismisses the need for a separate bibliography because these details are given in the Endnotes. This is pre-

sumably for the sake of economy, but it is a false economy that is no service to students and scholars looking for primary and secondary sources by and about Ryga. Economy enough was gained by the compact print and large pages of this slim volume.

One final irony emerges from events after the publication of *Politics and the Playwright*. The Vancouver Playhouse, in conjunction with Expo '87, decided to mount the premiere of *Paracelsus*, fourteen years after it was completed and thirteen after that theatre's rejection of *Captives*. Despite a lavish production directed by John Juliani, the play was not a critical or popular success. Innes's book shows that yet another setback should not deter Ryga, whose political will and dramatic vision will spur him on to invent new forms of drama in creating a Canadian mythology. Perhaps he should consider the Fringe Festival; that's where his people are.

JAMES NOONAN

## MISSION TO CHINA

ALVYN J. AUSTIN, *Saving China: Canadian Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom 1888-1959*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$27.50.

By 1919 THERE WERE 175 Christian mission organizations in China whose staffs included 321 missionaries from the Canadian Methodist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches, and more affiliated with other groups. In a few years Roman Catholic missionaries would go out from Quebec. In the face of opposition, poverty, and disease these people founded churches, schools, hospitals, orphanages, printing presses, and newspapers — a process that began in 1888 and ended for all but a few in 1951. Alvyn J. Austin, the son of China missionaries from Ontario, has written a lively and detailed

account of these emissaries of Christianity and Canadian culture. *Saving China* is well written, edited and printed, and based on interviews and mission archives. Its approach is biographical and historical, with a focus on the missionaries themselves, their backgrounds, activities, and attitudes. Austin's approach is sympathetic, yet objective; he understands religious motivation, but points out the narrow egotism of some, as well as the extent to which missionaries relied on the support of colonial powers in China.

The author's view of China itself is deliberately limited. As he says in the preface, "I have tried to present the Chinese not necessarily as they were but as Canadian missionaries saw them and reported them in letters home." This is clear enough, but the result is a fragmentary and distorted view, with China glimpsed hurriedly between the cracks of narratives about missionaries and their internal politics. In the period covered, China was in worse shape than it had been for centuries, because of overpopulation, administrative corruption, and invasions of Britain, France, Russia, Germany, and Japan. The missionaries came unprepared, idealistic, and self-righteous. Most Chinese resented them; their work was slow and difficult, and their spouses and children died of diseases. The result is a jaundiced view of China that Austin's disclaimers do not offset.

Given this limitation, the book is a balanced discussion of missionaries from all the major Canadian churches, discussed in the historical context of the larger mission movement. There is interesting information here on the perspective of Quebec Catholic missionaries, some of whom felt a certain familiarity between Chinese villages and their own, and identified with Chinese dislike of the British. Austin also notes the important role of women, who made up two-thirds of the missionaries in the field. They

were concerned with the social and educational liberation of Chinese women as well as with the salvation of their souls. Half of the missionary women were unmarried, so they also developed a new, high profile vocation for Canadian women. The impetus for Quebec missions came from societies founded by Sister Délia Tétréault in the late-nineteenth century. But the real puzzle posed throughout this book for those at a secular distance is, "why did they go?" What in the world were these people doing in China, a civilization far more ancient than their own? What a combination of religious fervour and cultural arrogance, of ethical dedication and sheer foolishness! And yet they did some good, both for the Chinese and for Canada, whose involvement with the larger world was stimulated by their appeals.

Alvyn Austin has done well what he set out to do. The next step is to integrate this material into the larger realm of cross-cultural interaction, and from there use it to better understand ourselves.

DANIEL L. OVERMYER

## MUNRO'S PROGRESS

ALICE MUNRO, *The Progress of Love*. McClelland & Stewart, \$22.95.

SOME YEARS AGO, while being interviewed for Jill Gardiner's 1973 New Brunswick M.A. thesis, Alice Munro spoke about her use of retrospective narrators and the problems they confront in her stories, saying that as we grow older: "life becomes even *more* mysterious and difficult," so that "writing is the art of approach and recognition. I believe that we don't solve these things — in fact our explanations take us further away." *The Progress of Love*, Munro's sixth collection since she began publish-

ing during the 1950's, everywhere displays its author's unequalled maturity, her unerring control of her materials, and of their multitude of interconnections. It leaves its reader enraptured — over the stories as narratives, certainly, but more than that, over their human detail and most of all over the uncompromising *rightness* of the feelings they describe, define, depict and, finally, convey. Yet at the same time, and in keeping with her sense of the mysteries of being, Munro's insights here are both more ambivalent and more technically complex than those she has offered previously.

One does not so much review this collection as savour its delicacies. In "Es-kimo," which tells of a doctor's receptionist/mistress, Mary Joe embarks on a plane over the Pacific. Amid the strange things she sees and dreams while aloft, we are offered this recollection of her doctor, a snippet of their relationship:

He liked her when the braces were still on. They were on the first time he made love to her. She turned her head aside, conscious that a mouthful of metal might not be pleasing. He shut his eyes, and she wondered if it might be for that reason. Later she learned that he always closed his eyes. He doesn't want to be reminded of himself at such times, and probably not of her, either. His is a fierce but solitary relish.

When the narrator of the title story, now a divorced real-estate agent, visits the house she grew up in, her memories cause her to lash out at an off-handed remark made by Bob Marks, the man she is with. He immediately apologizes and, in a conciliatory follow-up, asks "Was this your room when you were a little girl?" This question is equally inaccurate, but the narrator acquiesces so as to smooth things over. She then explains to herself, and to us:

And I thought it would be just as well to let him think that. I said yes, yes, it was my room when I was a little girl. It was just as well to make up right away. Mo-

ments of kindness and reconciliation are worth having, even if the parting has to come sooner or later. I wonder if those moments aren't more valued, and deliberately gone after, in the setups some people like myself have now, than they were in those old marriages, where love and grudges could be growing underground, so confused and stubborn, it must have seemed they had forever.

Trudy, the protagonist in "Circle of Prayer," recalls her feelings after Dan, her husband, left her for another woman. She holds these feelings suspended in tandem with a memory she has of Dan's mother playing the piano in the ramshackle hotel where the older woman lived, and where Dan and Trudy, years before, had spent their honeymoon. Munro describes Trudy's wonder:

Why does Trudy now remember this moment? She sees her young self looking in the window at the old woman playing the piano. The dim room, with its oversize beams and fireplace and lonely leather chairs. The clattering, faltering, persistent piano music. Trudy remembers that so clearly and it seems she stood outside her own body, which ached then from the punishing pleasures of love. She stood outside her own happiness in a tide of sadness. And the opposite thing happened the morning Dan left. Then she stood outside her own unhappiness in a tide of what seemed unreasonably like love. But it was the same thing, really, when you got outside. What are those times that stand out, clear patches in your life — what do they have to do with it? They aren't exactly promises. Breathing spaces. Is that all?

Reading passages such as these in context, we first notice family resemblances with other Munro stories — in subject, technique, tone, and effect — but the maturity of these stories eclipses earlier efforts and even exceeds those in *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982). "Jesse and Meribeth," for example, which tells of the connections between two girlhood best friends, is related in subject and treatment to "Boys and Girls," "Red Dress — 1946," and "The Shining

Houses" from *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) as well as *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971). At the same time, Munro is extending her range; "The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink" has a nostalgic air about it as it matter-of-factly tells the histories of two brothers from the farm boarding in town to attend business school. Calmly and in great detail, Munro recounts their activities, the difficulties which lead to their sudden flight from the town, and eventually — from the perspective gained a lifetime later — she offers a seeming sense of resolution. Beautifully done, the story is unlike most of Munro's other work. Another, "A Queer Streak," deals also in familiar materials — weaving the interlayered relations and connections of four generations together — but it does so at much greater length.

But more than such comparisons, *The Progress of Love* offers both greater complexity and, oddly enough, greater uncertainty than we have seen before: not uncertainty of purpose, control, or detail, but rather uncertainty of meaning or uncertainty of being — these stories offer a complex wonder at the strangeness of it all. In the passage from "Eskimo," for instance, the paragraph builds matter-of-factly to the telling descriptive line — "His is a fierce but solitary relish" — which is so precise and right in its focus. Yet such a detail, which encapsulates the doctor's stern, Ontario-WASP demeanour, is offered only incidentally, a snapped, subtle phrase. In the narrative itself, Mary Jo either misunderstands or misperceives a scene between two fellow-passengers on her Tahiti-bound plane, an Eskimo man and a teen-aged *métis* girl he is travelling with. After she experiences considerable vexation over their disagreement, offers to help the girl, and finally sleeps through some bizarre dreams that include these passengers, Mary Jo awakens to find that: "Some-

how a pillow and a blanket have been provided for her as well. The man and the girl across the aisle are asleep with their mouths open, and Mary Jo is lifted to the surface by their dust of eloquent, innocent snores." Munro concludes "Eskimo": "This is the beginning of her holiday." While generally still offering some sense of an ending in *The Progress of Love* — defined by a suitable summary paragraph — Munro now seems, most overtly here in "Eskimo," loath to say what it all means.

But if not composed explicitly to convey the fragility of being and of understanding, the stories here proclaim Munro's uncertainties by their structures, and by her masterful interweaving of events disparate in time, yet inescapable in connection, and so in personal resonance. Two differences are striking in this collection: Munro's more usual use of the third person, evident since *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978), has persisted and these stories, more than ever, reflect her return to Huron County. Indeed, they seem to offer us southwestern Ontario in something of the same way *Dance of the Happy Shades* does, but balanced now by an older narrative perspective: we no longer see Huron county from the point of view of one growing away and going away from her home place — the stories in *The Progress of Love* encompass more time, offering us the longer view, often the cradle-to-middle-age perspective of a returned native. From her earliest stories, Munro's narrative perspective has gradually grown older, so here many characters, like Mary Jo, have personal histories — and so perspectives of time and space — roughly equivalent to Munro's own: forty or fifty years of age, born in rural Ontario, living there still or living there again, divorced, remarried, preoccupied with spouses and mature children, and growing older (though not yet old).

These characters, whose perceptions and perspective Munro recreates through that emphatic yet detached way she has, share a common task. Their "real work" in their stories, as the narrator in "Miles City, Montana," says, is "a sort of wooing of distant parts" of themselves. Perhaps the most complex story in the collection, "Miles City" interweaves the narrator's childhood memories of a young acquaintance who drowned, with more recent memories of her own daughter's near drowning on a family holiday. The narrator interconnects memory with incident and with perspective upon her former self and upon her now former marriage, marvelling, in the words of another Munro narrator, at "all this life going on." In these stories we approach the mystery of being, follow the narrative wooing of self and, in the end, if we don't achieve understanding, we emphatically recognize life — as it is lived, felt, and wondered about. Through them, Alice Munro's "real work" proclaims in every way the precise delicacy of her approach, recognition, and progress.

ROBERT THACKER

## FOLKTALES

ELLIOTT B. GOSE, JR., *The World of the Irish Wonder Tale: An Introduction to the Study of Fairy Tales*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$12.95.

GERMAIN LEMIEUX, *Les Vieux m'ont conté*, vol. 23. Bellarmin, \$20.00.

THESE WORKS REFLECT polar differences of approach to the study of folktales in Canada, and like most highly polarized studies their respective virtues and vices may be readily underlined. To begin with the more challenging of the two, Gose's *The World of the Irish Wonder Tale* is introspective and speculative; Lemieux's is down-to-earth and practical.

Gose is a literary scholar; through literature he has discovered folktales. His *Preface* informs us of his belief that folktales bear within them "unconscious, compensatory images, promptings which seek conscious recognition. . . . Unlike the folklorist [whom he mistakenly believes to be preoccupied with the "typical"], I have tried to find not the most typical but the most compelling version of a particular tale." In order to elucidate the meanings and messages of his selection of tales, he has adopted a seemingly eclectic set of theoretical approaches, the insights from which he applies as his "sense of its particular structure and theme seemed to dictate." The particular approaches Gose favours include the ritualistic — which "helps to suggest the animistic way of thinking that also informs wonder tales"; the psychoanalytic, making use of both Freudian and Jungian views; structuralist, drawing both on Vladimir Propp and Tzvetan Todorov's perceptions; and to a lesser extent, insights from comparative mythology, comparative religion, and the cross-cultural studies of anthropology. All these disciplines are, however, "adjuncts to my own literary approach. I am interested in how the narratives work, how characters become involved in conflicts, how plots embody themes, and how readers are implicitly involved in a process with psychological consequences."

One of the failings of folklore scholarship until the 1960's was its lack of concern with interpretation of the abundant data accumulated over the preceding 150 years; not that there had not been numerous interpretive forays made, but most had been based on what proved to be ultimately groundless and unprovable theories. One of the areas that provoked the greatest ire of international folklorists was the psychoanalytic; most of those who applied Freudian theory to folktale analysis were readily able to prove whatever points they wished to prove, to dem-

onstrate that such-and-such a tale was a clear example of the Oedipus theme, but in a manner which smacked of reading into, not out of, the tales. In short, psychoanalysts have tended to rely on ideal examples of tales upon which to base their interpretations, and have generally failed to base their analyses on a large body of comparative data. Folklorists tended to provide the comparative data, but to avoid overly speculative interpretations. Gose has also restricted himself to select texts which will serve to illustrate his theses, and has, moreover, compressed, condensed, and taken episodes out of context.

There is a considerable body of literature devoted to attacks on the various theoretical stances Gose adopts (and, in all fairness, a similarly large body of supportive studies). The plethora of opposing views simply confirms the speculative nature of many of them: one man's opinion is just as valid as another's; but to be useful, conclusions must be drawn which will inform the reader, offering insights of many kinds, helping an individual stimulate his or her intellectual activity. This has always been an aim of literary criticism, and the themes Gose explores — "Acts of Truth," "Self-transformation and Alienation," "Aspiration and Identity," "Love and Violence," "Healing and Wholeness," "Destiny and Fate," to name some of the chapter titles — are all matters which concern the thinking individual and which form the focus of much creative literature.

Apart from a few perfunctory remarks about the oral style of some of the Irish narrators whose narratives eventually became the subject of this study, Gose nowhere acknowledges the fact that "wonder tales" or *Märchen* can still be collected in living oral tradition, with the same complexity of theme and plot, the same variety of narrative style and dramatic performance as he associates with

the former Irish tradition whose tales he draws upon. Such an approach not only stresses the literary applications of folk-tale study, it also stresses frequent scholarly neglect of the actual storytellers, people who may well be illiterate or semi-literate, but who have been over the centuries the active transmitters not only of the tales but of the aesthetic criteria associated with their transmission. To think of storytellers as the unwitting bearers of uncut diamonds, the value of which the scholar alone can appreciate (a nineteenth-century view which has endured well into the twentieth), is an unwitting act of cultural elitism; but worse, it ignores the considerable research undertaken during the last twenty years or so by folklorists attempting to elicit from the tale-bearers themselves their views and interpretations of the tales they transmit. For the "folk" understand their tales and interpret them, inelegantly perhaps, possibly without complex theoretical stances to back them; surely, any interpretation of such tales should at the very least take into account the views of the storytellers themselves. Professor Gose's study is, in the final analysis, an example of the divorce between the collector and interpreter of data collected in a living context, and the dilettante interpreter who chooses the most appealing or useful approaches to serve very personal ends.

It is not wrong to adopt such an approach; artists and authors and others may make such use of the human copyright as they see fit. But it is another thing again to present the creative use of folklore as "An Introduction to the Study of Fairy Tales." Gose's knowledge of the field is limited to a few pertinent areas, but insofar as any "Introduction" will provide an adequate historical survey of the scholarship, covering at least the major schools of thought, the work is, at best, mistitled. An approach that dwells

on abstract themes alone is incomplete, and ignores the human context from which they spring. A number of minor bibliographical errors betray Gose's dated familiarity with folktale scholarship, but the work is certainly interesting and provocative.

Germain Lemieux's *Les Vieux m'ont conté*, twenty-third volume in a series which will include at least thirty such, is, to use a folk idiom, a different kettle of fish entirely from Gose's. This particular contribution includes six folktales which conclude Lemieux's presentation of the repertoire of Antoine Landry, a native of the Gaspé where he was born in 1871. Sailor, lumberjack, fisherman, carpenter, Antoine Landry was also an "official storyteller" in the lumbercamps; shortly before his death he claimed to know about 250 versions of folktales; one of his sons considered this a modest estimation. Most of the volumes in this collection consist of the repertoires of storytellers gifted or not-so-gifted, prefaced by brief biographical notes on the narrators.

Father Lemieux began collecting folktales some forty years ago, eventually producing a doctoral dissertation under Laval University's Luc Lacourcière. Lacourcière, and the majority of his students, were comparatists concerned with questions of dissemination and variation of folktale texts. Their work was in the tradition of the so-called Finnish historic-geographic school which had elaborated a methodology originally designed, at the end of the nineteenth century, to help solve questions of origins. Such problems rarely motivate contemporary folklorists who, since the late 1950's, have begun to explore new issues using, amongst others, some of the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted by Gose. Lemieux's work has always been primarily one of collection and publication of data in the context, broadly speaking, of the

Finnish method. In this respect he has not been concerned with interpreting his data, and this is today a major criticism that can be levelled at his research; on the other hand, one does not expect, with all due respect to Lemieux, to teach an old dog new tricks; it is enough indeed to trust that a septuagenarian will be able to complete his life's work, and make available to scholars what is undoubtedly the largest published collection of French-Canadian folktales.

There are nonetheless weaknesses in the series. The tales are given the most summary of identifications according to the Aarne-Thompson catalogue of international folktales, *The Types of the Folktale*. No attempt is made to provide lists of motifs according to the widely used work by Stith Thompson, the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (the most recent co-ordinates of which were apparently not known to Gose). Instead the reader is offered an analytical index which attempts to replace motif numbers. Admittedly, to provide motif numbers for the many tales in the series would be a time-consuming task; they are, however, expected by international folktale scholars.

In one respect, Lemieux has departed from the Laval school of folktale publication, and in this he is to be commended. Folktale specialists trained at Laval were text-oriented. In comparative matters, the text is primordial, and concern with textual accuracy did not include fidelity to the spoken word. Contemporary folkloristics is much preoccupied with performance theory and related matters, and this concern demands a method of transcription which reflects as accurately and as legibly as possible the actual verbal utterance. Laval scholars have been mainly concerned with the narrative content of texts and, under pressure from colleagues in linguistics, resort to phonetic transcriptions

which are readily accessible only to the initiated. Thus, a typical folktale published by a Laval-trained scholar standardizes and deforms the oral text; it is therefore impossible to talk, for example, about matters of style.

Lemieux devised his own system of transcribing the oral text. While his system is cumbersome and might readily be refined, it has the virtue of attempting to provide a close approximation of what was actually said. Thus, future scholars will be able to do more than simply study the content of his tales. His system does require some practice to master, but to the serious scholar it is by no means a daunting task.

His awareness of that problem, however, partly inspired Father Lemieux to provide, following each original text, a revised and standardized version. Scholars will find this unnecessary, and the method doubles the size of each volume. But Lemieux also wanted to make his texts available to a much wider public, and so attempts to kill two birds with one stone.

GERALD THOMAS

## FULL STOPS

ALI-JANNA WHYTE, *Economic Sex*. Coach House, \$11.95.

THIS IS A FIRST NOVEL by a woman writer whom Coach House Press coyly identifies as "a somewhat mysterious writer" who is "now thirty years of age and lives in northern Ontario." Since the novel is largely about identity, it is perhaps a deliberate joke that the author should conceal her identity.

The story is of Sarah Stauton, a blue-blooded Ontarian in her late twenties and working in the publishing trade in Toronto. She is a contemporary woman — working out at the University of Toronto gym without paying dues, juggling three

male relations at the same time, and sporting the attitude toward sexual encounters of any healthy philandering male: get what you can out of the relationship and then move on. The narration focuses on one week during which she reminisces over her entire biography, discovers she is pregnant, and has an abortion. Following the abortion she disowns her materialistic bourgeois past and the metaphysics of the "Mind/Body split," renouncing her identification with Rich, Powerful People and vowing to listen to her body, and to no longer *use* it for the ends identified by her greedy mind.

The novel is a first-person narration, largely retrospective. It begins with Sarah dining with Nicholas while dispassionately and critically observing both him and herself. During the following week of psycho-narrated interior monologue we learn Sarah's entire biography. She is a Stauton, a wealthy Ontario Lakeshore family. The portrait of Ontario society does not ring true. And Sarah seems to have been doomed to encounter only stereotypes throughout her life. There are some twenty-two named characters including a manipulative mother and self-sacrificing father, a lecherous uncle, a series of phallogocentric youths and men, and a comprehensive set of female friends: the plastic American, the Earth Virgin, the athlete, the poor ethnic, the earnest suburbanite child, and the New Woman. Sarah herself is a New Woman still imprisoned in the nets of class and social ambition. The novel releases her from these tangles by means of Nicholas, a crass, wealthy, philandering American without any redeeming features that I could discern. Nonetheless, cold, calculating Sarah falls hopelessly in love with him — only to be cast off like an old shoe. Sarah's pregnancy is not a serious problem in the relationship, for she readily obtains an abortion. However, con-

fronted with her body's "betrayal," Sarah, for the first time in her life, confronts *herself*, a union of mind and body. The meaning of the experience is conveyed by a following scene in which Sarah sits in her bath with the shower pouring over her: "Sitting in the pond. In the water. Breathing easy. Comfortable. Warm. A tiny fetus in the world womb." The contrast to this is Nicholas's remark when she asks him for affection — even genital affection: "It's all economic sex." Despite all of this Sarah inexplicably continues to long for Nicholas.

The greatest difficulty I had with *Economic Sex* arose from its prose style. Whyte has decided to represent Sarah's stream of consciousness by the scrupulous avoidance of sentences, and the liberal use of the full stop. The passage I have cited is typical of the entire novel. Such a telegraphic style certainly slows down the reader, and does catch the fragmentary nature of Sarah's psyche. But 200 pages of isolated noun clusters is a bit trying. Thematically the novel left me a little puzzled, and — even more damaging — a little bored. The difficulty, I think, is that Sarah and all the other characters never rise above stereotype. Sarah herself and the minor characters appear to be introduced primarily to "cover" this or that thematic topic essential to The Great Canadian Feminist Novel. (Although I must admit that there is not a single allusion to lesbians or French Canadians.) The characterization and incident are so *pro forma* that I found myself wondering if the novel was not an allegory rather than a representative fiction. Sarah's genuine love for her American beau Nicholas is so poorly motivated that I was tempted to conclude that it was meant to be read allegorically as an account of American-Canadian relations. Sarah, perhaps, is the female Canadian victim willingly plowed by the male American predator,

and cast aside when his interest turns to Mexico.

As an account of the life of the New Woman, *Economic Sex* is not without interest, and certainly it is a serious attempt to engage serious moral and social issues. For this reader those concerns were unnecessarily blurred and marginalized by the effort to incorporate an assessment of an imaginary Ontario class structure, of Canadian-American relations, and of consumerism. In short, the novel reads as if the author were determined to include it in everything she had to say about women, the middle class, Canada, the U.S.A., history, and metaphysics. If she has a lot to say, it must look superficial when compressed into 200 pages. If she hasn't something new to say on every topic, it must look trivial and hackneyed. Alas, the novel tumbles into one or the other of these pits.

LEON SURETTE

## CRISIS OF FAITH

RAMSAY COOK, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$15.95.

THE "CRISIS OF FAITH" engendered by a changing world view and the assaults on the Scriptures mounted by "scientific" historians left believers in Canada as elsewhere to hunt for new certainties. Some found them in their moral and social convictions. These fill most of Ramsay Cook's book; but there were others whom he notices as well, including spiritualists and those who itched to use psychiatry on the soul itself.

Cook is a social and intellectual historian. That is to say that his book is concerned with certain events in a process of social change, chiefly deliberate attempts to mould public opinion. Apparently Canada was "Victorian" long

after Victoria, and Cook, who begins in the mid-nineteenth century, works his way through the Mackenzie King era. He tells his story mainly through the lives of a cast of characters whose eccentricities and zest clearly delight him. We meet social reformers (Salem Bland, J. S. Woodsworth and, yes, Mackenzie King, who occupies most of a chapter), philosophers (John Clark Murray, John Watson, and George Paxton Young), a mystical psychiatrist (Richard M. Bucke), and two spiritualists (Benjamin Fish Austin and Flora MacDonald Denison). In the background there are a few dreary spoilsports — Anglican traditionalists, Methodist fundamentalists, and vague purveyors of moral uplift who found all the intellectual excitement deplorable. There was even Sir William Dawson, a man who opposed Darwin, objected to the “integrated” education of women, and fought battles with John Clark Murray, the social-gospel philosopher of the hour. But the role of the naysayers, naturally enough, is relatively small in the story which is, after all, about the “regenerators.” The title is taken from a satire in the *Canadian Magazine* of 1893 probably written by S. T. Wood but, though Cook does not think that religion did get “regenerated” (the large Protestant denominations are in more trouble now than they were in the late-nineteenth century), he does not mean to satirize his characters.

Some of the regenerators were outright failures. Spiritualism did not catch on even as well in Canada as it did in Britain and the United States, but most of those mentioned by Cook played identifiable roles in bringing us the world we have today. Bucke was a pioneer — not just in Canada — in the physical treatment of mental illness. His general thesis that sick minds imply bodily disturbance carried the day, even if his specific practices and his theories about morality and

the sympathetic nervous system are forgotten. He makes me think of *The Clockwork Orange*, but in his profession he is something of a hero. Mackenzie King’s vision was fuzzy, but he lived to be able to recognize its realization — fuzz and all. J. S. Woodsworth is still a name to be reckoned with.

Cook tells his story well. We can sense the delight with which Watson puts down the social Darwinists for “applying Evolution to a wholly different class of cats,” and appreciate the absolute if suicidal integrity of the Rev. Mr. Austin as he defends himself against a charge of heresy based on spiritualism by reminding the Methodist assembly of the soundness of their *other* enemy, the “higher critics.” We watch the misty mind of Mackenzie King work its way unerringly from socialism to the support of Rockefeller, and worry along with J. S. Woodsworth as he confronts the Protestant mind in Gibson’s Landing, British Columbia, and wrestles hopelessly with its attachment to capitalism and the Imperial Cause in the First World War.

The chapter on Mackenzie King is much the sanest and most intelligible account we have of that curious mind. Cook can even make Henry George sound plausible, but he does not succeed in getting us to understand how many of the social gospellers could, at the same time, tie a whole movement to propositions they found in the New Testament *and* welcome the critical attempts to show how unreliable the New Testament really was. And the mind boggles at Cook’s account of the beliefs of W. D. Le Sueur, one of the founding fathers of our public service, who “was a defender of Auguste Comte’s positivism, Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection, and Herbert Spencer’s materialistic ethics. . . . He was also an admirer of St. Beuve, Matthew Arnold . . . and Ralph Waldo Emerson.” One recalls Leacock’s head-

less horseman and Canadians will not be surprised to learn of Le Sueur's role in the development of their Post Office.

This is a good book to curl up with on a chilly night and a good book in itself, but an analysis of its structure raises a few doubts. I have two worries: one is about its omission of specifically Canadian ideas (as opposed to ideas borrowed by Canadians) and the other is about the way in which the material is abstracted from its context. Cook describes a Canada in which ideas essentially flow in from abroad and Canadians react to them in ways which closely parallel the Americans and the British. The main problems he examines are those posed by evolution and the "higher" criticism of the Bible. Bucke did have some very original ideas, but few other characters who receive extended treatment from Cook did. And even many of Bucke's ideas were borrowed from outside. In fact, however, there *were* some wholly Canadian elements in our intellectual life. George Blewett, a Canadian-born philosopher who does not get mentioned, went to Alberta as a young Methodist minister in the 1890's and came away disturbed both by what was being done to the Indians and to a fragile environment. His *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God* (1907) reflects some purely Canadian concerns which turned him away from orthodox Methodism. He did have an effect, however, on later Canadian Methodism. There are other Canadian elements in the shift in religious belief, too. The distribution of population created small isolated communities in which one *could not* maintain numerous denominations. It did have an impact on the "de-doctrinalization" of religion.

Even more important is the relation of religion and literature in Canada, and yet, though Dickens and Matthew Arnold get mentioned, Canadian literature

is largely ignored. There are specific interesting problems which thus do not appear. E. J. Pratt was perhaps no Victorian (but was Mackenzie King?), yet he published his *Studies in Pauline Eschatology* in 1917 — well within the time frame of this book. He had his own way of dealing with Biblical veracity — a way which rings true in a Canadian tradition — and it echoes in his poems and in the kinds of imagery which struck home to a good many Canadians. His way of tying religion to nature is an alternative to the reorderings which Cook discusses. To omit such things is to make us seem more colonial than we really were.

The second doubt arises from the fact that Canadian Protestantism never existed in a vacuum, as did British Protestantism in an era when Catholics were a tiny and generally impoverished minority, or American Protestantism when most Catholics were immigrant workers. Religious thought in Canada therefore gets distorted when one tells the story with the Catholics left out. Their effect on Protestantism was often negative, but not always.

To say, more, however, Cook might also have had to say less — for his essay is about the maximum length for a manageable book. No doubt there are other books to be written, but, for now, we can be grateful for this one.

LESLIE ARMOUR



## PRAIRIE LOVE

CAROL FAIRBANKS, *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction*. Yale Univ. Press, \$22.00.

THIS BOOK, WRITTEN by an English teacher at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, is sometimes illuminating or provocative. It is also often strangely dissatisfying. Nevertheless, its exploration of popular literature, images and themes in women's fiction, prairie writers, and the interrelationship of history and literature will interest a variety of readers.

Fairbanks sets out to determine women's vision as recorded in over 120 works written by prairie women over the past century. "The small facts of women's versions of experience," she asserts, "when analyzed and interpreted as structures of signification, lead to a new vision of women's roles in the cultures of Canada and the United States." No longer is woman solely "reluctant pioneer" or a "worn and resigned, but determined" figure. Numerous images emerge, likely some variant of Prairie Victim, Prairie Angel, or Frontier Hero. Chapter headings — "Women and the Prairie Landscape," "First Wave Women," "White Women and Indians," "Second Wave Women," "The Prairie Town," "Prairie Born, Prairie Bred" — suggest the scope of Fairbanks's exploration.

The author's task is formidable, especially since she attempts not only to discuss fictional images and relate them to historical knowledge, but also to use interpretations and concepts from the social sciences. This latter effort, it might be briefly noted, is perhaps most effectively realized in her use of "structures of signification" from the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Fairbanks's book is partially successful, adding to the "re-visioning" of prairie women already underway, particularly in the hands of

American scholars like Julie Roy Jeffrey, Glenda Riley, Elizabeth Hampsten, and Susan Armitage.

The authors chosen by Fairbanks are women who have been directly identified with the prairies and sought to depict women's experiences there. Interestingly, Canadian women predominate (thirty-four of sixty-six). The well-known "good" writers are frequently Canadian — established figures like Margaret Laurence and Gabrielle Roy and relative newcomers like Sharon Butala, Barbara Sapergia, and Aritha Van Herk — but included also are Americans like Willa Cather and the now-prominent Louise Erdrich. Most authors, Canadian or American, are obscure, often deservedly so. For Fairbanks, who seeks to explore as fully as possible women's versions of experience, such writers are crucial. As a historian, I welcome such examination. The question is, how well done is the task.

Fairbanks's most startling contention is likely her argument that women's response to the prairies has often been positive. While demonstrating that this awareness is present also in some works by male novelists, she focuses upon the female vision. "Love of the prairie landscape," she writes, is "a dominant structure of signification" in fiction penned by prairie women writers. Her analysis of women's response to the land calls to mind Annette Kolodny's *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. Both writers, for example, explore the ways in which the notion of prairie as garden was used to establish a sense of place for women, and Fairbanks, though critical of Kolodny, can be said to take up where she ends. She examines in detail how women in subsequent decades experienced the land. Many positive relationships emerged: "The prairie is rich in associations with home ground, erotic

experiences, imagination and creativity; it is a sacred place, sometimes linked with psychic healing, a place of oneness with nature." In another vein, the prairie has meant opportunity, even liberation, for some women. Here Fairbanks emphasizes the important role of the city, which, rejected by some, was a welcome haven for others.

Women, then, could embrace the prairies as land and as opportunity. Fairbanks's evidence, culled largely from a century of fiction, is irrefutable, but she overgeneralizes. Moreover, positive portrayal often came only decades after settlement.

Her explanation of how "limitless vastness" became "familiar, friendly, and even intimate" is intriguing — and provocative. Attitudes shape perceptions, the author argues. Woman has been socialized into expert accommodationist, and her sense of space and relationships gives rise to what Fairbanks describes as a feminine — and positive — version of Northrop Frye's "garrison mentality." Unlike man, who needs to conquer or control, she accepts the land on its own terms. She becomes "'garmented with space,'" projecting onto the prairie "the potential to clothe and protect her." Survival, even triumph, is the outcome. Fairbanks's explanation has an eco-feminist tinge: "A sense of the secrets of life is at the heart of women's optimism. Belief in renewal and rebirth underlies the survival instinct." In this identification of women with nature and discussion of its impact, the author overgeneralizes. In contrast is her awareness that "accommodationism" is a cultural fact of life not necessarily limited to women.

Central to her exploration is Fairbanks's heroic effort to relate fictional images and historical reality. Debates about the nature of reality, historical or otherwise, or the truthfulness of fiction can be raucous. My own position is that

relatively accurate, though incomplete, knowledge of the past can be acquired and fiction may be "true to life." What fiction, though, can serve as historical truth? A novel or short story may illuminate contemporary reality; that is, it may provide insights about the era in which it was written. Included in Fairbanks's study, however, are works written by a later generation long after the fact.

As sources of historical truth, then, Fairbanks's fictional works sometimes need to be used cautiously. Even so, her discussion has value. She provides detailed analysis of women's experiences in terms of "structures of signification" found in the fiction — journey, work, farm or homestead, ordeal and isolation, satisfactions, female relationships. She finds, by the way, no national differences, except for a persisting sense of prairie in Canada. Contrasts with historical accounts suggest the limitations of fiction, history, and our current state of knowledge. Her heavy reliance upon American sources is inevitable, given the literature's more extensive development. Nevertheless, some Canadian references are ignored. Eliane Leslau Silverman's work on Alberta women is an example. And why, in her discussion of Kate Simpson Hayes, historical example of liberated woman and cultural giant (and lover of Nicholas Flood Davin), does Fairbanks cite Ken Mitchell's play, *Davin: The Politician*, while omitting C. B. Koester's *Mr. Davin, M.P.: A Biography of Nicholas Flood Davin*, which has the most accurate information? It is unnerving, furthermore, to find her describing Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* as a novel.

Fairbanks's book, though, is a major attempt to relate fiction and history, and contributes to our growing awareness of the numerous images of prairie women, real or fictional. Her exploration will doubtless startle, even upset, many liter-

ary scholars. She sometimes challenges common interpretations of familiar fictional characters and assumptions of conventional literary criticism. The result of her book, I hope, will be additional research in literature and history on women, especially Canadian women — and men. As Fairbanks notes, we need also to examine anew men's images and "versions of experiences."

ANN LEGER ANDERSON

## UNE VOIX ONTARIENNE

HELENE BRODEUR, *Chroniques du Nouvel-Ontario*. 3 tomes. Prise de Parole, n.p.

NOUS SOMMES TEMOINS ces dernières années d'un essor remarquable d'une littérature canadienne-française qui n'est ni québécoise ni acadienne: celle de l'Ontario. Avec ses *Chroniques du Nouvel-Ontario*, Hélène Brodeur vient ajouter sa voix à cette expression littéraire croissante qui réclame son dû face à son cousin plus prestigieux. Cette trilogie (*La Quête d'Alexandre*, *Entre l'aube et le jour*, *Les Routes incertaines*) raconte, de façon parfois touchante, le peuplement de l'Ontario du Nord par des colons venus du Québec et leurs coups de chance et leurs déboires à travers les années. L'auteur a voulu "faire revivre une époque révolue de l'histoire de l'Ontario-Nord" en relatant des événements qu'elle prétend être vrais. Au lieu de suivre une intrigue centrale, l'oeuvre entière nous présente plutôt des scènes de la vie, des séquences dont le fil conducteur est assuré par certains motifs-clé: l'amour, le feu, la religion, la politique, la nature et le fait français en Ontario.

Le premier tome, dont l'action se déroule durant les années 1913-16, donc peu après l'arrivée des premiers colons

dans cette région, se divise en trois parties. La première raconte l'histoire d'Alexandre Sellier, jeune Québécois destiné à la prêtrise, qui arrive en Ontario du Nord à la recherche de son frère, dont toute trace avait disparu à la suite d'un feu de forêt catastrophique. Esprit insoumis, curieux et courageux, Alex remet en question sa vocation religieuse et ses croyances auparavant si solides. Ceci permet à l'auteur de procéder à un réquisitoire de l'hypocrisie, de l'orgueil et de l'intolérance qui caractérisaient l'Eglise catholique. Dans cette première partie, Hélène Brodeur nous fait sentir la tension qui existait entre Protestants et Catholiques, entre Anglais et Français. Elle critique vivement les attitudes bigotes et intolérantes qui créent une abîme entre les deux groupes et semble rejeter tout le blâme sur l'Eglise. Le bon sens commun du bûcheron, qui prêche le seul Evangile de la tolérance, ou du médecin qui lutte contre le fanatisme et l'orthodoxie, contraste éloquemment avec les idées étroites et préjugées des ecclésiastiques.

La deuxième partie de ce tome nous présente Rose, Anglaise venue en Ontario pour y vivre avec son frère. Mal servie en amour par son mari, elle tournera ses yeux vers le jeune Alex, d'où le dilemme moral de ce dernier. Troublé par son émoi pour Rose, par sa formation religieuse et par ses rêves érotiques, il essaie en vain de refouler ses sentiments. L'inévitable se produit: Rose et Alex consomment leur amour pendant l'absence du mari. Le feu de la passion montante des deux amoureux est suggéré de façon métaphorique par la chaleur montante de l'été torride et par l'incendie qui en résulte. Le feu, leitmotif qui avait déclenché toute l'action au début du livre, la boucle aussi. Le premier tome finira donc par un feu de forêt désastreux où Alex sauvera la vie à sa maîtresse. C'est d'ailleurs leur survie au beau milieu du sinistre qui le convainc défini-

tivement de se consacrer à la prêtrise et d'établir une mission en Afrique. Mais ce qu'il ignore au moment de son départ, c'est que Rose est enceinte de lui.

Le deuxième tome fait un saut en avant jusqu'aux années 1930-36, au début de la crise. La caméra est maintenant braquée sur la génération suivante et en particulier sur Donald, fils de Rose et d'Alex, sur Rose-de-Lima et Germain, enfants du voisin de Rose, et sur Jean-Pierre Debrettigny, fils d'un autre voisin. L'auteur raconte les histoires respectives de ces amis d'enfance et l'entrecroisement inévitable. Il s'agit surtout de l'amour constant et inébranlable de Rose-de-Lima pour Donald, amour qui restera toujours sans réponse.

L'auteur y continue de développer un autre motif qui avait une place non négligeable dans le premier tome: la relation haine-amour que l'on entretient avec l'Ontario du Nord. On ne cesse de le maudire à cause des nombreuses épreuves qu'il inflige: dur labeur, incendies dévastateurs, froid perçant en hiver, chaleur étouffante et insectes piquants en été. Mais il exerce en même temps une sorte d'envoûtement et l'amour évident avec lequel l'auteur le décrit trahit un profond rattachement à ce pays si souvent inhospitalier. Dans les deux premiers tomes, elle met l'accent sur cette dichotomie: la nature, entité parfois hostile, voire meurtrière, a en même temps un effet salutaire.

Par ailleurs, les histoires de Donald et de Jean-Pierre permettent à l'auteur de s'en prendre aux gens ambitieux et orgueilleux. Les deux amis ont chacun une espèce d'"ange gardien" qui se charge personnellement de l'éduquer et de le former. Mais leur motif est loin d'être altruiste. La tante de Jean-Pierre veut qu'il devienne médecin seulement pour assurer que le nom Debrettigny figure de nouveau parmi ceux de cette profession. Parvenue au plus haut degré, elle ne voit

que la rentabilité d'une action ou d'une amitié. Pour Donald, c'est encore pire, car son Pygmalion n'est même pas un parent. Les Gray, parents d'un de ses amis, l'enlèvent pratiquement à ses parents et en font un deuxième fils. Ambitieux, riches et influents, les Gray ont d'autres ambitions pour Donald que celles que la pauvreté de ses parents pourrait lui offrir, et savent que sa gloire éventuelle rejaillera sur eux.

Le troisième volet du triptyque, *Les Routes incertaines*, présente au lecteur quelques différences par rapport aux autres en ce qui concerne l'enchaînement du récit. Entre les tomes I et II, il y avait un saut de quatorze ans, mais avec le troisième, on commence là où on avait terminé à la fin du tome II, en 1936. Une deuxième différence tient au passage du temps. On sautera des étapes (la guerre, les années cinquante) pour terminer vers la fin des années soixante. Et, enfin, au lieu de changer de génération, l'auteur laisse sur scène les mêmes acteurs. Rose-de-Lima continuera de vivre un amour non réciproque pour Donald alors que ce dernier, réussissant brillamment une carrière parfaitement prévue et orchestrée par les Gray, finira par devenir Premier ministre du Canada. Jean-Pierre, quant à lui, sera évincé par sa tante à la suite d'une aventure amoureuse qui le détourne de ses études. Plus tard dans sa vie, il rencontrera Rose-de-Lima après une longue période sans l'avoir vue et ensemble ils feront un voyage en Ontario du Nord après plusieurs années d'absence. Ce "retour aux sources" n'aura pas qu'un effet bénéfique sur leur esprit; il provoquera en outre la naissance de l'amour entre eux, confirmant ainsi l'influence salutaire de la nature. Enfin, l'auteur boucle la boucle en faisant revenir sur scène Alexandre Sellier, absent dès après la fin du premier tome, maintenant vieux missionnaire en Afrique. Il y accueille Donald, son fils in-

soupçonné, lors d'une visite officielle de ce dernier, situation un peu tirée par les cheveux, il faut l'admettre, mais qui ne manque pas de suspense et dont la conclusion surprendra.

Celui qui entreprend d'écrire un roman-fleuve s'expose nécessairement à des problèmes d'ordre structural. Avec trois tomes et un total de plus de neuf cents pages, il n'est pas toujours facile de maintenir de façon cohérente tous les fils des diverses histoires et d'en suivre tous les développements. Il n'est donc pas surprenant de constater dans les *Chroniques* un air décousu, quelques redites et, parfois, une certaine lourdeur. Ceci est dû en partie à deux procédés narratifs auxquels Hélène Brodeur a souvent recours par la bouche d'un narrateur omniprésent: la prolepse ("Jean-Pierre ne croyait pas si bien dire. Il allait vite s'apercevoir de la distance... qui séparait Val d'Argent de Montréal"), et l'analepse: ("Rien qu'à évoquer ce souvenir elle se revit..."). Pour nous donner l'information qu'elle juge nécessaire, son narrateur fait souvent des apartés où il raconte l'arrière-fond d'une telle situation, résumant brièvement les événements qui y mènent. Cependant, ces apartés deviennent parfois trop longs et ne sont pas toujours nécessaires (par exemple, l'histoire du chemin de fer en Ontario du Nord). En fait, il y a d'une part beaucoup de détails que l'auteur aurait pu laisser de côté sans nuire à la trame du récit, et d'autre part des détails non réglés. Il en résulte que le récit s'étend trop et l'auteur n'arrive pas à tout boucler. L'histoire de Germain, par exemple, se termine prématurément, sans conclusion satisfaisante. De plus, on voit souvent où l'auteur veut en venir, car ses allusions sont à peine voilées. On sait bien d'avance, par exemple, qu'il y aura un feu de forêt dans le premier tome; l'allusion flagrante à la page 53 n'en est qu'un indice parmi d'autres. Ces deux procédés

narratifs trahissent assez manifestement la présence très sentie du narrateur. Nous sommes conscients que l'on nous raconte une histoire bel et bien finie, dans un passé récent. On nous le rappelle constamment, d'où le titre du recueil, doit-on assumer. Il y a en outre ici et là quelques accroc, des invraisemblances et des métaphores et comparaisons un tant soit peu banales. Par exemple, la sauvagesse "énigmatique" qui se laisse prendre est comme "la bonne terre qui se laisse fouiller par la charrue."

Mises à part ces quelques critiques, on peut dire qu'Hélène Brodeur nous livre ici trois récits fort divertissants, liés les uns aux autres, certes, mais qui se tiennent indépendamment aussi. Sans prétention, sans grandiloquence, elle traite du thème éternel de l'amour impossible tout en évoquant un pays trop peu connu de la plupart des Canadiens et en décrivant les efforts des Canadiens français pour s'y établir tout en gardant leur langue et leur culture. C'est là, en effet, dans sa description du beau pays rude de l'Ontario du Nord, que son oeuvre brille le plus par sa vigueur et par son lyrisme.

MARK BENSON

## INSALATA MISTA

*Il Veltro: Le Relazioni tra l'Italia e il Canada.* gennaio-aprile/maggio-agosto 1985, \$40.00.

THE CANADA OF FRANCESCO CERLONE'S 1764 play *GPinglesi in America, o sia il Selvaggio* is planted with palms and cyresses and presided over by a Prince Arensbergh, Lord of the Savages, who makes his first entrance at the head of a caravan of camels. Despite his Teutonic name, the Prince is black, making him a son of Caliban. Yet, as Piero del Negro points out, the source of the play is not directly *The Tempest* but Goldoni's

*Bella Selvaggia*. The picture of Canada which Cerlone's play provides is not unlike the one that emerges from the pages of Pietro Chiara's 1768 novel *La donna che non si trova* (the source of which was the Italian translation of William and Edmund Burke's *An Account of the European Settlements in America*). Although the novel is set in the period 1740-1760, it (like the play) makes no reference to the events of 1759, even though they were largely responsible for making Canada into a topos of the European imagination.

Del Negro's article (which covers much the same ground as his 1975 and 1979 essays listed in the notes) is one of the most informative among those in this two-volume collection devoted to the historical and cultural ties between Italy and Canada. The result is something of an *insalata mista*; the unevenness derives a good deal from the goal of the editors to "promote" a greater awareness of the presence of Italy in world culture. This fervour has been communicated (at times) too strongly, and exaggerated statements are made: Pasquale Jannini claims the pervasive influence of *Futurismo* on Québec culture (although his principal source, André Bourassa's *Sur-réalisme et littérature québécoise*, provides no support for this assertion); Michelangelo Picone's exclamatory prose states that Canada has been a "fertile terrain" for "the most refined hermeneutic experiments" in Dante criticism.

The variation in quality is evident in the historical contributions, among which the most interesting concern the earliest relations between the two countries. Thus we find that accounts of the voyages of Verrazano and Cartier were made known in Italy by the 1556 publication, in Venice, of Ramusio's collection of travel accounts, *Delle navigationi et viaggi*. Five years later a translation appeared (again in Venice) of Thevet's

*Les Singularitez*; three years before this, Nicolò Zeno had published his *Commentarii*, but already history had hypertrophied into myth, Zeno's voyage being a well-constructed fake (as Del Negro puts it). By 1625 a political connection had been established through the arm of the Vatican known as Propaganda Fide; it is thanks to its archives that records of the early relations between the two countries have been preserved. Much of the research in these archives has been done by Luca Codignola (who is not, however, represented by an article). Indeed, the historical essays do not go far beyond the terrain already mapped in the essays edited by Codignola and published in 1978 (*Canadiana: aspetti della storia e della letteratura canadese*); 1979 (*Canadiana: storia e storiografia canadese*); and 1983 (*Canada: problemi di storia canadese*).

Like the essays on history, those on cultural relations vary widely in quality; a number of them have the function of imparting information to the Italian audience, and do not represent original research. The name of Giacomo (later James) Forneri fittingly occurs more than once in this section, for he introduced the study of Italian at the University of Toronto in 1853. No mention, however, is made of A. A. Nobile, whose list of subscribers to his various works on Italian culture comprise a who's who of Upper Canada in the late-nineteenth century.

The essays on cultural relations inevitably raise the issue of canon, as Eva-Marie Kröller notes in her article on nineteenth-century English-Canadian travellers to Italy. Kröller points out that the *Literary History of Canada* includes only those travel accounts which speak of Canada, as if affinities with Europe were irrelevant to Canadian culture. As Kröller argues, Canadian culture can be considered a product of the dialogue be-

tween Old World and New. Her extensive research indicates that cultural awareness of Italy in Canada was significant in the nineteenth century, as articles in *The Week* (Toronto; 1883-1896) indicate. Abroad, the Canadian traveller (often a woman, unlike her Québec counterpart) tended to interpret what she saw, as opposed to the Québec traveller, who tended towards an impersonal recitation of facts. Kröller traces this attitude to the tradition of Protestant individualism. By contrast, Québec travel accounts often repeated details verbatim from other sources (which was apparently not that uncommon, as James de Mille's brilliant parody, *The Dodge Club; or, Italy in 1859*, indicates).

Another nineteenth-century traveller to Italy, Napoléon Bourassa, was concerned not at all with the Italy that was there, but with the Italy that was not. As Novella Novelli points out, modern Italy was for Bourassa merely the decadent remnant of Rome's glory. Similarly, Earle Birney's twentieth-century travels to Italy were primarily literary. In a delightful vignette, "Io e l'Italia," he relates that he first encountered Latium in the person of his boyhood chum, Tubby Pasquale. Later he visited Italy under the aegis of Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio while he was studying Chaucer. Then, at Berkeley on a fellowship, he explored Cavalcanti, Bruno, Leopardi, *zabaglione*, and some Sicilian swear words he learned in San Francisco's Little Italy. Only in 1958, and then again in 1963, did he set foot in those other invisible cities: Rome, Florence, Pisa, Siena . . .

At about the same time that Birney was making his first trip to Italy, the second great wave of Italian immigrants was establishing itself in Canada. One of the most interesting results of that translation was the invention of a Canadianized Italian (or was it an Italianized

Canadian?) known as *Italiése*. Gianrenzo Clivio provides a small lexicon of this language, showing how it differs from standard Italian. Thus, basement becomes "basamento" rather than the Italian "seminterrato"; carpet becomes "carpetto" and not "tappetto." And I can remember my uncle saying "checcia-besa" for catch basin, though he dropped the final "a" to make the word conform to his dialect.

Taken as an *insieme*, these two volumes indicate that the relations between the two countries merit more than the ambassadorial gush with which they begin. While much original research remains to be done (as Stelio Cro's discovery of an unknown letter by Bressani indicates), we have, nevertheless, come far from the stereotypes of James S. Woodsworth's *Strangers Within Our Gates* (1909) and the effusiveness of John Murray Gibbon's *Canadian Mosaic* (1938). It is in this direction of understanding the heterogeneity of Canadian cultural phenomena that *Il Veltro* moves: "e sua nazione sarà tra feltro e feltro."

RICHARD CAVELL

## THEATRE ENCORE

ROCH CARRIER, *L'ours et le kangourou*. Stanké, n.p.

JEAN DAIGLE, *Au septième ciel*. Editions du Noroît, \$10.95.

*L'ours et le kangourou* is a dialogue (divided into sixteen chapters) between "Roch," the bear, and "Chris," the kangaroo. It has attributes of the novel, the theatre, and the travel journal. As they travel about Australia, each of the two companions vies with the other in telling tall tales about his own country and in provoking his interlocutor with the absence or presence of the oddities expected by the "informed" tourist. Roch, after

five days in Australia, has not yet seen a kangaroo — “Est-ce qu'ils existent vraiment, ces insectes?” Chris spent a whole winter in Canada without seeing a single Mountie, and lived in daily fear of opening his door to find a bear staring at him. Roch counters that bears were invented by the same ministry which invented the R.C.M.P.

The two travelling companions tease each other about language. Both Australians and *Québécois* like to draw out the pronunciation of their respective language. Chris thinks that natives of the mother country (England or France) have to compress their language in order to keep it within the boundaries of such small territories. Each inevitably comes around to applying his ironic view of the world to his own culture. Reproached with faulty logic, Roch asks indignantly what is logic — he's from Quebec! “Etre québécois, c'est pouvoir dire oui et non à la fois; c'est pouvoir être conservateur et libéral en même temps; c'est pouvoir être fédéraliste et séparatiste ensemble...”

Chris and Roch discuss a dizzying array of topics from politics to biology and from religion to the “big bang,” treating most of them with irreverence and humour. Virtually no theme strays far from topics of current concern. It is perhaps in the imaginative and light-hearted treatment of serious topics that fiction takes hold, rather than in construction of the plot and narrative of a traditional novel. Roch expresses admiration to have run into the “most famous Australian poet,” H. D. Hope, urinating like an ordinary human being in a public men's room. In response to Chris's suspicion that he is making fun of Australian poetry, Roch protests that the poets of the “mother countries” never engage in such natural functions — “A-t-on déjà vu pisser Shakespeare ou Victor Hugo?” It would be a serious misreading to take

this as sarcasm directed at the “great writers” rather than at affected attitudes of “superiority.” Perhaps, in a desperate academic attempt to categorize Roch Carrier's dialogic tall story, we should say that it is a fast-moving, humorous commentary on contemporary attitudes toward “reality,” uninhibited by slavish adherence to “truth” or any other sacred cows. It is worth an hour or two of reading time by anyone with the least degree of awareness that the colonialist/colonized mentality affects persons of various estates, careers, religions, sexual outlooks, and political dispositions.

Jean Daigle does not write with the free-wheeling irreverence and facility of Roch Carrier, and he never touches directly on political themes. His theatre has repeatedly been described as “psychodrama.” Daigle's first full-length play, *Coup de sang*, was published only in 1976, although he had been writing since the late 1960's. The third play, *Le jugement dernier* (Théâtre Port Royal, Montréal, 1979), was criticized for its unwieldy use of difficult-to-follow flashbacks. The earnest excavation of the unlovely and unloving past of parents is evocative not only of Chekhov's theatre but also of Eugene O'Neill's probing into family violence and alcoholism in U.S. drama.

Between his early dramas and this most recent “comedy,” Daigle has certainly evolved in his theatrical writing. *Au septième ciel*, his sixth play, takes us through the complications of autumnal love and engagement. The play turns around the doubts and desires of two gentlemen of sixty-five, Albert and Edmond, who are engaged to Yvette and Rose (fifty-five years young), the proprietors of a rest home. While the themes of misunderstanding between lovers and the fears of a “convinced bachelor” (Edmond) upon contemplating marriage for the first time at a relatively advanced

age yield the comic situations and repartee which we associate with summer theatre in Quebec, there is genuine humour of language and some poetry in Daigle's writing. Albert is a world-wise bachelor who enjoys verbal parry and thrust. He is impatient with the engagement ritual — he would prefer to “taste the wedding cake” before marriage. In wrathful reaction to the precipitous departure of a faithless companion, Evangeline, a friend of the two fiancées, decides to reconstruct the French language — “j'utiliserai plus jamais un mot masculin” — and she proceeds to feminize all masculine words: “Faites-moi *la* plaisir de retourner dans *la* jardin, je veux pas vous voir *la* bout de *la* nez seulement” (my italics).

There is a good possibility that the success of Michel Tremblay's *Les belles soeurs* in 1968, with its scandalous use of *joual* had an impact on the dramatic career of the young Jean Daigle. To his credit, it should be noted that Daigle did not jump on the bandwagon to try to capitalize on Tremblay's success. Daigle's characters in fact bring popular language to the stage also, but it is clearly and realistically based on the spoken French of a small provincial town, having little or no connection with the popular language of Montreal or with the literary and theatrical modishness of “joual” in the late 1960's. Jean Daigle is a craftsman of the theatre who has been working slowly and deliberately for nearly twenty years producing theatre which may be viewed and re-viewed with increasing respect for the human statement that it makes.

CARROL F. COATES



## TELLINGS

ROBERT CURRIE, *Learning on the Job*. Oberon, \$11.95.

JANE MUNRO, *The Trees Just Moved Into a Season of Other Shapes*. Quarry, \$8.95.

KEN NORRIS, *In the Spirit of the Times*. The Muses' Company, \$6.95.

STEVE NOYES, *Backing Into Heaven*. Turnstone, \$7.95.

LOVING AND WRITING have often been the subjects of poetry as poets ask not only what it is to love but also what it is to write “I love.” This relation between what French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva might call desire and language has been worried over recently in Canadian poetics. Theorist, novelist, poet Robert Kroetsch articulates his awareness of the problem in a 1981 interview with Shirley Neuman:

I realize that I fall in love by saying I fall in love. But I also know that I then have fallen in love. You know, I have an upset stomach and can't sleep at night, I write love letters . . . and all the crazy things a lover does.

More recently, in her latest book of poems, Jane Munro also acknowledges the uneasy relation between the words we have to speak about love and our experience of it when she writes of two lovers who “haven't learned enough yet about the many kinds of telling, in love.” As different as Jane Munro's book is from recent books by Robert Currie, Ken Norris, and Steve Noyes, at some point they each struggle with or in the relation between language and loving, whether their poems speak of a love for others, for words, or for the ways that our words give us access to our “others.” Some poems tell us of the many kinds of love; others that, as Kristeva writes, “love is spoken, and that is all it is.”

The poems in Robert Currie's *Learning on the Job* speak, with humour and insight, of the different kinds of love a

man feels for wife ("The Trouble With Marriage is Getting to Sleep"), children ("Thank God it Ends at 10:30"), and friends ("This Poem Says What it Means"). There are poems that register the anguish of unrequited love ("In the Waiting-Room") and of physical desire ("Learning on the Job"). "In the Waiting-Room" is a particularly interesting poem that speaks of waiting as the condition of desire, absence as the position of the loving subject:

You sit curled behind a magazine  
 eyes moving left to right  
 tongue playing with your lower lip  
 Were this a crowded room  
 I could stand it and understand  
 why you don't notice me  
 but the room is empty  
 though I am in it.

Also addressing the problem of the position of the writing lover, "Last Night" speaks of the "learning on the job," the learning about love that goes on while a poet writes a love poem. It is the poet's uneasiness about writing about love that produces some of the most interesting lines:

As I woke up this morning  
 I began to dream a poem  
 saw it forming in the darkness  
 of a night that you had warmed  
 But haunted by your memory  
 I couldn't find a way  
 to force the words on paper  
 wanting more to be with you.

Currie's is not always a poetry of absence of this kind; but when his poems do confront the experience of writing what cannot be written about love they are poignant and compelling.

The poems in Jane Munro's *The Trees Just Moved Into a Season of Other Shapes* also wrestle with the paradox that a poet often writes of not being able to write. "Sermon on the Mount" speaks of "the sacred and horny romp, / redundant as all get out, treating each other / that way we can never quite

say." Having said what it says it cannot, with these words the poem ends. But Munro's poems also attempt another kind of telling — by allowing a few carefully placed words to produce a multiplicity of meanings. "Birds," the series of short poems which opens the book, recalls Phyllis Webb's *Naked Poems* in its stark, rhythmic simplicity. Telling, in these poems, is taken from the speaking voice and given to the seemingly arbitrary arrangement of words on a page. The final poem of the sequence retells (because the poem of the first part is repeated in italics) an earlier "story," pointing out how the same words mean differently in new contexts:

*one flew away  
 from  
 one flew away  
 to  
 why would a bird depart?  
 a bird will fly  
 from  
 and  
 to*

*one flew*

*a  
 way  
 the bird knew*

In its punning and word (bird?) play, this poem tells also of a love for words.

Munro's long poem "Creek Bed," which follows "Birds" in the book, speaks of a difficult love between mother and daughter — difficult both to experience and to write about. The creek becomes a metaphor for both the mother and the poem that is trying to be written:

creek  
 blithering over a stuck log  
 bends its restless tongue  
 to the deadfall  
 arguing against its finish

Other poems in the collection speak of the love sister has for sister ("Woman Clothed By the Sun") and of the love that occurs (or fails to occur) between lovers ("As Windows Shape Light").



four dollars  
 mean this to me  
 a pack of cigarettes  
 three coffee  
 one poor student  
 talking talking talking

Again the words offer the occasion of the poem.

As varied in voice, style, and subject as four books of poetry obviously should be, each of these books offers examples of the many kinds of telling, in love. Some poems read easily because they are written with and in many voices; others ask more of us; many of the most provocative poems tell their stories with an uncanny awareness that it *is* the telling that matters. Norris writes that "what may save us is our love." Perhaps it is not only the loving but also the writing that makes all the difference.

SUSAN RUDY DORSCHT

## COMME UN VENT

FRANCOIS DESNOYERS, *Derrière le silence*. Triptyque, \$8.00.

PATRICK COPPENS, *Enfants d'Hermès*. Triptyque, \$8.00.

DANIEL GUENETTE, *Empiècements*. Triptyque, \$8.00.

JEAN FOREST, *Des Fleurs pour Harlequin*. Triptyque, \$8.00.

THESE FOUR COLLECTIONS push the expressive power of language to its limits and carry the reader to the frontiers of the ineffable and the inexpressible. Each poet bids us enter the hermetic universe of his unique vision of the world. Each one, in his own way, transforms — or deforms — the French language in order to give us a glimpse of that universe.

The title of Desnoyers' collection reveals his sense of the inexpressibility of his poetic experience. The idea of silence haunts the poet, and he dwells obsessively on the difficulties of interpersonal communication. This is the most lyrical of

the four collections, the poet expressing as much by the melodic rhythms of his phrasings as through words. His *chants* explore the great metaphysical themes, like love, absence, and death, which have always haunted poets. In each poem, the poetic speaker addresses his beloved and tries to inspire in her a response to his emotional urgings. Desnoyers reveals a Romantic's sensitivity to external Nature, and the latter provides the objective correlative to his feelings and thoughts. "Et je t'ai aimé / comme un vent cherchant refuge / au verre parfumé des roses." "La terre est une excroissance du silence." The poet is aware of the mysterious message which the cosmos is trying to communicate to the lovers. "Et j'ai senti brumeuse la beauté du murmure / que nous accordions aux plantes et aux arbres." "Ne refuse pas d'écouter ces arbres . . . j'ai appris le langage des éclairs." Desnoyers does not flaunt nationalism, but his hibernal landscape of snowy mountains and fir trees is an evocation of the Québec countryside which is all the more eloquent for being discreet.

Like Mallarmé, Desnoyers is seeking a kind of Orphic vision of the universe. As his editor points out, the poet is moved by "le désir gravidique de mettre à découvert la face obscure du monde." He achieves mastery over the world by humbly making himself totally open to the other. "La conscience . . . naît ainsi sur le mode d'une connaissance élémentaire qui consiste en l'attention du voir et de l'entendre les plus purs."

Patrick Coppens combines the art forms of drawing and poetry in a synesthetic whole. Twelve individuals each provide the subject for pictorial sketches (by Mino Bonan) and accompanying verbal ones (including the irregular sonnet, "Laurent"). The collection impresses the reader as something of a post-Surrealist joke. The tone is one of mock-

ery, directed toward the characters, the reader, and the work itself. What these fictional personages have in common is that each is an outcast, a *révolté*, a seeker of the unknown, and an incarnation of the anguish of the human condition. "Mal du siècle, mal de vivre. Mal de tous les siècles."

*Empiècements*, as its title suggests, is poetry based on the verbal decomposition and reconstruction of reality. A modern Ulysses, Daniel Guénette sets off on a quest for unknown meaning. One way of accomplishing his mission is in the loving exchange with another person: "un flanc contre le mien / se dévoilant fit sourdre le monde / langages se liant découvrant au-delà." The poet, however, often has a feeling of discouraged isolation, an awareness of the impossibility of communication and comprehension. He is haunted by a sense of sterility: "je demeure, celui qui ne sait et n'arrive à rien, / seul." The poet's odyssey ends in failure and frustration: "ne pouvant presque tracer une ligne droite de paroles / trancher en deux quelque objet du monde / en lire quoi que ce soit / cause sans effet." He can at best give a piecemeal suggestion, miraculous but fragmentary, of truth and being: "Tels, ces mots / placés un peu de travers / en retenant d'autres qu'ils taisent / sous un phrasé coulant de roches."

While in the three works already discussed, language is explored as a possible means of giving voice to the poet's worldview, in *Des Fleurs pour Harlequin* it becomes the poet's major preoccupation. Forest's poems, though beautiful in themselves as verbal structures, constitute at the same time a meta-linguistic *art poétique*. Forest makes clear repeatedly that the language of poetry is not the rational instrument of expression employed, for example, by literary critics, politicians, and other "preachers." The poet thus rejects any concep-

tion of a *poésie engagée* which would be for him a contradiction in terms. His only fatherland or motherland is language and the realm beyond to which it points: "POÉSIE quand on ne reconnaît plus le pays / les modulations de la Mère / et qu'on avance seul, en une contrée de mots, / hérissé, tendu vers AUTRE CHOSE." He also distinguishes poetry from imaginative literature, like novels and movies. For him, poetry is a mystical evocation of an essential reality which lies just beyond the reach of human language: "Le poème récite l'insistance de ce qui sous les fracas des fanfares tente de rejoindre Dieu. Il aspire à l'impossible silence, jamais accordé. Tout est encore à dire." Rimbaud is Forest's ideal of the poet, who is an inspired prophet, a visionary. The poet attempts to distil into fragmentary verbal forms his contact with the infinite. The poem becomes a deconstruction of reality and words in order to liberate true being: "Le sujet ne s'articule jamais que depuis les décombres dont il naît, et qui sur lui s'entassent." Poetry is for Forest a total experience which takes hold of both the mind and body of the poet and his readers: "Que le sens de l'écriture réside / dans sa chair / elle-même / Que lire est un acte de chair à chair / à prendre au mot à mot." The acts of writing and reading constitute breaks in the surface of visible reality and create an opening into the transcendent.

JAMES P. GILROY

## LOYALISTS

JOHN & MONICA LADELL, *Inheritance: Ontario's Century Farms Past and Present*. Dundurn Press, \$16.95.

NEIL MACKINNON, *This Unfriendly Soil: The Loyalist Experience in Nova Scotia 1783-1791*. McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, \$27.50.

THE LADELL HUSBAND AND WIFE team present a tribute to Ontario's farming

community in their story of forty-two century farms both past and present. To be designated a century farm a property must have been in possession of the same family for at least one hundred years; many can boast a history of family ownership since before Confederation, while some can go back further to the beginnings of settlement. When Upper Canada was founded by Loyalist settlers in 1791 a mere handful of 10,000 souls was living in that vast area. Originally from the American colonies, the Loyalists had migrated from Quebec as they wanted British institutions, and disliked the system of government and land tenure in existence there. Most of the families interviewed are of Anglo-Saxon background, while at least a quarter can trace a Loyalist ancestry.

The oral history the Ladells have transcribed makes for interesting reading, for these families have known triumph and failure, and have handed their story down from generation to generation; century farm families of six generations are common, while a few go back eight generations or more. This book emphasizes the continuity of those with tenacious ties to the land and stresses the reality of inevitable change, for it allows the families to bring their story up-to-date with present problems and concerns. Loss of productive land because of rising population, encroaching urbanization, and pollution, all pose a threat; young people leave the farms for the city, and century farms pass out of the control of the original families. While presenting no statistical evidence, the authors claim that each year an increasing number of century farms go under. My complaint with *Inheritance* is that the background chapters, which seek to set the context, do not integrate smoothly into the "interview" sections at the end of each chapter: more care should have been taken in organizing the format, even though

the book is intended as a popular and not a scholarly work.

Neil Mackinnon has drawn upon the latest research in his scholarly study of the Loyalist experience in Nova Scotia. He shows clearly that the influx of 20,000 refugees in a single year was a much more complex experience than standard Loyalist hagiography would have us believe. This work complements Walter Stewart's recent popular history which emphasizes the bitter in-fighting among the Loyalists. *En masse* they were a diverse group of different ethnic, social, and religious backgrounds, who had come from every corner of the United States; the only thing that gave them a semblance of unity was loyalty to the Crown; they are far removed from the genteel martyrs of Loyalist mythology. As the author reminds us: "One can take the notion of a typical Loyalist attitude only so far, for there was no typical Loyalist."

They were a microcosm of the pre-revolutionary world they had left. Quite rightly the author notes the class conflicts among them: "With their sense of class, status and privilege, and their contempt for the lower classes . . . they were far closer to the oligarchy in Halifax than the common refugee." He also notes their uneasy relationship with native Nova Scotians, who not only profited at the expense of the newcomers, but were far from being as antagonistic to their American neighbours in the New England states as many of the Loyalists would have liked. He details the privations and frustrations of the Loyalists in a harsh new environment, and their problems with Governor Parr and the authorities with respect to the provision of emergency British aid and land settlement. Britain was seen as "their reluctant benefactor" and there was a good deal of souring in the imperial tie.

Beyond noting the black slave element among the Loyalists, Mackinnon only seems to hint at their ethnic diversity, instead of giving this serious question the attention it merits. The thoughtful reader might well wonder if the extensive records of the Loyalist Claims Commission can throw any light on the ethnic diversity of the Loyalists in Nova Scotia. Most interested readers will find the Note on Sources quite inadequate, and would prefer a more detailed bibliography; otherwise the book is well documented with adequate footnotes and is attractively produced.

CLIFFORD G. HOLLAND

## STILL LIFES

GILEAN DOUGLAS, *Kodachromes at Midday*. Sono Nis, \$6.95.

ANNE CAMPBELL, *Death is an Anxious Mother*. Thistle-down, \$8.95.

JOY KOGAWA, *Woman in the Woods*. Mosaic, \$8.95.

GILEAN DOUGLAS IN *Kodachromes at Midday* celebrates love and nature, speaks of man's transience, and his confrontation with death, in traditional rhyme and metre. These poems recall the rhythm and diction of Walter de la Mare, John Masefield, and English Romantic poets. While there is a certain pleasure in the sound of these poems, one does not have a new sense of language as Douglas's poems are interwoven with such clichés as "fragrant hours which our love was bright in," and "the laughing stream." There is too much of "the calm where a heart may rest." These poems are snapshots of experience, not deep explorations of loneliness, fear, and passion expressed in an individual language. However, what separates Douglas's poetry from a sentimental traditional poetry is the interplay of sound patterns, and her use of hypnotic

rhythms that give the poetry genuine lyrical qualities:

What shall I say of autumn  
That I have never said?  
With ardent maples burning  
Beside our marriage bed  
And golden poplars shining  
Upon your russet head,  
I shall not speak of autumn  
But kiss your mouth instead.

In Anne Campbell's *Death is an Anxious Mother* there is a sense of contemporary idiom, the rougher texture of everyday speech. These poems are arranged into phases of a cycle beginning with memories of the speaker's childhood, moving through changing states of love, and ending in self-affirmation, expressed in the freedom of the prairie. Sometimes her images are too stereotyped, as when she describes isolation in marriage: "two good people / always / ships in the night / passing." However, in a goodbye poem to her husband, "Terse Note," she uses a leaner line, and creates a fine contrapuntal effect by juxtaposing polite surface reactions with powerful underlying feelings of separation.

While Campbell's language has an informal quality of speech, it also possesses a sense of ritual as she tries to make the reader apprehend the sculptural integrity of her experience in "Living Room":

Little altars  
I build all around  
place first one plate  
candle or glass  
on my mantle  
sill or shelf  
introduce an other  
and another then shift  
them around  
shape space

In this poem Campbell becomes a shaping spirit as she expresses the relationship of things in her life and creates the poem's translucent landscape.

Joy Kogawa's *Woman in the Woods* contains simple, powerful poetry that explores political, psychological, and natural warfare. It is the almost inaudible and nearly invisible presences that concern her:

Faint as in a dream  
is the voice that calls  
from the belly  
of the wall.

Her synthetic vision emphasizes the effects of exploiters: Egyptian Vultures, social climbing tarantulas, Nebuchadnezzar, and the cruel researcher. Kogawa writes of the victimizer and the victim: sometimes it is man who is the victim of the "insects" within his head, while other times it is man, the killer, who destroys a community of wildlife creatures to make way for a "future shopping cemetery." Kogawa tries to break down the rigid dichotomy of man and nature by changing the natural order so that one sees the atmosphere as dense or blood coming from a stone.

Kogawa's language is more exciting than Douglas's or Campbell's because she draws on a wider range of resources. In "Old Woman in Housekeeping Room" she uses syntax, sound patterns, and symbols to illustrate the tenuous condition of people in their worlds:

Feeble star rays  
leave the surface of her slow turning  
hoping to find out there in the night  
someone that needs  
her needing light.  
But stars die, she knows  
eventually the spinning ends  
lights sputter across uninhabited moons  
and people who once were needed  
no longer are.

Kogawa's voice, like Campbell's, is colloquial, yet she creates a world that is animated with myth and dream, a mixture of grotesque fairytales and nightmarish realities. In one of the strongest poems of the book, "Minerals from

Stone," she evokes the process of the poet's search for truth by using sculptural imagery along with mythical and psychological elements:

For many years  
androgynous with truth  
I molded fact and fantasy  
and where they met  
made the crossroads home.

Through the paradoxes of the speaker's evolution she has learned to build her house in shadows and gained strength and independence so that she can "eat minerals / straight from stone."

Kogawa not only is concerned with moments of intense and austere consciousness, but also is aware of the processes of nature, of "how the blossoms are falling." A minor weakness in this collection is that there are not more of these moments to throw into relief the darker landscapes. But *Woman in the Woods* is a strong book where Kogawa presents the world not in snapshots, but through her own special time-lapse poetics. She captures the changing conditions of both violence and beauty, and uses the complex lens of her language to focus on the nearly invisible features of our physical and spiritual topographies.

LAURENCE HUTCHMAN

## PARODY & LEGACY

LINDA HUTCHEON, *A Theory of Parody*. Methuen, \$12.95.

MAX BRAITHWAITE, *All The Way Home*. McClelland & Stewart, \$19.95.

IAN DENNIS, *Bagdad: A Romance*. Macmillan, \$17.95.

NOEL HUDSON, *Mobile Homes*. Polestar Press, \$9.95.

In *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon describes parody as a strikingly contemporary genre that gives a postmodern world access to the legacy of the past while encouraging ironic distance from

and therefore reformulation of that past. To differentiate it from the closely allied forms of satire and irony, Hutcheon emphasizes that parody foregrounds difference over repetition and aims toward the intramural rather than the extramural. Throughout the six chapters (which range from definitions of parody, to its pragmatic range, to the central paradox of parody, to parody's shared codes, to the parodic text's relation to the world), Hutcheon concentrates on parody's reclamation of the past "with difference." While somewhat conservative, parody allows the present room of its own.

Although problems in using shared contemporary cultural codes sometimes force parody closer to perversion than to subversion, Hutcheon, I think correctly, claims parody as a postmodern genre *par excellence*. Because it is self-reflexive and operates with dependent meaning, like other postmodern forms it contradicts essentialism. And it obliges a triple reading competence — linguistic, rhetorical, and ideological. Hutcheon's most important argument, however, is that parody de-marginalizes literature and theory by connecting art with the world. By using satire (which always observes and comments on the world), by combining popular and elite cultures, by accepting the authority of the past while insisting on art's right to transgress, and by encouraging the sharing of reading codes, parody brings into play many current debates on the status of the subject, on the notion of reference, and on concepts of objectivity and closure.

As this too-condensed summary suggests, *A Theory of Parody* is an ambitious study. It is particularly valuable as a provocative response to current aesthetic realities. And it is filled with a wide-ranging sample of examples from the visual arts, from architecture, from music, and from literature and cinema. Hutcheon's incorporation of various current

theories (for example, feminist theory) and her references to Canadian literature as well as other world literatures are of considerable political importance. If at times the rapid listing of illustrations confuses a reader already struggling to follow the on-going argument, quibbling about excessive illustration detracts from the importance of using a thoroughly interdisciplinary perspective. To illuminate contemporary life, as this book undertakes to do, to show how cultural, artistic, social, and ideological codes must be shared by creator and respondent (Hutcheon analyzes form and semiotics, creation as well as response), to illuminate a playful genre that moves anywhere from anger to mocking fun, much postmodern expression needs to be investigated.

Hutcheon's writing would certainly benefit from a less highly condensed style. In a work this difficult, the reader needs more direction, more summary, and more description. I also think that a more discursive style would help demonstrate parody's idiosyncracies. As it stands, Hutcheon leans heavily toward using parody synonymously with the term "postmodern," undercutting parody's distinctiveness. As well, some of the theoretical language needs fuller explanation, not because the terms are jargon, but because they have been used so often they need reinterpretation from Hutcheon's own point of view ("ideological"; "historicize"; "validation"). All this aside, Hutcheon's refusal to be caught up in either/or thinking and her consequent emphasis on paradox are of crucial political importance. By breaking down divisions between *élite* and popular cultures, between tradition and innovation, even among disciplines, she aligns herself with postmodern movements that re-situate art within the everyday world.

Hutcheon's investigation of the ways in which the present uses and transforms

the legacies of the past, suggest various connections with three recent fictions. The least satisfying of them is Max Braithwaite's *All the Way Home*. This novel nostalgically contrasts a western Canadian past with a present somewhat ambivalently associated with eastern Canada and a much wealthier western Canada. At 65, Hugh Windmar, a successful, unmarried Toronto playwright, returns to his Saskatchewan home to share holidays with his parents and five siblings (a sixth brother has died). Through conversations among family members, and through the artificial device of extended tape recordings of the voice of William Henry, the father, recalling his past, and the voice of Martha, the mother, recalling hers (both are being interviewed by one of their children), the reader is given considerable detail about the difficulties Canadian farmers faced in starting farms during the Depression. The anguish of two world wars is also present in these parental voices.

At the same time, from his quite rootless perspective, Hugh learns about the strength, playfulness, daring, and imagination of parents he has learned to think of as dull. His slight transformation — the only one in the novel — allows him to reformulate his past so that it no longer restrictively hangs about his neck. But the lesson is muted for the reader. Throughout, excessive stereotyping (the inarticulate, silent father; the nurturing, generous, virtuous mother; the asexual daughter with three academic doctorates; the loud, blustering farmer-brother, with his self-conscious use of bad grammar) belittles Hugh's struggle (indeed, he too seems a stereotype of the westerner's opinion of the easterner: effete, cold, and exaggeratedly intellectual) and alienates the reader from the conflict dramatized. Although Braithwaite carefully touches base with contemporary discussions of subjects like feminism, and

acknowledges the importance of economic changes in western Canada, the novel fails to dramatize enough the dialogue between past and present, between old and new selves. In playing off past against present, Braithwaite allows nostalgia to win.

Ian Dennis's novel uses the past more effectively. In the fantasy, *Bagdad* (Part One of *The Prince of Stars in the Cavern of Time*), he parodies *The Arabian Nights*, focusing particularly on tales and their telling. Situated in a country laid out in a map at the beginning of the novel — such names as "Trackless Waste" and "The Further East" alert the reader to Dennis's parodic aims and remind us that the orient is a western construction — we are, in the stories to follow, introduced to a whacky political group, "The Ripe Fruit Party," whose main drink is sherbert and whose favourite saying is: "It is as it is." The stories are connected, naturally, by a search, in this case for "that which is within." Having set up a structure and some characters, Dennis proceeds with the fun. The adventures include the hanging of the Moderate Man (see current policy in the Mid-East), stories of the Burned Man and the Purple Man, the story of the origins of the leader of the Ripe Fruit Party, who is notable for believing that "[L]ife is long, art short," the story of Alladin and the Magic Warehouse, a witty modernization of "Alladin's Lamp," and so on through various oriental tales in which appear such out-of-place figures as civil servants. It concludes with the story of The Never-Harvested Field, which self-referentially emphasizes anticipation over performance.

Indeed, throughout, Dennis has fun with current literary theory, particularly as it applies to narrative. Ironic remarks like "many a word has been spoken with no signifying about it," self-evident ones like "the story begins, proceeds and then

ends," and naïve questions like "Couldn't we just have the beginnings of stories?" combine to create a playful text that fulfills some of Hutcheon's requirements for parody. She suggests that "parody can, inadvertently perhaps, serve another useful function today: it can call into question the temptation toward the monolithic [*sic*] in modern theory." Although Dennis's novel periodically oversteps itself, wallowing in silliness and losing the reader in a series of confusing references, on the whole it is an effective example of intertextuality (*The Arabian Nights* in particular), of genre parody (the current fascination with fantasy), and of satire (literary theory) that creates some dialogue between the past and the present.

Finally, the nine stories that make up Noel Hudson's *Mobile Homes* demonstrate story-telling at its best. Each story investigates novelty as it attempts to fit itself into past structures. Hudson has developed a number of authentic voices to narrate the various stories, and has used the effective metaphor of "mobile homes" to comment on the vagaries of contemporary life. From the first story, whose narrator works in a mobile home factory and believes that "work is on the way out, the future is leisure time," through a story of the west where Rooter, the buffalo, rather than roaming, "buffafloats," to a trailer family who cover their walls with American flags, bald eagles, and crossed muskets, these stories are bizarre, vivid, witty, and often moving. They are stories that counteract nostalgic views of the past, stories that flirt with many of the forms Hutcheon sees as close to parody — "burlesque, travesty, pastiche, plagiarism, quotation and allusion." While the word "homes" suggests that the stories recognize a stable past, the word "mobile" implies revolutionary potential. And, indeed, each story establishes an idiosyncratic spatial and tem-

poral balance. Marble bird baths, iguana, and vacuum cleaner salesmen reside quite naturally together, in homes that are sometimes "squeezed to fit, a house squeezed into a Velveeta cheese box," in landscapes that hover between "classic Jurassic" and outer space. Noel Hudson has succeeded in making his out-of-the-way characters speak for contemporary life while, at the same time, reminding his readers of past legacies.

LORNA IRVINE

## APPASSIONATA

FERDINAND ECKHARDT, *Music from Within: a Biography of the Composer S. C. Eckhardt-Gramatté*. Univ. of Manitoba Press, \$20.00.

PICK AS YOUR HEROINE a musician of extraordinary talent, fiercely independent, almost untameable, "outwardly decisive and self-assured, inwardly insecure." Match her in marriage first with a young expressionist artist suffering from lung disease and, after his early death, with an art historian who enters her life as the painter's posthumous cataloguer and promoter and who, after exerting a stabilizing influence on her for over 40 years, becomes her own posthumous cataloguer and promoter. Choose as locales Moscow, Whiteway (a communal settlement along Tolstoyan principles in England), Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and, for the last 20 years, Winnipeg. Weave in such varied themes as the woman as composer, the uneasy partnership of musician and painter, the struggle for recognition, survival under the Hitler regime, and adjustment to life in Canada. Introduce historical personages from Leo Tolstoy and Tsar Nicholas II to Artur Schnabel, Marc Chagall, Leopold Stokowski, Glenn Gould, and Sir Ernest MacMillan. And spice your narrative with mystery (who was her father?),

melodrama (her mother throws herself before the Tsar's horse to gain support in her marital-legal battle), and dramatic coincidence (no sooner has the artist-husband revealed "you shall have me for only one more year" than a telegram announces "Famous orchestra conductor Leopold Stokowski wants to hear you. . . . Come immediately").

What does all this add up to? A 700-page epic suffering from an improbable plot? A treatise about modern music, feminism, and the artist's place in society in the guise of a novel? Nothing of the sort; it is the meticulously researched true-to-life story of the musician Sophie-Carmen ("Sonia") Eckhardt-Gramatté, a lady with five residences, four surnames (born Fridman, alias Maurice, married to Gramatté then to Eckhardt), three languages, two instruments (a virtuoso on the piano and violin who would play the *Appassionata* and the *Kreutzer* Sonata in the same recital), and one consuming ambition, to be a great composer. The fascinating story, from her birth, presumably in Moscow in 1899, to her death after an accident while visiting in Stuttgart in 1974, is recounted by her devoted widower with warmth, humour, and compassion. Eckhardt, the former director of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, brings a historian's critical skill to his examination of the rich source material and is objective enough to recognize less admirable qualities in her character, such as a certain lack of tact and modesty. Thus several generous benefactors in Berlin, who encouraged her to succeed as a virtuoso rather than starve as a composer, became estranged from her. And yet it was precisely her unshakeable belief in her talent to compose that helped her to survive decades of insecurity, emotional turmoil, and shortlived successes. The story does have a happy ending, for inner peace, domestic comfort, and handsome recognition came during her 20

years in Canada. One cannot help remembering in this context that female composers have always been an accepted part of the Canadian cultural fabric, from Emma LaJeunesse, Susie Harrison, and Gena Branscombe through Jean Coulthard, Barbara Pentland, and Violet Archer to Norma Beecroft, Micheline Coulombe Saint-Marcoux, and Alexina Louie.

An art historian is not a music critic and Eckhardt wisely limits the discussion of his wife's compositions to the circumstances of their creation and their reception by actual or potential performers. He also quotes some of Sonia's self-assessments as a composer. Often her insights are beautifully lucid:

In the end I would rather trust the laws of nature than the man-made ones. The work which constantly has to solve new problems creates a new form. It is the task which produces the form, not man. The human mind has to obey the task and not vice-versa.

Written in "the late 1930's" after she had begun honing her compositional technique under Max Trapp, the same letter includes another passage worth framing:

I shall never write again as genuinely and as nicely as I did before, because now I am too aware. . . . I never wrote immaturity or childishly but I was a child at heart and my compositions were free of affectation. . . . I was a poet in music but now I am a knowledgeable composer. . . . Now I simply put one note after another, while before, oh before, my heart would weep. I could hear the weeping and play it.

If the book does little to analyze Eckhardt-Gramatté's music and to place it in the context of twentieth-century styles, it does demonstrate throughout its pages the sad problem of so many contemporary composers, to have to spend too much time and energy in self-promotion. Why is it so difficult for new works, even the finest ones, to assume a

performance life on their own momentum? Why did the 1929-30 United States performances under Stokowski and Stock not induce a dozen German orchestras to play Sonia's music? Ideally, new works ought to become known by having pleased score-exploring performers and understanding audiences, rather than by "marketing techniques." Too often the question "Who will do something to make my music known?" becomes an obsession; egocentricity and bitterness are likely to result. In April 1942 Sonia writes:

Until now, I was so naive as to believe that one could go directly to a musician and the music, good music, would speak for itself. But now I set aside that foolish misunderstanding once and for all. You can only reach musicians the long way, either through extortion or through giving personal advantage. But not just through the music.

One must not forget that each new composition competes against a hundred contemporary and a thousand established or rediscovered ones and that score-reading or comprehension after a single listening opportunity is often extremely difficult. Fortunately there are enlightened performers who do examine new scores and perform the ones they like, and since 1942 national music centres have taken over many of the promotional and quasi-publishing functions while international juries for festivals or competitions and broadcasting organizations provide a measure of objective expert evaluation.

A subject deserves either no biography at all or at least two, one expressing that person's or an intimate's view of life "from within" and one, or more, providing society's view of the subject. Although Ferdinand Eckhardt goes some way to combining both approaches, there is a challenge for a musician and psychologist to explore further along several paths. Obviously a critical guide to

the compositions is needed. And three circumstances that must have had a profound effect on the shaping of Sonia's growth as human being and artist deserve elucidation: her fatherless upbringing, her lack of schoolmates, and the delay of expert instruction or supervision in composition until her middle thirties. Were these disadvantages turned into assets, did they promote individuality while retarding self-control? One might also probe for an explanation why only a minuscule part of her works are for voice. Could this have something to do with the fact she was never allowed to mature completely in the use of any one language? English was her first and last language, French the language of her childhood and conversation with her mother, but German, her daily environment for over 40 years, she had taken up only as a teenager.

The design of the book, with its bold print and black leaves separating chapters, is very attractive. In addition to a short list of works and recordings and an index, there are six reproductions of Walter Gramatté's pictures of his wife, 30 photos from her childhood to her years in Canada, and specimen pages of her handwriting. Errors are few, but three deserve mention: the cellist is Edward Bisha, not Edmund Bishe; Sir Ernest MacMillan's wife was Lady Elsie, not Louise; and Sonia's Berlin address for over 12 years was Neue Winterfeldtstrasse, not Wintersfeldt, an error repeated several times. The book originally was written in German, with all quotations from letters, diaries, and other notes left in the languages they were written in. The author's own translation into English was then edited and condensed by Gerald Bowler of the University of Manitoba and the Canadian Nazarene College. The condensation achieves a good balance; if there is one regret about the

editing, it is that the original language of quoted excerpts is not indicated. It would be interesting to know which letters or, since she sometimes switched from one language to another in mid-stream, which passages were written by Sonia in English and which were translated from her French or German.

The last chapter is an "Epilogue: The Search for Sonia's Father" which sheds more speculation than light on the mystery of the composer's father. The origin of my acquaintance with the composer is my private "Sonia mystery" and also one that will never be solved. It is certain enough that my conscious introduction to her and Ferdinand took place in the mid-1960's when they dropped in at the CBC music library in Toronto (my place of work at the time) and she placed herself on top of my desk, unleashing a torrent of information about her music. It was only some time later that we discovered that we had lived in the same district of Berlin for over 12 years, half of that time a mere 150 metres apart, although from my parents' apartment to theirs one would have walked a Z-shaped route. I often played in "the little park where we would sit on a bench on hot summer evenings," I often boarded the subway train there, and I crossed the Neue Winterfeldtstrasse a stone's throw from their residence some 3,000 times on my way to or from school. Is it possible that I did *not* become aware of the "little woman with her assertive manner, determined voice and rather accentuated movements" walking with the tall man with the friendly face? Curiously enough, we left Berlin at the same time: on June 1, 1939, the Eckhardts went to Vienna; 11 days later I went to London. Neighbours without knowing it, we would finally meet in far-away Canada 25 years later.

HELMUT KALLMANN

## POLITICS & PARADISE

MARIE JAKOBER, *Sandinista: A Novel of Nicaragua*. New Star Books, \$8.95.

IN A SEEMINGLY IRRELEVANT episode, Jadine, the author surrogate of *Sandinista*, describes her brother's suicide in Kerry Heights, Pennsylvania:

What you could do was walk out onto McKinley bridge at three a.m. and feel the cold that came from the water and the steel mills and the remorseless eyes of cars that came from nowhere and passed into nothing; what you could not do was stand there and look at it all and say fuck you and walk into the river. You couldn't do that and expect a decent burial.

Eryn's death, lodged firmly in Jadine's subconscious, becomes a recurring motif in the novel, warning the reader to look for patterns beyond the narrative. However, the more immediate relevance of the suicide becomes evident, several pages later, when we are told that Sandino, the leader of the Nicaraguan rebels, was shot and buried under the runways of the Las Mercedes airport. Both are heretics, with one essential difference: one refuses to accept while the other decides to change. And the desire to change, to resist in the face of insuperable odds, becomes the subject matter of *Sandinista*.

Set in Managua, Marie Jakober's novel traces the relentless onslaught of the Sandinistas against the desperate and ruthless Somoza regime of the 1970's. What seems at first like the suicidal defiance of a band of scattered rebels soon becomes a people's movement, drawing its strength from the shantytowns, the barrios, the clergy, and even the new rich. Like so many political novels of this century, *Sandinista*, too, portrays the "terrible beauty" of a revolutionary movement.

The ring of verisimilitude that characterizes the work is implicit in the title itself. A novel that calls itself *Sandinista* is, willy-nilly, committed to a referential mode. In fact, it is the abundance of information, the meticulous attention to detail, combined with a compelling sequentiality, that contribute so much to the force of the novel. As the narrative focus moves from one end of the social ladder to the other, the reader glimpses the dismal poverty of the barrios, the barbarism of the National Guard, the flamboyant wealth of Milan Valdez, the dedication of Father Pepe, the agony of the mothers of Hamelin, the total commitment of the rebels—all of which contribute to the *weltanschauung* of the novel.

The multiplicity of the novel is held together by its linearity, which in turn falls back on causality. In a work that focuses so heavily on the October offensive of 1977, causality is perhaps as inevitable as it is necessary. But both the author and the reader are aware that the historical reality runs counter to the causality of the novel. Even if the text affirms the precarious power of the Somoza dictatorship and describes the gradual disintegration of Daniel and his friends, the reader never forgets that Somoza's days are numbered. And the novel succeeds not in spite of this duality but because of it.

As the reader becomes increasingly responsive to this and other deliberate gaps in the referential mode, he also becomes aware of the margins of the text. What the novel leaves partially explored now invites attention. Eryn's suicide and Jadine's presence in the novel, for instance, now acquire significance. Jadine, the expatriate Nicaraguan from the States on a visit to Managua, enlists as a volunteer in Father Pepe's clinic. Significantly, she is given the task of writing letters to the western world describing the suffering of

the country. Even as Jadine attempts to do so in purely metonymic language, she recognizes the futility of her endeavour. Language, she discovers, obeys its own rules and obscures or subverts the reality she so painstakingly tries to convey.

It is no surprise, then, that the text which admits its own limitations often resorts to paradox. The city of Managua, for example, is "greening with weeds" and contains "streets of shacks and streets of riches and streets of weeds." Daniel's memory of Pilar is "like a song, like a wound." The characters, too, are often a bundle of contradictions. Colonel Davilo, the chief of the National Guard, secretly admires the single-mindedness of the Sandinistas. Valerian, whose idealism triggers the imagination of the rebels, carries the secret guilt of all the lives lost under his direction.

Paradox thus establishes the dichotomy between pretence and reality, thereby reiterating that the neat categorization between good and evil in the novel is, after all, no more than a ploy. Like the Intercontinental Hotel which looks like a Mayan pyramid, designed by "somebody who had never seen a real one," the political reality of the novel becomes vaguely inadequate. The armed resistance never loses its hold on the reader, but what the novel appears to de-emphasize becomes, for the reader, a centre of focus.

In its meditative and digressive moments the novel explores its dominant concern: the quest for identity. All the major characters in the novel, regardless of age, class, or ideological commitment, are caught in the same desire to seek in the midst of turmoil a sense of identity. When Daniel sings "of the fields and the shanties, of women who made clay pots and men who made shoes" or when Jadine wonders "how the earth that you could sleep on without even a blanket could ever hurt you," one remembers

Eryn and his gesture of negation in a "homeless" world.

In symbolic terms, this preoccupation with identity is mirrored in two houses: one, owned by Valdez, represents everything money can buy; and the other, owned by Lidia, serves as a hideout for the Sandinistas. Both houses are described in terms that suggest, either ostentatiously or obliquely, an earthly paradise. In the final analysis, both prove futile. Valdez's mansion is opulent, but maintained by a brute power that creates an atmosphere in which one hears "Chopin wandering bewildered in the palm trees." Lidia's home is a place of mutuality and passionate love, but is watched over by a cynical Eduardo and is totally defenceless against the wrath of the National Guard. In both cases, the metaphor of paradise is created, tested and finally dissolved.

*Sandinista* offers no comforting solutions. At best, it stresses the urgency of the quest. What is certain, however, is that for the author of the tendentious novel *The Mind Gods*, this work marks a new phase, a welcome change of direction.

C. KANAGANAYAKAM

## COLUMNS OF DARK

GEORGE FALUDY, *Selected Poems: 1933-1980*, ed. & trans. Robin Skelton. McClelland & Stewart, \$12.95.

IN 1933, WHEN GEORGE FALUDY was twenty-three years old, "The Ballad of George Faludy's Only Love" appeared on the front page of the Sunday supplement of Budapest's leading liberal newspaper. It marked, we are told in a brief biographical note, his initial literary success. One can see why the poem would have appeal. It is very much a clever young man's somewhat cynical view of love. There is the assumption of a world-

weary pose as this young man, who is identified by the initials GF, living in Vienna, "that desolate city," has his first passionate encounter with a girl called Natasha "in the grey room of a pension."

Natasha murmured at dawn, as they lay together,  
 "Well, now, you are not a virgin either!"  
 Very shortly GF ran out of money;  
 even on red-letter days his shirt collars were dirty,  
 but she, a student of medicine,  
 shrugged off all those who asked questions about him,  
 washed his shirts, and brushed his coat,  
 and listened to everything he went on about.  
 In bed they sometimes discussed Chekhov,  
 her each small breast like an orange cut in half.

Eventually they come to a parting of the ways. GF, showing not the slightest emotion, sees her off at the railway station. "On the way home he bought chestnuts and forgot her."

Two other women, Metta and Fritzie, serve his needs for awhile, then are abandoned and quickly forgotten. The fourth woman he meets, Eva Scherff, ensnares him, but she is "cold, capricious, and wholly mean." She tortures and teases him, and withholds "her dear body, tight-sheathed in its silken dress, / which every other idiot could possess." But it is this woman, a typical *belle dame sans merci*, whom he can never forget, "never, never, never."

All kinds of echoes in this poem remind us of the *fin de siècle* poets of England, France, and Austria. One can imagine Beardsley illustrating it, though Beardsley's line was perhaps a bit too elegant. Faludy's poems of the years 1933 to 1935 all have the aura of decadence about them. Even the titles of many of these poems, "To Celia, My Faithless Love" and "Danse Macabre," for example, remind us of the melodies we first heard in the 1890's, although now somewhat

coarser, more astringent than those sounded by earlier poets who sang to their Celiás:

I came upon her on a day of summer  
when the sweating cheeks of the golden sun  
hung like a greasy bum above the water.  
The blue sky held no clouds at all, not one.  
I had not played the violin between  
a woman's thighs so long that when we  
touched  
hot honey filled our laps and rapture rushed  
upon us; as the night began to thicken  
I broke branches from a lilac bush  
and little tremblings blessed our naked skin.

So the attitudes of the *fin de siècle* are now expressed in the modern poetic idiom that developed in the 1920's and 1930's. But within this context the characteristic voice of George Faludy clearly emerges. I use the English version of his first name. What the voice of György Faludy sounds like I am unfortunately unable to say. Faludy is a poet who makes me wish that I knew Hungarian, but even in translation the personal, unique signature of the artist is manifest. There's no mistaking it. I made the test of comparing the work of the various translators who have contributed to this volume. For though Robin Skelton is responsible, "in collaboration with the author," for the majority of the translations in the *Selected Poems*, there are also translations by no fewer than ten others, and in all the translations it is clearly the same poet whose voice we hear. It is a strong voice, tough and colloquial. The voice is most characteristic when it speaks in long poems where the lines are flexible and sinewy, the images precisely observed, and experience rendered directly. In the best and most memorable Faludy poems everything always happens now, before our eyes, even when events long past are recalled and brooded upon, as in the marvellous "To My Father" (1971), or in "Vienna, 1930" where he recalls, in 1956, the city where he had lived as a student and des-

perately wanted to become a published poet. In one of his most searing poems, "The Execution of Imre Nagy" (1958), he renders powerfully, only two years after the event, the last moment of the doomed leader of the Hungarian uprising in 1956:

The end. He guessed it would be hard  
but by now it made no difference  
— the door opened: cursing,  
the goons jumped on him with iron bars,  
crushed his shoulders  
and broke his arms  
and then placed a leather strap  
under his chin and tied it around his head  
so that standing under the gallows  
he wouldn't be able to say *Magyarország*,  
and they kicked him along the corridor  
and he stumbled, half blind  
without his *pince-nez*, then pityingly  
he looked around the courtyard  
but couldn't make out the hangman's  
frightened face, nor Kádár  
who stood there cowering, drunk,  
flanked by two Russian officers.

By the time Faludy writes of Imre Nagy's death, he had himself experienced some of the special hells that the wretched ideologues of our century have been so prolific in creating. It is one of Faludy's great achievements that he has borne witness to the degradations of our time and has maintained his own moral integrity. His poetry is a kind of spiritual autobiography, but it transcends the merely personal. Faludy's fate is shared by millions of others and by speaking of what he has witnessed and of what he has suffered, he gives them a voice also.

When Faludy was writing his early poems and creating the youthful, somewhat cynical persona of young GF, Europe was already burning. Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin were strutting on the stage and clerico-fascist secondary actors like Dolfuss in Austria, Horthy in Hungary, and Franco in Spain were already playing supporting roles in the unfolding tragedy. How all-consuming the fire would become was still, in the early

1930's, quite unthinkable. Certainly, we have no inkling in the early poems translated here of the conflagration that was to consume Europe barely a decade later. It is only in a brief biographical sketch at the end of this volume that we are told that Faludy was "passionately opposed to Nicholas Horthy's regime in Hungary because of its fascist sympathies," and that "in 1933 [he] began to express his views in a series of poems which he described as 'free' translations of the French medieval poet François Villon. While some of these poems *were* derived from Villon, a good many of them were Faludy's own creations." It is a pity that we don't have at least some of these texts in this volume. By the end of the 1930's, at any rate, barely forestalling imprisonment, Faludy had fled from Hungary to France and after the fall of France found himself a refugee in Morocco.

The poems of the period 1940-41 reveal a personality very different from the GF who first appeared in the poems of 1933 and 1934. Gone is the assumption of the easy cynicism of a man of the world. In the North African poems a sophisticated Central European encounters an alien civilization:

Death swarms here.  
And if you're young, you're his special  
darling:  
he enters the bed at climax,  
he takes the next chair at meals.

Yet everything I used to love at home  
is altered here, become so much  
irrelevant window-dressing. Boring. Fake.  
And what, back there, disgusted me — this  
vicious, barbarous country —  
is more like final truth.

In "Promenade at Dusk" and in "Death of a Chleuch Dancer" there are violent confrontations; in the love poems ("Alba One," "On the Tower of the Kasbah," for instance), the sensuality of the early poems is still there, but without

the affectation and without the clever posing. The sensuality is raw now:

We're closing in,  
two ruthless duellists, and from heel  
to thigh  
you spread yourself in challenge: well,  
can I  
nail shut the curious lips of your shell  
— and win?

The moon attends in the garden, through  
the palms,  
flushing our pillow with its coppery light.  
Grapple me, clutch my neck with both  
hands, tight:

trumpet our love's defiance to the night.  
You're whimpering now, as I begin to bite  
the parched and wispy dark beneath your  
arm.

We follow Faludy as he moves from North Africa to the United States and returns finally to Hungary after the end of the war, only to come quickly into conflict with the brutal Stalinist regime of the immediate post-war era. "I had a dream of a free country, / but woke to a Soviet colony."

Our sadist quisling with the head  
of an ostrich egg has got  
his eye on me. He wants me dead.

Although Faludy wasn't killed, he was imprisoned in 1950 and remained in prison until 1953 when, after Stalin's death, he was released. Some of the most interesting poems in the collection, written in various prisons, record the experience. They are distinguished by a clarity of perception and a precision of expression. They are never self-pitying, and though they do of course deal with the appalling conditions of prison life, the main interest of these poems is in their contemplative, reflective nature. Shut in by prison walls, made anonymous ("All prisoners are the same; / a body is just a body"), the mind turns to contemplate the human condition. This involves a recalling and necessary re-ordering of the past ("Prison Letter to a Grande Dame of Yore," "Solitary Confinement") and

an effort to discern a pattern, perhaps even some meaning in what must often seem an arbitrary, cruelly indifferent world ("Soliloquy on Life and Death," "Western Australia").

The arbitrariness of existence is underlined when Faludy, together with his wife and son, leaves Hungary once more and finds refuge in London, only to watch his wife die of cancer in 1963. This, too, is recorded, characteristically in a number of love poems, and these are among the most moving poems Faludy has written. Like the prison poems, these poems are without self-pity. No false sentiment invades the text, and like the prison poems they both record and reflect upon the nature of existence:

There is no mercy. If I leapt  
after you I'd be denied.  
No voice echoes my lament.  
None stir upon the other side.  
Life turns to dust, the world's one tale  
an empty shell without the snail.

At last, if the poems can be used as evidence, Faludy finds a safe haven in Canada. In 1970, at the age of sixty, he settles in Toronto. The storms and agonies of a representative Central European life in the first and middle decades of the twentieth century are now mercifully in the past. He has left us a record of them in powerful poems of experience transformed and made permanent in the smithy of the imagination.

From 1966 onwards philosophical contemplation, though never absent from Faludy's poetry, becomes more central, and Faludy seems increasingly to have used the sonnet as the form most suitable for condensing the essence of experience. At the same time, the young Faludy, lover of women and of the world, and the Faludy outraged by the venality of human behaviour, is still there, looking over the shoulder of the old poet who, at the age of seventy, pays his respect to Petronius whom he has worshipped for

fifty years because he was able to create "gaiety, radiance, beauty, / although he knew the columns of the dark / were already blocking gates and doors."

HENRY KREISEL

## LILLY & WILLIE

HEATHER ROBERTSON, *Lily: A Rhapsody in Red*. James Lorimer, \$24.95.

*Lily: A Rhapsody in Red* is the second volume in Heather Robertson's trilogy "The King Years." Like the first, *Willie: A Romance* (1983), it is an imaginative, daring, and frequently hilarious blend of historical fact and flamboyant fiction. Basing her narratives on meticulous historical research, Robertson employs the techniques of the political satirist and the novelist to recreate a time of social and political turmoil. In so doing, Robertson explores not only the issues and events of Canadian history during the modern era, but also the issues which have come to preoccupy many writers and literary theorists in our "postmodernist" age. Incorporating historical documents within a fictional narrative, inventing private lives for public figures, intertwining the lives of actual historical people with those of fictitious characters, Robertson explores the problematical relations between fact and fiction, writing and reality.

The temporal framework for "The King Years" is provided by the public record of events in Canadian history during the period of William Lyon Mackenzie King's political career. *Willie: A Romance* covers the period 1914 to 1918, the years of the Great War and of King's political apprenticeship. *Lily: A Rhapsody in Red* covers the years 1919 to 1935, the period during which King emerged as the dominant force in Canadian politics. Robertson approaches the public record from the private side to

produce a satirical exposé of hypocrisy and corruption in our political system and reveal the inadequacy of our political culture in the face of the profound social and economic dislocations of the post-First World War era. At the centre of the political structure sits the enigmatic figure of Wm. L. M. King. As she did in *Willie*, in which King is a major actor in the plot, in *Lily*, Robertson presents King mainly through his own words. Although he plays little part in the action of *Lily*, King's presence is always felt. Our awareness of his central role is maintained by excerpts from his diaries (written as private journals, now part of the public record) which are inserted at intervals throughout the text.

Both *Willie* and *Lily* have large casts of characters, "real" and fictional. In *Lily* we meet, in addition to King, such actual historical personages as Nellie McClung, Vincent Massey, Norman Bethune, and Edward, Prince of Wales. We encounter an obnoxious young Gordon Sinclair, and an even less appealing Harry Houdini. The fictional characters include a mysterious man named Esselwein who appears throughout the story in a variety of guises — Communist Party organizer, RCMP officer, Nazi — and the Coolican family: Jack, whose career encompasses professional hockey, gold-mining, stock market manipulation, bootlegging, aviation, and the Canadian Senate, among other things; Christina, alias "Mr. Legion," a madwoman who cures the insane, sometime medium to King, and prophet of apocalypse; and Lily, sister of Jack, daughter of Christina, professional photographer, and secret wife of Willie King.

Lily is the major protagonist in both novels: her voice, her perception and interpretation of the dizzying welter of characters and events bring coherence to the story. The title *Lily: A Rhapsody in Red* alludes to Lily's somewhat irregular

involvement with the Communist Party of Canada. In the first part of the novel, "Way Up North," the activities of the party, which include a successful but short-lived revolution in Kirkland Lake, are treated farcically; in the second section, "Way Out West," as the Depression deepens, the humour blackens. A secondary plot emerges in this second part of the book. Basing her reconstruction of character and event as always on historical documentation — in this case newspaper accounts and transcripts of two sensational Edmonton trials — Robertson recounts the tale of the downfall of the Brownlee government in Alberta. It is a sordid story of abuse of power, seduction, and exploitation; leavened by Robertson's satiric wit, it affords opportunity for telling remarks on the rights, or rather the lack of rights, accorded women under Canadian law during the 1930's.

Through Lily, who is an artist figure, Robertson explores the potential of art both to illuminate and to distort reality. As a photographer, Lily knows that a picture can lie; she is highly skilled in the techniques of photographic misrepresentation. As a writer, she consciously avoids the temptation to follow the narrative path of least resistance. She is suspicious of the devices we employ to help ourselves see more clearly. Reflecting on the bookishness of the men in her life, and on their dependence upon eyeglasses to enhance their vision, Lily "saw how irrevocably [her] life had been shaped by men who looked at life obliquely, through a lens, in the pool of the printed page: too careful, or afraid, to look it in the eye." Lily herself looks at life through a camera's lens and uses the medium of language in her attempts to make sense of it all. But at least she is aware of the potential of both lens and language to deflect our gaze from reality, and she struggles to face experience directly.

Above all, Lily has an eye for the absurd. Her voice gives the novel its remarkable energy, and makes reading it a vastly entertaining experience, even as the story/history raises profoundly disturbing issues. *Lily: A Rhapsody in Red* ends, characteristically, on a note of black humour, as Lily prepares to leave for Germany as a member of King's entourage: "Everyone is going to Berlin these days. It's the 'in' thing to visit Hitler, like visiting the Matterhorn." We may anticipate that the third and final volume of "The King Years" will be as amusing, as absorbing, and as disquieting as the first two.

LINDA LAMONT-STEWART

## MEDIA WOMEN

SUSAN CREAN, *Newsworthy: The Lives of Media Women*. Stoddart, \$24.95.

THOSE WHO REGULARLY view Barbara Frum hosting Canada's most prestigious current affairs program and note the many crisply professional women reporting the national news may be forgiven for believing that Canadian women journalists have achieved equality in the news media. Susan Crean's purpose in writing *Newsworthy: The Lives of Media Women* is to ask whether women are more than a highly visible minority in the media business and to examine the history of women in Canadian journalism.

A media woman herself, having worked in newspapers, magazines, and current affairs television, Crean is a well-placed observer. Her interviews with more than one hundred of her colleagues represent the experience of women in all branches of journalism. Each chapter highlights the personal style and career history of a handful of successful women in a specific field — newspaper columnists, radio broadcasters, or television

newsreaders, for example — who then discuss their lives and their work. Crean's style is chatty and colloquial, giving the reader plenty of background colour and backroom gossip. Not surprisingly, she writes as a journalist rather than scholar. As a result, the book resembles a series of magazine articles which is given continuity by Crean's middle-of-the-road feminist perspective.

Although Crean claims that her research has given her "a sense of the century old history of women journalists in Canada," she demonstrates a typical journalist's concentration on the present and the living. While her chapter on the first women journalists introduces the best known turn-of-the-century figures — Sara Jeannette Duncan, Kit Coleman, Gaetane de Montreuil, and Cora Hind — it ignores the less-famous and perhaps less-brilliant women who nevertheless established journalism as a respectable profession for women during the 1910's and 1920's. Repeated references to Cora Hind may pay tribute to an early pioneer, but they fail to document in depth how a Canadian tradition of women in journalism developed.

Crean is more successful in tracing women's contribution to the media since World War II. Through the recollections of present-day journalists such as Elizabeth Gray, she shows how, for three generations, media women have nurtured their successors' careers. Moreover, as increasing numbers of women gained a foothold in Canadian media they began to influence what would be considered worthy of public attention. At the same time, a female presence became an essential status symbol for commercial radio stations and for current affairs television programs eager to prove their broad-mindedness and to enlarge their audiences. In tracing women's infiltration into all branches of Canadian media,

Crean provides an alternative guide to recent Canadian cultural history.

It is hardly remarkable that most media women built their careers in traditionally female, lower status departments such as the society column or daytime broadcasting. In common with many feminists, Crean is ambivalent about this female ghetto in journalism. On one hand she reserves her highest praise for women who made it in the traditionally male mainstream as "hard news" gatherers, political interviewers, and foreign correspondents. Yet, on the other hand, Crean recognizes that women could create a more innovative and controversial style of journalism in the women's section because there they were less closely scrutinized by powerful and conservative editors or producers.

In the final analysis *Newsworthy* is predominantly a collection of female success stories. Naturally, headlines such as Barbara Frum and Jan Tennant are "newsworthy" in a way that obscure assistant producers and behind-the-scenes researchers are not. Nevertheless, Crean's concentration on the vocal and the visible few weakens her assertion that women have not achieved the authority they deserve in the media world. While she does point out the difficulties these women have surmounted — discrimination, sexual harassment, absence of maternity leave, and limits to advancement — her subjects are not ordinary women doing typical media jobs. Crean's central argument is that the high profile of a few Canadian women journalists obscures the low status of the many. Yet her book may prove most popular with readers pursuing a backstage look at some famous names. Ironically, it is through this interest in the media star system that the myth of the influence of media women in Canada is perpetuated.

MARJORY LANG

## CIRCLE GAMES

ARITHA VAN HERK, *No Fixed Address*. McClelland & Stewart, \$19.95.

MARY BURNS, *Suburbs of the Arctic Circle*. Penumbra, \$9.95.

H. R. PERCY, *A Model Lover*. Stoddart, \$12.95.

IN ATWOOD'S POEM "The Circle Game," children are mechanically engaged in a circular dance about which Atwood issues the following warning: "we might mistake this / tranced moving for joy / but there is no joy in it." In the three books discussed here a similar circle game is enacted; under the guise of child's play the fertile imagination from which stories are born is thwarted. The result is as disturbing as the deadening dance: there are no stories adequate to the situations of individuals presented in these books.

*No Fixed Address* follows the bizarre life of Arachne, a definite non-yuppy who rebels against stereotypical definitions of women both in her work (as bus driver and then as travelling salesperson) and in her interpersonal relations (most pointedly in her insatiable desire for casual sex). It is one of Arachne's sexual partners, the eighty-year-old Josef, who gives Arachne a copper plate on which he has shaped figures, "imprisoned in motion," caught in a "relentless and comically sad" "circular dance." Arachne does not ask what the "grotesque" figures mean; her response is instead to laugh out loud.

The implications of this dance do not affect Arachne; her "main difficulty lies in keeping herself amused" and not in questioning from whence that amusement comes. Nevertheless, it at first appears that she may have escaped the stultifying rhythm of the dance by virtue of her refusal to be circumscribed and fixed by the story (her memories are "erased and erased") or by place.

But *No Fixed Address* is a difficult

book to pin down. Its two endings point, on the one hand, to a "roadless world"; on the other, to the statement: "there will be no end to this road." There is either an endless road or no road at all. Similarly, Arachne appropriates her freedom in the personal gesture of shedding her underwear (underwear in this novel is a metaphor for the repression of women) while at the same time undermining this gesture in her public profession as underwear salesperson, thus perpetuating the system she attempts to undo. Contradictions like these add depth to the text but they also boggle any decisive interpretation. In the end the structure strains and, despite the entertaining and engaging style, the image of women presented between the lines is too close to the pathetic copper figures for comfort: relentless and comically sad.

In contrast to the baffling movement of Arachne, the characters in Mary Burns's collection of short stories *Suburbs of the Arctic Circle* are very much rooted in place, and their sense of self comes from this sense of place. There is an opposition set up between the people in the small northern town where these stories are for the most part situated and those who are on the "Outside." This dichotomy alone creates an understanding of self (in reaction to what it is not) that is much more firmly grounded than anything we see in *No Fixed Address*.

Burns provides a sensitive portrayal of that compelling small-town curiosity because she couples it with the equally insistent desire not to know, the desire *not* to tell a story. In the title story the clues to a crime are slowly unravelled in an attempt to piece together the truth. But as the story progresses it becomes clear that in fact no one really wants to hear what happened. This same idea is repeated again and again, most notably in "The Men on My Window." Knowing the story signals an involvement, and

consequently a responsibility, that many characters wish to avoid. The desire not to tell the story is approached from a different angle in "Collected Bear Stories." Here telling the story causes the intensity of the actual event — confrontation with a bear — to fade. The narrator, "afraid to lose it [the reality of the experience] all together [*sic*]," stops telling the story.

Burns, however, does keep telling the story and she does so surprisingly well given the limitations of her always simple and unpretentious style. The movement of the first story, which traces the slow collapsing inward of one small town, parallels the structure of the collection as a whole: each story moves closer to a very concrete centre, the arctic circle, that is reached in the final story. The attempted experimentation ("A Joint Communique," for example) is not successful and the unvaried tone becomes a bit tiresome but the insights into isolation, place, and story are worth making.

H. R. Percy's *The Model Lover* falls somewhere between Van Herk's opposition to that which fixes (the story and place) and Burns's opposition to that which distorts (the story). Percy's characters try to make art work for them, to make art not only adequate to their experience but also to surpass it, to articulate an inarticulate silence, all that "two shynesses could not say." Given the ambitiousness of this aim it is not surprising that the attempt repeatedly ends in failure. In fact, seven of the eighteen stories that are collected here deal explicitly with art (music, architecture, and sculpture) and in each story the desired "art" object is either flawed, destroyed, or incomplete.

In "Afterglow," one of the experimental (and less successful) stories, Percy writes somewhat presumptuously: "For what was being reduced to ashes there was not merely the erotic dream [a

carved nude that a boy had made] but the soul of the artist he knew he should have been." This statement points not only to the destroyed art object but also to the connection between art and love/eros which it made explicit when Percy states that "art and love both" must attempt the impossible. This relationship is neatly conveyed in the title which suggests both an ideal (model) lover, and one who loves toy models (although in this book they are elevated to an art form); both are meanings which modulate and shape the telling of the sotry. But again neither the toy model nor the ideal lover are ever realized.

In each text characters are, in one way or another, arrested in the relentless dance, a dance which the story (imagination) is in no position to challenge or displace. In general, Van Herk's and Burns's characters react negatively to *hearing* the story while Percy's characters unsuccessfully *tell* the story (or create the work of art). If the prisoning rhythm is to be broken it can probably only be in the activity of telling, in listening to what is told, and in the acceptance of responsibility that an informed telling demands. Nevertheless, Arachne's response is still tempting: laughter and irreverence.

BARBARA LECKIE

## FOUR POETS

GERALD HILL, *Heartwood*. Thistle-down, \$7.95.

MARK FRUTKIN, *The Alchemy of Clouds*. Fiddlehead: Goose Lane, \$6.95.

PAT JASPER, *Recycling*. Fiddlehead: Goose Lane, \$7.95.

MAGGIE HELWIG, *Tongues of Men and Angels*. Oberon, \$9.95.

In *Heartwood*, GERALD HILL's first collection of poems, the influence of the land the poet grew up in is subtle but pervasive. The poems communicate a sense

of spaciousness and restlessness. They tend to focus on things moving and free — jets, clouds, balloons, and birds eagles, hawks, pelicans, budgies — and they express their predominant mood through phrases like "I floated," "I soared," "my arms float." In the opening poem, "A Boy's Time, How He Marks It," a boy digging in the dirt fantasizes about flying with the Golden Hawks, an air force aerobatic team. If his face is pressed against the earth, it is only to "sight / along a runway" he's constructed; what he wants is "to be / above the earth." In his imagination, he "flies / like a white hand reaching / for the blue." If there's a lot of digging in the ground going on in these poems, it's of a pretty superficial nature — children playing, people gardening; as with the boy, the longing is to be "above the earth" and, quite clearly, free of it. In "Anecdote of Sadness and Flight," a humorous and oddly poignant lyric, Dave's budgie alludes to its having "broke / through the silver door / high over Nelson." Dave himself was apparently making plans to leave Nelson but, as the bird observes, "I broke free / and beat you to it." In "Anecdote of the Eagle," the speaker is plucked gently from his canoe by an eagle and carried high above the land to see as "an eagle sees." As in so many of his other poems, Hill lets his imagination soar freely. What he offers is flight in the process as well as the product.

The restless unifying impulse in *Heartwood* is expressed in various intricately connected ways. Like the imagination, memory offers ascent and freedom from the land. In "The Grid Roads," people reminiscing become hawks: "For a moment our bodies lighten / and the birch falls away." There are pleasant memories of distant places, love in Cape Cod in one poem, lovers in another, painting each other's bodies under "the rusting /

fronds of palm trees." Love itself offers freedom. In "Bob Tells Phoebe about her Skin," the speaker declares "I am wing" and describes how his pleasure is to "skim / over" his love's body; in making love to her he traces "loops and slow / currents in the coloured air."

Though the desire for freedom from the land is strong in *Heartwood*, the prevailing mood is light. Hill's humour is uniquely whimsical in nature. The opening line of "Anecdote of Sadness and Flight" is typical: "This is your budgie speaking, Dave." "Pelican Air" offers a delightful series of glimpses into a pelican-centred universe. There is some gentle irony in "If Lafleur Never Plays Again," one of two good hockey poems in the collection. Nearing the end of his brilliant career, Lafleur declares "I do not fear injury. My hair is famous from Moscow to Nanaimo. / I'm thirty-three." In "Labour Day, Unemployed," the irony is sharper. In search of work, the speaker finds himself having to deal with a priggish Manpower official who also happens to be a former schoolmate of his little sister. The man wonders disapprovingly at the life the speaker has led:

*You've been there so far away?  
Doing all these other things?  
Why not remain still, in this heat  
and rise in the normal manner upwards  
towards the hot sky, the hot jobs  
as I have done.*

Perhaps "Labour Day, Unemployed" offers the key to the collection as a whole. Poems like "The Cyclone Season" and "Heartwood" express some apprehension about the harshness of the prairie environment; however, it may not be the prairie itself as much as the prevailing ethic of its inhabitants which has sent the poet soaring, rising in his own way as opposed to the "normal manner."

Appropriately in a collection of poems which take us up into the air as these often do, the language throughout is light

and tough. The imagery is imaginative and often pleasantly surprising. A young woman turning twenty-one muses on her situation: "my skin is where the golden cats lick." The images also suggest clearly enough that the poet knows his own world well; in the prairie winter night, "puck sounds hang / like chunks in the air." Though there are spots in these poems where the humour falters or the language becomes obscure, this is a good collection. The poems are innovative without being pretentious and they work well together.

*The Alchemy of Clouds* is a small book offering Mark Frutkin's second collection of poems. Exotic in both its setting and language, it reveals in the poet a romantic vision of the world and his art. In "Exile," he expresses his concern that at home his poetic sensibility grows duller, more stagnant; he has come to see his familiar world "more like a mountain / than a stream, / more like a stone." His response is self-imposed exile. He sets out into the larger world with the intention of "learning how to walk the highway / joining the braided voices of men." Most of his poems are descriptive and focus on such faraway places as Paris, India, and Africa. They have a marked Eastern feel about them; the imagery is as sensuous as the places described while the tone is formal and contained. As well, the poems are rich in their colours and wide in their expanse, yet economical in their language. This tension between extravagance and restraint marks the best of Frutkin's work:

*Evening song.  
Sun setting in the throat of a bird.  
Orange warbling.  
Pure water in the glass turns dark.  
Everything turns dark.  
Night blooms.*

Frutkin's view of Apollinaire's poetry, "brilliant tight poems / like a small window," seems to suggest his own ideal.

His idea is to capture the mystery of an intense moment and reveal it as succinctly as possible. When he is successful, the poems are strong, as can be seen in "Indian Miniatures," "River of Dreams," or the delightful lyric, "Duchamp's Hat." Sometimes, though, a softness in the language and a slight straining for the profound becomes apparent. One is a little uncomfortable with lines like

never shall I know every tree  
on these hills  
never shall I learn precisely  
how we are woven from this forest.

Nonetheless, the strong poems in the book more than offset the weak, and the last section, in particular, is worth special mention. Here, in a small group of very good poems, Frutkin's subject is the French poet Appollinaire. Poems like "What Appollinaire's Friends Said About Him," "Bells," and "Bracelets" retain the virtues of poems in the first sections, economy, intensity, and perceptiveness; as well, they are stronger for the delicate irony present, more restrained, and better unified. Though there are many other good poems in *The Alchemy of Clouds*, this small section alone makes this collection worth reading.

After *Heartwood* and *The Alchemy of Clouds*, Pat Jasper's first collection of poems lands us rather abruptly back in a more familiar world. Less exotic in its setting and moods, *Recycling* is concerned with the "small close spaces" of the family — with domestic relationships, crises, and patterns — and with coming to terms with time. These poems do not offer ways of escape from the day-to-day world but the view that there is no escape. If there are refuges, they offer only brief respite (though they are no less important for that): a hiding place "beneath an old wooden bridge," a "hot bath," a "year's supply of Neil Simon Movies." The book is autobiographical

in its feel, focusing on a woman's memories of childhood and of her having children of her own. Domestic crises are triggered by such things as alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, shell shock, political activism, mental breakdown, and a small boy's broken arm. As well, the poet is concerned with the power of time both to destroy and to heal.

All of the poems in *Recycling* are interesting and many are quite strong. Where the collection seems a little weak is in some of the poems furthest from the present; too often these lapse into little more than a recounting of events. The language becomes too prosey and the poems go a little flat. The reader's response is more to the crisis involved than the way in which it is conveyed. Perhaps in dealing with these early memories, the poet has unconsciously given away her having already come to terms with them. This seems to be suggested by some of the poems set in the present. These deal with the speaker's feelings in the present toward events of the past and the members of her family involved. What may be clearly seen is a truce — undeclared but promising nonetheless — with the members of her family and with life itself. All of these poems in the last section are strong but two are outstanding, "To My Daughter, Ironing On Christmas Eve" and "Late Afternoon in Chincoteague" in which the speaker and her aging alcoholic father go crab-fishing together. Having learned about the problems of raising a family, she is wryly content with small talk to "skirt the edges of deeper water." Having learned as well about the need for refuges, she understands that his drinking helps make him "numb enough to face the night ahead" and she reaches to "help him up." In the end, the reader is left with a woman much wiser for her experience and willingness to settle for small victories.

The structure of this book has been

given special attention; each of the four sections focuses on a different period in the speaker's life. As well, the concluding lines in the last two poems provide a feeling of her life coming full circle and affirm the book's note of wary optimism. Here the poet portrays herself as something of a girl again and even after all she has gone through, one happier than she was first time around. There is also an underlying ironic note sustained throughout in the poet's frequent reference to her activism in the idealistic 1960's. In the end she is content with these smaller victories in a smaller theatre.

Maggie Helwig's *The Tongues of Men and Angels* is a startling and demanding book. It is thoroughly fascinating in its unusual subject matter and flawless in its execution. The poet is particularly adept at making use of imagery, pace, and short and broken lines for dramatic effect. In two series of connected poems, her subjects are John Dee (astrologer to Queen Elizabeth) and Johannes Kepler, both sixteenth-century scientists who devoted themselves to searching the heavens, Dee to know God and Kepler to destroy Him through mathematics and then to resurrect Him through music. What Maggie Helwig focuses on is the intensity of the quest and the peril of penetrating too near truth and too far beyond the limits of other men's knowledge. As well, she is concerned with the terrible price men are willing to pay — and do pay — in pursuit of their heavenly and earthly desires.

In "Dr. Dee & the Angels" the drama is unfaltering. In a series of short lyrics interspersed with dramatic interludes, the learned Dr. Dee possesses a crystal which enables him to make contact with the heavenly spirits. Through his skryer, Edward Kelley, "crystal of the crystal," Dee becomes increasingly caught up with the angels, working his way ever nearer "the secret / of all secret names." How-

ever, it is not the Doctor's quest that is at the focal point of these poems but the trials of his wife Jane. Watchful as well as beautiful, she is apprehensive from the beginning about her husband's dealings both with the spirits and the "dark-faced" skryer who makes them accessible. External events help build the drama. Dee and his small entourage face poverty, hunger, political impediments, many hard journeys by sea and land; they travel through the winter to Crakow, later to the castle of the "half-mad Emperor in Prague," then from city to city fleeing a warrant for their arrest issued by Rome. However, the main source of the mounting intensity in the poems and of the cause of the problems with the angels is the dark side of the skryer's nature. Unlike Dee, whose powerful desire is to know the heavens, the equally passionate Kelley is hungry for things of this world — gold and the Doctor's golden-haired wife. Her despair for her children's welfare and her loneliness with her husband "afloat with the angels" growing ever stronger, Jane is always aware of the skryer watching her, his "deep eyes around her like / a pair of hungry dogs." Kelley's hatred of his own wife Joan (whom the angels have commanded him to marry) and her awareness of his feelings add to the tension. The poems reach their dramatic climax when Kelley reveals the dreadful nature of what he claims is God's command to the four of them. This leads to a sudden explosion of tension in two brilliantly conceived scenes of violent action in the fourth-to-last and last lyrics in the sequence; in between, the nightmarish opening vision in the "Prologue" of Dr. Dee trapped inside his own crystal is made comprehensible.

"The Dream of Joh. Kepler" is a dramatic monologue and, if it is less dramatic than "Dr. Dee & the Angels," it is more moving because of the reader's

greater intimacy with the central figure. As Dee's has done, Kepler's work, eventually leads him to Prague. If he fares better than Dee under Rudolf II and rises to become the "famous Doctor," he is well aware of his humble origins as the "prince of mud" and of the murky nature of his early education. His embittered mother, accused later in her life of witchcraft, was his first teacher. She passed on to her son her dark knowledge, part of which was "how to hurt with numbers" and prophesied that one day he would "wear a magic crown." Perhaps ironically, perhaps because of this legacy, Kepler becomes the "Imperial Mathematician." If Dee's ambition is to reach God to know his secrets, Kepler's (inspired by Copernicus) is to "clean the universe," to attain to "God in a calculation" — in effect to destroy him and "bear His crown." However ambitious and relentless he is in his quest, he is not malicious in his motivation and he begins to have doubts about his work as he comes to see how it deprives life of its value and purpose: "Be / is a word without meaning." His "new astronomy" leaves him with a hollow sense of victory and "alone. / A winter king / beneath a shattered throne."

Taking us deep into Kepler's mind, this poem gives us a different perspective on themes presented as well in "Dr. Dee & the Angels," the brilliance and relentlessness of these early men of science as well as their isolation and doubts. These poems ultimately concern their efforts to save their souls. Both sequences in this book are hauntingly beautiful. As well, they are slightly unnerving. There seems to be something of the skryer about Maggie Helwig herself. Her gaze seems formidably penetrating and her language as terse and high-pitched as might be expected of someone communicating forbidden visions.

RANDALL MAGGS

## ELSEWHERE

*The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* appeared first in 1980; in an expanded paperback format, edited by Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi (Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$19.95), it takes its readers on another charmed voyage into the spaces of the fanciful and the unknown (though not, as it happens, far into science fiction). The book is easy to use, in dictionary format. Places from Laputa and Xanadu to the Land of the Kosekins find space here — and the new edition adds some 150 or so new entries, drawn from the works of Atwood, Findley, Guy Gavriel Kay, Eco, Hoffman, and others. The editors treat the world of the imagination with seriousness — the book is full of maps, diagrams, and cogent summaries of the social habits of the denizens of imaginary worlds — but also with wit. There is enough of the contemporary travel guide about the book to read it as satire as well. For many reasons, then, it's a browser's delight. Coincidentally, Viking Penguin has published a hardbound, colour-illustrated *Encyclopedia of Things That Never Were*, ed. Michael Page and Robert Ingpen (\$24.95). This book also offers adventures, but they're of a more impressionistic sort, and the book's format is harder to use. The editors cast their net over a smaller territory (no Canadians here, and no detailed maps); Australian in origin, the book does offer a few South Pacific references. While paying reference to Maori myth, however, it offers no glimpse of native American myth; while listing Brobdingnag and Lilliput, it leaves out Oz. The colour designs, moreover, are moody, romantic, and Eurocentric: the heroes are predominantly white, the forces of the Otherworlds dark. The procedure of explanation is more narrative than descriptive; the editors retell stories. They seek, too, to categorize "Things" — by means of the natural territory in which the Things live: the Cosmos, the Ground, the Water and Air, the Night, the Wonderland, and one territory called Magic and Science and Invention. Inevitably, the borderlands blur. But the *Encyclopedia* tells us of goblins and beasts; the *Dictionary* takes us elsewhere and nowhere. Miraculously, the two books complement each other.

W.N.



## THE STORY OF AN AFFINITY: LAMPMAN'S "THE FROGS" AND TENNYSON'S "THE LOTOS-EATERS"

WHEN DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT praised Roberts's verse for speaking to "the Canadian reader . . . attuned to Tennyson . . . [and] Keats,"<sup>1</sup> he could just as well have been referring to Lampman. Both of these English poets had a particularly important influence upon Lampman in writing "The Frogs" (1887). However, even at this relatively early point in his career, the young Canadian was no servile imitator of either Tennyson or Keats. Lampman was (to use Harold Bloom's term) a "strong"<sup>2</sup> enough talent to organically assimilate his British mentors' work for his own artistic purposes. Such a creative use of Lampman's masters is very well described by L. R. Early in discussing the influence of Keats upon "The Frogs":

In "The Frogs" Lampman makes Keats not so much his model as his resource. While this poem strongly evokes the English poet's work, its echoes are more than a mere reflection of Lampman's taste: they form a meaningful pattern of allusion.<sup>3</sup>

Lampman in "The Frogs" likewise systematically and elaborately weaves a "meaningful pattern of allusion" to Tennyson's "The Lotos-Eaters."<sup>4</sup> That pattern is compounded from multiple echoes which perhaps by design are singly not obvious enough to make "The Frogs" seem derivative. However, Lampman's

reiterated hints do gradually catch the attention of the reader "attuned to Tennyson." Such a reader becomes aware on reflection that Lampman in "The Frogs" has established a highly significant system of reference to "The Lotos-Eaters."

Lampman begins creating his "pattern of allusion" to "The Lotos-Eaters" in the first sonnet of "The Frogs" with repeated if unobtrusive cross-references to Tennyson's piece. Thus, the Canadian poet describes his frogs in 1.3 as "Flutists of lands where beauty had no change," in 1.5 as "Sweet murmurers of everlasting rest," and in 1.13 as "Ever at rest beneath life's change and stir."<sup>5</sup> Lampman in these lines stresses precisely the two attributes of lotos-land that appeal most to Odysseus's weary mariners: immutability and ease. That Lampman intends his reiterated mention of those two qualities to bring Tennyson's lotos-land specifically to mind is indicated by the Canadian poet's statement in 11.7-8 that for the frogs, the sun is "But ever sunken half-way toward the west." This of course recalls lotos-land where "it seemèd always afternoon,"<sup>6</sup> where "The charmèd sunset linger'd low adown / In the red West" ("The Lotos-Eaters," 11.19-20). Less obviously, Lampman's description of the frogs in 11.1-2 as "*Breathers* of wisdom won without a quest, / Quaint uncouth *dreamers*" verbally echoes 1.6 of "The Lotos-Eaters": "*Breathing* like one that hath a weary *dream*" [*italics mine*].

In Sonnet 1 of "The Frogs," Lampman thus rather subtly establishes a "pattern of allusion" to "The Lotos-Eaters." As a result, Lampman's reader should be alerted to notice how Sonnets 2-4 of "The Frogs" recall Tennyson's poem in emphasizing three of its most prominent symbolic motifs. These are water imagery, vegetation, and the cyclical rhythms of nature. Sonnets 2-4 of "The Frogs" likewise resemble "The Lotos-Eaters" with their ambiance of a magical

enchantment, in which dream and reality merge. The third sonnet of "The Frogs" is particularly reminiscent of Tennyson's poem with its water imagery and its atmosphere of enchanted reverie:

All the day long, wherever pools might be  
 Among the golden meadows, where the air  
 Stood in a dream, as it were moored there  
 For ever in a noon-tide reverie,  
 Or where the birds made riot of their glee  
 In the still woods, and the hot sun shone  
 down,  
 Crossed with warm lucent shadows on the  
 brown  
 Leaf-paven pools, that bubbled dreamily,

Or far away in whispering river meads  
 And watery marshes where the brooding  
 noon,  
 Full with the wonder of its own sweet boon,  
 Nestled and slept among the noiseless reeds,  
 Ye sat and murmured, motionless as they,  
 With eyes that dreamed beyond the night  
 and day.

The landscape of Sonnet 3 provides as does Tennyson's lotos-land an appropriate setting for a twofold regression. This involves (1) man's reabsorption into primal nature, his return to her most primitive levels of existence as represented by vegetation and water, and (2), in Freudian terms, a retreat to prenatal ease, security and bliss. The outcome of such a dual reversion (intimated through Lampman's frogs as evolutionally primitive creatures floating embryo-like in water)<sup>7</sup> is presented by Sonnet 5 of "The Frogs" in terms strikingly reminiscent of "The Lotos-Eaters":

And slowly as we heard you, day by day,  
 The stillness of enchanted reveries  
 Bound brain and spirit and half-closed eyes,  
 In some divine sweet wonder-dream astray;  
 To us no sorrow or unprepared dismay  
 Nor any discord came, but evermore  
 The voices of mankind, the outer roar,  
 Grew strange and murmurous, faint and far  
 away.

Morning and noon and midnight  
 exquisitely,  
 Rapt with your voices, this alone we knew,

Cities might change and fall, and men  
 might die,  
 Secure were we, content to dream with you  
 That change and pain are shadows faint  
 and fleet,  
 And dreams are real, and life is only sweet.

Like the drug-induced "music" (11.46 and 50) which lulls Tennyson's lotos-eaters, the hypnotically enchanting song of the frogs produced for Lampman a blissful sense of release from the negativities of human existence. In this regard, Lampman follows Tennyson in emphasizing as particular "sorrow[s]" of man's lot disturbance, strife or "discord," "change," and mortality. To escape such woes through regression is paradoxically seen by both Lampman and Ulysses's errant crewmen as part of an elevation to a "divine" transcendence ("The Lotos-Eaters," 11.153-55). This last congruence is underlined by the parallel between 1.11 of Lampman's Sonnet 5 and 1.161 of "The Lotos-Eaters." Just as the Canadian poet seemed in his "divine . . . dream" to have escaped a world in which "Cities might . . . fall," so the lotos-eaters believe that, like the Olympian gods, they are above such human tragedies as "flaming towns." The various correspondences just detailed between "The Lotos-Eaters" and Sonnet 5 of "The Frogs" are underscored by the way 11.6-8 of the latter echo (using in two cases identical wordings italicized below) 11.31-34 of Tennyson's piece:

but evermore  
 The *voices* of mankind, the outer roar,  
 Grew strange and murmurous, faint and  
*far away.*

to him the gushing of the wave  
*Far far away* did seem to mourn and rave  
 On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,  
 His *voice* was thin, as *voices* from the  
 grave;

Lampman's repeated allusions to "The Lotos-Eaters" throughout "The Frogs" point to the importance for the latter of

the central thematic antithesis of Tennyson's poem. That opposition is established by the Laureate through the antiphonal semi-choruses of his lotos-eaters. The odd-numbered advocate an easeful self-indulgence in the pleasures of a drug-induced state of dreamy enchantment. This entails the twofold regression discussed above, a reversion which produces (1) an empathetic identification with nature bringing an acute appreciation of her manifold beauties, (2) a blissful feeling of release from suffering, stress, and upheaval, and (3) a withdrawal from practical, social, and ethical engagement. The lotos-eaters try to justify this last retreat in their even-numbered semi-choruses. They maintain the "toil" necessary to "war with evil," to "settle order once again" ("The Lotos-Eaters," 11.60, 94, and 127) is not just painfully fatiguing, but likewise futile and meaningless. However, those very arguments suggest an ideal contrary to the mariners' withdrawal from moral and social commitment. This is the characteristically Victorian ethic of "manly" dedication to strenuous goal-directed effort involving the moral responsibility to set the world right.

Both the viewpoint of the lotos-eaters themselves and Tennyson's antithetical ethos were deeply meaningful to Lampman. Each accorded with different aspects of his complex (and perhaps self-contradictory) poetic personality.<sup>8</sup> The outlook voiced by Ulysses' truant sailors was consonant with several facets of Lampman's artistic psyche that were expressed in "The Frogs." The most important of these was the Keatsian sensibility equally attuned to the painful negativities of life and to a sensuous/spiritual appreciation of nature's beauties. In this connection, "Ode to a Nightingale" could have provided for Lampman when writing "The Frogs" a number of links between his own inspira-

tion and "The Lotos-Eaters." Just as Keats is rapt by the nightingale's song, so Lampman was enchanted by the hypnotic thrilling of his frogs and the lotos-eaters are charmed by a drug-induced "music." Moreover, Keats in his stanzas 4 and 5 undergoes the same twofold regression to nature's lower levels (suggested again by vegetation) and to prenatal bliss as do Lampman and Ulysses' truant mariners. Like both, Keats attains an empathy with nature that involves an enhanced appreciation of her beauties. Like both again, the Romantic poet seems to transcend time and to achieve a divine status as he ecstatically identifies with his "immortal Bird" (1.61). Lastly, "Ode to a Nightingale" recalls both "The Frogs" and "The Lotos-Eaters" in that its author (if indeed only temporarily) escapes the woes of humanity. In this regard, Keats emphasizes the same "weariness . . . fever, and . . . fret" (1.23), the same mutability and mortality, as do Lampman and Tennyson.

The outlook of Tennyson's lotos-eaters would have struck responsive chords not only with Lampman the Keatsian, but also with two other sides of his poetic personality important for "The Frogs." These are the world-weary Arnoldian and the fin-de-siècle aesthete (the latter combining the refined hedonism of Pater with an aesthetic/mystical idealism). Both strains in the creator of "The Frogs" are expressed in that piece in ways recalling the viewpoint of Ulysses' wayward shipmates. Thus, Lampman in his Arnoldian role seeks refreshment after the stresses of civilization through retreat to nature, while Lampman the aesthete eschews worldly concerns in favour of an entranced contemplation of beauty. However, although the attitudes of the lotos-eaters variously accorded with Lampman's sensibility, their outlook would likewise have conflicted with his pronounced vein of Victorian moral

earnestness.<sup>9</sup> Such a trait may have made Lampman in writing "The Frogs" both sensitive and in part sympathetic to the ethic of strenuous engagement implied by the lotos-eaters' even-numbered semi-choruses. Regarded in those moral terms, the point of view of Ulysses' sailors and its close counterpart in "The Frogs" constitute a shirking of responsibility and manly exertion in effete self-indulgence. Furthermore, when set against the pressing exigencies connected with moral commitment, the bliss of lotos-land might seem illusory.

That such considerations may form an ironic subtext in "The Frogs" has recently been indicated at some length by D. M. R. Bentley in his article "Watchful Dream and Sweet Unrest . . ." (Part II, pp. 6-8). To Bentley's arguments, I would add two further suggestions of the relevance of Tennyson's Victorian ethos to "The Frogs." Both are significantly provided by features of Lampman's sonnets that recall "The Lotos-Eaters." These are (1) the Canadian poet's use throughout "The Frogs" of the past tense, and (2) his employment of "we" in Sonnets 2 and 5 when referring to those poems' speakers. The former follows Tennyson's practice in the stanzas introducing his lotos-eaters' "Choric Song," while the latter parallels the mariners' choruses themselves.

By using the past tense, both Tennyson and Lampman prime their audiences for an ethical awareness in two ways. These are first by distancing the reader from the seductive immediacy of a powerful enchantment, and secondly by intimating such a "dream" was merely a temporary escape from painful realities. Lampman's employment of "we" further points towards Tennyson's Victorian ethos through suggesting Sonnets 2 and 5 of "The Frogs" present a collective outlook. This has in the context of "The Frogs" as influenced by "The Lotos-Eaters" two

parallel associations: with the choruses of Ulysses' mariners as advocating a dual regression, and with the chorus of Lampman's frogs as primitive "embryonic" amphibians. Such a double linking with reversion of the "we" of Sonnets 2 and 5 would render ironically significant Lampman's abandonment after Sonnet 1 of the pronoun "I." Its absence would intimate the poet's lapse from the conscious and responsible human individuality in which one faces life's painful problems and moral duties. A partial "fall" from that mental state, which is the psychic vehicle of Tennyson's Victorian ethic, is suggested in Sonnet 5. The "we" of the poem are immersed in "enchanted reveries," which bind "brain and spirit and *half-closed eyes*" (11.2-3, italics mine). Lampman in the last phrase could be punningly referring not only to the organ of sight, but also to the pronoun "I" as indicating a sense of personal identity. The "we" of Sonnet 5 may have thus partially lost the individuality which is a prerequisite for adult ethical consciousness.

Lampman's elaborate but unobtrusive "pattern of allusion" to "The Lotos-Eaters" may represent a compromise between conflicting feelings in the Canadian poet. On the one hand, Lampman as both a connoisseur of verse and the child of a provincial Victorian culture would doubtless have cherished a good deal of enthusiasm and reverence for Tennyson. He would probably have shared the belief of many contemporaries that the Laureate was at once a great modern master and a worthy scion of a great and venerable tradition (suggested in "The Lotos-Eaters" by that poem's Homeric paternity). More specifically, Lampman would have found expressed with lyric genius in "The Lotos-Eaters" an in some ways kindred sensibility. For all of these reasons, Lampman would gladly have availed himself of Tenny-

son's masterwork as both a "model" and a "resource." The Canadian poet would have done so all the more readily for being self-consciously a literary novice as yet unsure of his own direction and powers. In this regard, Lampman could have gained from following Tennyson a sense of support and orientation allaying the "anxiety of creative uncertainty" that haunts many beginning artists.

However, Lampman may well have simultaneously been inspired with a two-fold "anxiety of influence"<sup>10</sup> by Tennyson. In this connection, Lampman could have felt overshadowed (1) as a junior tyro by an already revered master and (2) as the provincial artist of a relatively uncultivated recent colony<sup>11</sup> by a literary "institution" of the great mother country. Such a double insecurity respecting Tennyson could have moved Lampman in "The Frogs" to assert both a personal and national literary identity. He may indirectly affirm the first by keeping the Laureate's influence from being in any particular instance too obvious. Lampman likewise suggests a nationalistic literary consciousness in "The Frogs" by translating his expression of interests shared with Tennyson from a Classical and Mediterranean to a Canadian setting. Through these tactics, Lampman was able in "The Frogs" to use the Laureate as a "resource" while maintaining his independence as an "individual talent" and as a Canadian writer.

Lotos-Eaters" was one of Lampman's "points of departure" in writing "The Frogs." See Bentley, "Watchful Dreams and Sweet Unrest: An Essay on the Vision of Archibald Lampman," Part II, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 7, no. 1 (1982), p. 7. While Bentley does not pursue this point, he concludes as does the present study that Lampman is aware in "The Frogs" of the "deficiencies" as well as the "attractions" of "escapism" (Bentley, p. 16).

<sup>5</sup> Quotations from "The Frogs" are uniform with the text in Douglas Lochhead, ed., *The Poems of Archibald Lampman* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 7-10.

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from "The Lotos-Eaters" are uniform with the text in *Poems of Tennyson, 1829-1868* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 91-95.

<sup>7</sup> Such symbolism becomes more apparent in view of Lampman's characterization of nature in Sonnets 1 and 2 in maternal terms.

<sup>8</sup> Early delineates such an artistic character throughout his study. See especially Early, pp. 29-39.

<sup>9</sup> Such a strain in Lampman's poetic character found particularly powerful expression in "The Story of an Affinity" (1893-94). It is perhaps significant for the present study that (as Early notes, p. 121) Lampman relates his protagonist's strenuous quest for personal development to the homeward journey of Odysseus.

<sup>10</sup> For this critical term, see Bloom, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> That Lampman as a young man had strong negative feelings about Canada as a cultural environment is indicated in his description of his initial response to Roberts's *Orion and Other Poems*. See Early, p. 5.

JOHN OWER

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Duncan Campbell Scott, "A Decade of Canadian Poetry," in Lorraine McMullen, ed., *Twentieth Century Essays on Confederation Literature* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1976), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> L. R. Early, *Archibald Lampman* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> D. M. R. Bentley has noted that "The



## ON THE VERGE

\*\*\*\* LUCY MAUD MONTGOMERY, *Anne . . . La Maison aux pignons verts*, trans. Henri-Dominique Paratte, Ruth Macdonald, and David Macdonald. Ragweed Press, \$12.95. Among the funniest movies I have seen are John Wayne westerns dubbed into French, in which a torrent of eloquence squeezes its way past the hero's terse and barely moving lips. No such inconsistencies afflict the French translation of *Anne of Green Gables*, published in the wake of the CBC/PBS television production and apparently the first complete translation into French, although the book has appeared in more than forty languages since it was first published. Anne's richly textured language translates well into French; her favourite phrases like "a kindred spirit" and "a bosom-friend" are rendered smoothly into "une amie de coeur" and "une âme soeur," as is her "I am in the depths of despair," which becomes "Je suis en proie du désespoir le plus total." It is only when Anne's retorts hinge on one barbed word, or when she elicits response from taciturn Matthew that the effect cannot be reproduced as well. Anne's verdict on Mrs. Peter Blewett — "She looks exactly like a . . . gimlet" appears as "Elle ressemble . . . à une queue de cochon pour percer des trous," and Matthew's embarrassed "Well, now, I dunno" becomes a rather more garulous "Eh, bien, disons, euh, j'sais pas." But on the whole, this is an accomplished translation, well worth "à ranger dans sa bibliothèque à côté du *Grand Meaulnes* et du *Petit Prince*."

E.-M.K.

\*\*\* VICTOR HOWARD with MAC REYNOLDS, *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*. \$8.95; Lionel Groulx, *The Iron Wedge*. \$8.95. Carleton Library Series: Oxford Univ. Press. The simultaneous publication of these two minor classics of Canadian socio-political history emphasizes the polarities of Canadian attitudes. *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion* shows the Canadian left of the 1930's in its heroic and unself-critical extremity, and Lionel Groulx's *L'Appel de la Race* (which translator Michel Gaulin, using Groulx's original title, calls *The Iron Wedge*) displays some of the least pleasant aspects of right-wing Québécois nationalism. *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion* tells what is at the same time an admirable and a pathetic story. Howard gives full and proper credit to the courage and idealism of the men who went to Spain and fought in the International Brigades, but he does not emphasize

how much they were unknowingly manipulated in the interests of Stalinist foreign policy, nor does he acknowledge sufficiently that the Brigades were not the only units in which foreign volunteers fought for the Republic. Many people fought, like Orwell, for the POUM or for the anarchists, and probably had a better idea of the realities of the situation than the International Brigaders. Still, within its limitations it is a good narrative of a small current of Canadian history too much neglected. The Abbé Groulx was a man totally lacking in fictional gifts who attempted to incorporate a highly racist doctrine into a novel. He handles human relations with the sentimental crudity of a Victorian writer of formula fiction, and his message — that the French culture in Canada can only be sustained if there is no mingling of races — today seems appalling, and would probably so appear to the most enthusiastic Péquiste. We have, one hopes, advanced a little beyond such crude thinking.

G.W.

\*\*\* CAROL SHLOSS, *Invisible Light: Photography and the American Writer 1840-1940*. Oxford Univ. Press, \$37.50. Photography, initially celebrated as a medium of absolute verisimilitude, was soon discovered to be as subject to manipulation as other forms of art. Some of Barnardo's photographs of destitute Victorian children for instance were revealed to be artificial studio creations, as was the "newsphoto" of Emperor Maximilian's execution in Mexico. Carol Shloss explores the social and political responsibilities of documentary photography, and links her observations to perspectival complexities in nineteenth and twentieth-century literature. More specifically, she focuses on Nathaniel Hawthorne and the daguerrotype, the collaboration between Henry James and Alvin Langdon Coburn (photographer of the frontispieces in the New York edition of James' works), naturalism in Theodore Dreiser, Alfred Stieglitz, and Jacob Riis, John Dos Passos's experiments in verbal montage and the Soviet cinema, phenomenology and social reportage in James Agee and Walker Evans as well as John Steinbeck and Dorothea Lange, Norman Mailer and combat photography by Margaret Bourke-White and Robert Capa. Influenced by John Berger, Shloss considers the photographer as potentially in collusion with those in power against the dispossessed. Even if the photographer's goal is ostentatiously benevolent as in social documentation, his intrusion and aesthetic distance may violate his object's initia-

tive and self-respect. In contrast, scrupulous attention to the potentially exploitative nature of their work distinguishes James Agee and Walker Evans's work on Southern sharecroppers in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a book which has also been named as one of the sources for Alice Munro's self-reflexive realism. As Shloss's bibliography indicates, her conclusions are supported by extensive scholarship; however, *Invisible Light* absorbs impressive amounts of criticism while remaining admirably fluent and generally accessible. A good selection of photographs is included.

E.-M. K.

ANYONE writing or teaching about Canada's Indians must read Bruce G. Trigger's *Natives and Newcomers: Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (McGill-Queen's, \$35.00). Trigger's ambitious aim is to write into Canadian history (from European discovery to 1663) the peoples who were almost invisible in what we were taught in Grade 8 and again in History 200. The book is crucial for its putting Canadian natives at the centre of its study of the intricate relationships among economic, religious, political, and military movements, and for the sheer density of its information, material hitherto obscured and ignored. *Natives and Newcomers* is particularly attractive to students of literature, because Trigger continually sees history as a literary enterprise, subject to narrative considerations, and shaped by the fashions, ideologies and fictional conventions of its time.

Douglas Cole's *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Douglas & McIntyre, \$24.95) is much narrower in scope, but the novelty of its approach is gratifying. For example, the fury a reader senses at these magnificently talented tribes being deprived of their own cultural artefacts, and of Canada's being dependent on the U.S. and Europe for a knowledge of its own aesthetic background, is repeatedly curbed by Cole's judicious claims that museologists saved something that otherwise would be lost entirely, and that the international awareness of, and contact with Canadian ethnology is a great benefit to the country and potentially to its Indian people.

The artefacts preserved have obviously been vital to Bill Reid, the artist and environmentalist whose career has been synonymous with the revival of Northwest Coast Indian art. In *Bill Reid: Beyond the Essential Form* (Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$12.95), Karen Duffek comments carefully on the copies and adaptations of earlier pieces which

made Reid an artist; her notes on the essential tension between copyist and innovator, between high realism and Haida stylization create an illuminating context within which to evaluate Reid's work. In the same series is Marjorie Halpin's *Jack Shadbolt and the Coastal Indian Image* (Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$12.95), an equally interesting and colourful introduction to a companion artist who makes still more innovative use of Indian motifs. The work of neither Reid nor Shadbolt appears in Ralph T. Coe's *Lost and Found Traditions: Native American Art 1965-1985* (Univ. of Washington Press, \$45.00), a lavish tribute to contemporary Indian art found outside museums, but the author's extensive comments on the possibility of a new native art (including many Canadian examples) are nicely complementary. At the core of the discussion, Coe points out, is the very concept of tradition itself. "The Anglo world insists on viewing tradition as an entity, as a body of information that is almost tactile. . . . The Indian view is that tradition, like time, cannot be measured. It exists within everything, a sort of wholeness or aliveness that man touches, or establishes contact with."

These are books originating to accompany museum exhibitions where texts go well beyond their value as catalogue notes. In the



### IRVING LAYTON: AN INTRODUCTION

A candid portrait of poet Irving Layton as writer, teacher and private individual. The film affords glimpses of Layton's intense approach to life and the close connection between his life and art. A classroom adaptation of *Poet: Irving Layton Observed*.

27 minutes 27 seconds

### A TALL MAN EXECUTES A JIG BY IRVING LAYTON

Irving Layton reads and explains the poem widely considered to be his masterpiece. In this fascinating "conversation," Layton talks of how he transforms fleeting experiences into art. An extremely valuable film for literature studies.

25 minutes 58 seconds

Both titles are available in film and video formats. Purchase price:

16mm	\$455.00
VHS	\$ 80.00
U-Matic	\$100.00



National Film Board of Canada  
Office national du film du Canada

same category is Robert Stacey's *Western Sunlight: C. W. Jefferys on the Canadian Prairies* (Mendel Art Gallery, n.p.), a catalogue whose reproductions are disappointing, but whose 50-page well-documented biography extends to a history of prairie painting, particularly enriched by the author's sensitivity to musical and literary analogies. Much less thorough is George Moppett's *Robert Newton Hurley: A Notebook* (Mendel Art Gallery, n.p.), an introduction to one of Jefferys' important successors. Hurley is the key figure in the development of the iconography of the grain elevator; Moppett illuminates Hurley's attention to geometry and shadow, with sensitive analytical comments attached to several of the reproductions. Prairie art of a different form is recovered in *William James: Selected Photographs 1900-1936* (Mendel Art Gallery, n.p.) — indeed, the catalogue contains a short essay by Grant Arnold considering the problem of conflicting aesthetic and social contexts for interpreting photographic images: are these photographs art? Nonetheless, I found these works of one of Saskatchewan's most important photographers, which this book introduced to me, give great pleasure both for their aesthetics and for their social information. Especially impressive are sweeping panoramas reproduced in foldout, a difficult format which seems especially fitted to prairiescapes. Many of James's photographs, perhaps surprisingly, depict the lumbering industry, also subject for Wilmer Gold's *Logging As It Was: A Pictorial History of Logging on Vancouver Island* (Sono Nis, \$34.95), which has some plodding writing, and some confused oral histories, but some excellent, often blown-up, photographs, especially those, such as chokermen setting chokers, which give visual definition to the peculiarly specialized language of this industry.

Another version, more contemporary, of the westernmost province is Donald Blake's *Two Political Worlds: Parties and Voting in British Columbia* (UBC Press, \$19.95) whose particular observations are more fascinating than its blandly generalized conclusions. Blake's book reveals surprising ambiguities in Federal and Provincial political behaviour, showing, for example, how class lines are followed in provincial voting but not in federal. *Two Political Worlds* gives fascinating detail about British Columbia as a state of mind, but its major contribution is its differentiation of the subject of federal-provincial domains of influence (or perception of same) from the subject of provincial or regional alienation. It

redefines alienation in the Canadian context, emphasizing it as a positive political influence.

L.R.

Robert Prévost explains that in glancing through a Montreal telephone directory, he counted 4,612 entries for the name Tremblay, most of them affixed to male first names whereas the "*demoiselles* . . . ont immolé leur identité sur l'autel du conjugo." In his *Québécoises d'hier et d'aujourd'hui: Profils de 275 femmes hors du commun* (Stanké, \$14.95) Prévost sets out to fill that gap by presenting, in alphabetical order, a *pot-pourri* of biographical sketches. The result is less a useful handbook than a series of often quirky or tantalizingly uninformative entries ranging from Marie-Anne Boucher-Martineau, the oldest known Québécoise, to Annette-Eglantine Coderre, who earned a doctorate at 87, to Suzanne Blais-Grenier, sometime Minister of Environment Canada, to Marie-Claire Blais, author of the first "roman québécois publié en Chine." Intriguing however are the numerous entries on women associated with the 1837 Rebellion: when the Théâtre Passe Muraille collective researched their play *1837*, they largely had to invent the role of women, as no pertinent materials could be found. A more methodical kind of handbook is Antoine Gaborieau's *A l'Ecoute des Franco-Manitobains* (Editions des Plaines, n.p.), a glossary of Manitoba French compiled with the intention of teaching "une gamme plus étendue d'usages, de communiquer dans les conditions les plus diverses." Besides archaisms and dialect words, Gaborieau lists a staggering number of anglicisms. Although he speaks of Franco-Manitobans as overwhelmed by a strong English-speaking majority, however, he also suggests that a sentence like "la sloche dans laquelle on est stoqué" brings to life "les images d'un vécu, . . . les fibres profondes d'un passé." Similarly concerned with preserving the Franco-Manitoban heritage is *Chapeau bas: Réminiscences de la vie théâtrale et musicale du Manitoba français* (Editions du Blé, \$15.00), with contributions by Marius Benoist, Martial Caron, Pauline Boutal, and Roland Mahé. Profusely illustrated, this third volume of *Les Cahiers d'histoire de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface* is a lively contribution to the study of regional culture. Another pocket of French-Canadian culture, the Franco-Albertans of the Peace River country, dominates the stories in Jean Pariseau's *Les contes de mon patelin* (Editions des Plaines, n.p.), which, together with sometimes Rabelai-

sian illustrations, presents an often delightful chronicle of life among the pioneers.

E.-M.K.

Entries on Callaghan and Vanderhaeghe feature in Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 41 (\$90.00); the series surveys and excerpts critical literature. More overtly bibliographic is John Bell's *Canuck Comics* (Matrix Books, \$12.95), a book containing lively histories of the publishing of English- and French-language comic books in Canada, together with a preliminary listing of titles, a price guide, and an introductory essay by Harlan Ellison. In another bibliography, Robert Georges and Stephen Stern have assembled *American and Canadian Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore* (Garland, \$91.00), an annotated guide to critical commentary, fuller on American than Canadian sources because of "limited access" to Canadian materials. The fifth edition of Holman's excellent *A Handbook to Literature*, newly compiled by W. Harmon (Collier Macmillan, \$21.50), extends its coverage to some of the terms of contemporary critical theory. In a different kind of reassessment, C. Peter Ripley's *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. II (Canada, 1830-1865), (Univ. of North Carolina, \$35.00), is a valuable contribution to black history in Canada. Primarily an edited collection of essays, letters, editorials, and speeches from various sources — all on the subject of black survival, educational and social opportunities in Canada, and the cause of abolition — the book also historically surveys the emergence of black Canadian communities. Windsor, especially — with the journalism of Henry and Mary Bibb, James T. Holly, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary — achieved special prominence. The appearance of a book such as this is long overdue, but it only begins to redress one of the several imbalances of our current notion of cultural history. One further collection of interest assembles the proceedings of a 1984 conference sponsored and published by the Science Council of Canada, which addresses the role of the social sciences both in shaping and in describing public policy: *Social Science in Canada: Stagnation or Regeneration?*; of particular interest are three talks about the future, agendas for organization, and reflections of the disciplinary potential for taking control or for lapsing into irrelevance.

W.N.

\*\*\* A. B. MCKILLOP, *Contours of Canadian Thought*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$12.95. As A. B. McKillop (who is also the author of

*A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* and the editor of *A Critical Spirit: The Thought of William Dawson Lesueur*) points out in the essays, lectures, and prefaces collected in *Contours of Canadian Thought*, intellectual history as a discipline has developed with some difficulty in Canada because scholarly concern with the country's colonial past seemed an admission of its dependence and imitativeness, hence of its cultural inferiority. But, McKillop argues, "there is the necessity to view Canada's long-held 'colonial' status as a constitutional phenomenon rather than a source of intellectual shame" and "to delineate neither to condemn — nor to celebrate — the contours of that past." In admirably lucid prose, these essays outline the pioneering work already accomplished by Carl Berger, Ramsay Cook, Richard Allen, Michiel Horn, William Westfall, Allan Smith, S. E. D. Shortt, and Douglas Owrarn, charting the enormous — and fascinating — territory still to be covered, and presenting a number of exemplary studies demonstrating the definition and method of the field. There is much of interest here to the literary historian as well, for McKillop includes such works as Eli Mandel's *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*

*Out-of-Print*

CANADIANA BOOKS

and

PAMPHLETS



HURONIA-CANADIANA  
BOOKS

BOX 685

ALLISTON, ONTARIO L0M 1A0

*Catalogues free on request*

and D. G. Jones's *Butterfly on Rock* in his analyses, explores contemporary literature as part of the general intellectual climate, and studies periodicals like the *Canadian Forum* as barometers of cultural change. Drawing on S. F. Wise's seminal essay "Sermon Literature and Canadian Intellectual History," McKillop also speaks of the study of rhetoric as an important, but greatly neglected, field. In a country where much literary criticism, both in English and in French, has been dominated by clergymen, such a study promises valuable results.

E.-M. K.

\*\* *The Forty-Ninth and Other Parallels: Contemporary Canadian Perspectives*, ed. David Staines. Univ. of Massachusetts Press, \$10.50. The aim of this anthology is to present the similarities and differences between Canadians and Americans; it is written by Canadians, but published under the auspices of a group of New England institutions calling themselves the Five Colleges. Perhaps it will help to enlighten a few academically inclined Americans about what makes Canada a distinct political and cultural community. For Canadians it is largely old hat, with two former Liberal cabinet ministers lustily blowing their own political trumpets, a former Parti Québécois minister making the expected justifications of Bill 101, and Walter Stewart predictably but eloquently destroying the arguments of those who try to present journalism as a profession with high ideals rather than as a worthy trade. Bob Rae writes interestingly on the reasons why socialist parties thrive above but not below the forty-ninth parallel. The only piece relating to arts of any kind is a sound essay by Robert Kroetsch on the nameless protagonist as a significant and distinctive figure in Canadian fiction.

G.W.

\* JOHN FRASER, *Telling Tales*. Collins, \$19.95. There are some judgments that writers drag down on themselves, as John Fraser does in these insubstantial recollections of Canadian celebrities. Fraser is known for one informative book, *The Chinese*, which was mostly read for its interesting content—an early look at post-Cultural Revolution China—by people who had little idea of style, and which for this reason was a best-seller. That success led Fraser to believe he was a *real* writer, who could take his place in the literary heritage, and he begins *Telling Tales* by comparing himself to John Aubrey of the *Brief Lives*. It is true enough that Aubrey at times did drop into anecdotal banality, but he did

not write in quite the same vein of self-complacent triviality as Fraser does, name-dropping his way indiscriminately among the famous and the fatuous. Still, one could pass over Aubrey if Fraser did not later on coyly assure us: "Hazlitt is my inspiration and Orwell my guide." Hazlitt who said—and proved it—"I never wrote a line that licked the dust?" Orwell, that uncompromising man who called for "prose like a window pane"? Fraser's writing may not lick the dust, but it licks less palatable surfaces in its sometimes shameless flattery of pretentious nonentities. And where, in all this immature gossip, are the window panes of Orwellian decency and light?

G.W.

## LAST PAGE

OLD AGE, writes John Blight in *Holiday sea sonnets* (UQP, A\$14.95), recalling the presence of a young woman, provides "a safe fence within which, yesterday, we viewed the garden." It seems a phrase distanced from the present by literary convention as well as by time, by attitude and by presumption. *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets* (\$12.95), ed. Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn, is full of poems resistant to just such conventions. A collection of works by 89 women, from aboriginal and convict songs to contemporary lyrics, the book is political throughout, objecting to the marginalizing of female roles and the transformation of *women* into *things*. "I'm not a fucking painting / that needs to be told what it looks like," writes Gig Ryan; and elsewhere: "His cubist drawings are lying everywhere / between the dripping virgin and his male despair, / that suffers, seeing nothing..." The aboriginal laments of Kath Walker and Charmaine Papertalk-Green: these, too, are political. And while Judith Rodriguez dances motherhood in "Eskimo occasion," Jennifer Maiden more solemnly intones the intricate dances of promise and trust: "No / one but I can see, and you have come / here, and here is nothing you can mourn. It / isn't to the gates that I escort you, but / it isn't to escape that you have come." Such perspectives are not the sole voice of Australian poetry. In *Poetry New Zealand*, vol. 6, ed. Elizabeth Coffin (John McIndoe, \$10.50), Kerrin Sharpe writes of "The Nature of Appearances"—of living where the "air is crazy / with butterflies," and

of leaving nevertheless to read the "Conservationist" hawk as "compassionate." Public images shape the limits of identity. But public images can also be resisted.

*Angels of Fire*, ed. Sylvia Paskin et al. — subtitled "an anthology of radical poetry in the '80s" (Chatto/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$21.95) — defines "radical" in related terms. It's perhaps a sign of the current state of British poetry (and cultural politics) that the predominant voices of protest are those of racial and ethnic minorities: of John Agard, for example, or Valerie Bloom, or Grace Nichols — though Bloom and Nichols appear in a section entitled "Heretic women." The poet taken as a model for the book (despite these contexts?) is Rimbaud; there's an odd hint here of resistance as a romantic attitude. But the poems — not always in discontinuous or vernacular forms — attend more readily to the cynicism of isms and ologies. "We have handled butterflies with tongs and said: 'This is nothing but fragments,'" writes Alan Jackson, trying to purge himself of irony in order to reaffirm the future.

Canada, too, shares in these perspectives. Paula Burnett's meticulously edited *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* (\$12.95) — with notes and a substantial introduction — tells of slavery and imitation and the resistance to various kinds of emotional landlord. Among the poets collected are several with Canadian connections, including Judy Miles and Dionne Brand. Elsewhere, the Muses' Company (of Ste-Anne de Bellevue, Quebec) has issued Mohammed S. Togane's striking collection of *The Bottle and the Bushman*, reiterating the diversity of contemporary Canadian literature. The African background to these poems is neither exoticism nor simple setting; it's a political frame: "A Short Lesson in Comparative Languages" illustrates with wry amusement how bland a cultural presumption can be, especially when it meets the language of political experience.

Some attempts to recover earlier writers stem in part from the issues that engender rereading. Ruth Gilbert's *Collected Poems* (Brick Row, NZ\$16.95) reintroduces a post-war poet who could still see beauty in the name of sandalwood, and Pan in suburbia. Ursula Bethell's prewar poems come together in *Collected Poems* (Oxford, NZ\$19.95), affirming a still more confident faith in Christian grace and the salve of nature. Such a conservative trust in place, speech, and observation has not disappeared from contemporary poetry — witness Andrew Taylor's *Travelling*

(UQP, A\$14.95): "This is the weather / dolphins come, weaving / their intermittent print / between our world and theirs / then vanishing, a dark and leaping / language, going somewhere, leaving / us here, pointing, wondering, alert." Such uncertainty is not necessarily debilitating, nor unaccompanied by wit, and still other works — Chris Wallace-Crabbe's *The Amorous Cannibal* (Oxford, £4.50) — take up the theme of travel (of potential alienation, potential discovery) with wry voice and passionate understatement. Bill Manhire, in *Zoetrope* (Allen & Unwin, NZ\$9.95), writes of "The poor . . . as passionate as charity, surviving in everything they spend." But the travels are as often forays into system in search of meaning as they are simple observations of activity. Cornelis Vleeskens' *The Day the River* (UQP, A\$9.95) effectively reconstructs convict history; Michael Jackson's *Going On* (John McIndoe, NZ\$9.95) balances recollections of a lost New Zealand against observations of a surviving Europe; Michael Harlow's *Vlaminck's Tie* (Auckland, NZ\$13.00) imagines its way past Freud and Jung into musical process and polemic force. The Samoan poet Albert Wendt's *Shaman of Visions* (Oxford, NZ\$11.50) also visits Europe briefly — but to perceive the failure of conventional modes of representation: in "Montmartre," the poetic persona sings "Polynesian songs / with a Tahitian trio / who haven't stepped out / of Gauguin's paintings." The new world, in some sense, is a way of retrieving an older one, as Wendt's title poem explains, rejecting the limits of European myth-making: "Shaman of Visions, in words is the silence / before Taga Waalagi created the dawn of solitude. / We measure ourselves against our words. / . . . / shaman of Visions, / we'll not live under / the dark side of Pluto afraid / of evening as much as death. / shaman of Visions, when we die disperse / every particle of our dust into the dawn / which gave birth to the first word."

For Maori writer Keri Hulme, *Lost Possessions* (Victoria University Press, NZ\$8.95) is less sanguine about the possibility of retrieval. Her long poem/short story — the generic ambivalence is part of the resistance to received limits — tells in note-form of a man's incarceration. What does limitation do? the story asks: it denies a sense of time, it changes attitudes toward silence and paper, or constrains the logic of understanding — all of which acquire another reverberation through the bureaucratic paper that provides the story's closing frame. Here a nameless bureaucrat's words

take over as the speaker's words disappear, providing a laconic "reason" for the (temporary) preservation of this "manuscript": "Finder didn't want it." The resistance of conventional structures to alternative words, alternative systems of value, underlies the articulateness of the will to protest. Vivienne Joseph's *A Desirable Property* (John McIndoe, \$8.95) probes the fictions of safety and order that structure fairy tales, but realizes that women repeatedly live with "Another Prince, Another Story," and with violence and loss. Cilla McQueen's *anti gravity* (John McIndoe, NZ\$8.95) asserts the poet's role as anarchist in an uncivil world: a world where fall-out and gravity are the norm, and where the trapeze artist and the wilful wit of the vegetable garden are hints of an alternative possibility. Grace Nichols' *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (Academic Press, \$6.95), finally, resists a whole range of exclusive terms ("fat," "black," "exile"), turning discrimination on its ear: "I have crossed an ocean / I have lost my tongue / from the root of the old one / a new one has sprung." Whoever thinks this rhyme is easy has not been listening.

W.N.



take over as the speaker's words disappear, providing a laconic "reason" for the (temporary) preservation of this "manuscript": "Finder didn't want it." The resistance of conventional structures to alternative words, alternative systems of value, underlies the articulateness of the will to protest. Vivienne Joseph's *A Desirable Property* (John McIndoe, \$8.95) probes the fictions of safety and order that structure fairy tales, but realizes that women repeatedly live with "Another Prince, Another Story," and with violence and loss. Cilla McQueen's *anti gravity* (John McIndoe, NZ\$8.95) asserts the poet's role as anarchist in an uncivil world: a world where fall-out and gravity are the norm, and where the trapeze artist and the wilful wit of the vegetable garden are hints of an alternative possibility. Grace Nichols' *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (Academic Press, \$6.95), finally, resists a whole range of exclusive terms ("fat," "black," "exile"), turning discrimination on its ear: "I have crossed an ocean / I have lost my tongue / from the root of the old one / a new one has sprung." Whoever thinks this rhyme is easy has not been listening.

W.N.

## contributors

Adrienne KERTZER teaches at the University of Calgary; Arthur ADAMSON at the University of Manitoba; Roderick HARVEY at Medicine Hat College; William LATTA at the University of Lethbridge; Kathleen TUDOR at St. Mary's University; Stanley ATHERTON at St. Thomas University; Mark BENSON at St. Francis Xavier University; Anthony RASPA at the Université de Québec à Chicoutimi; Leslie ARMOUR at the University of Ottawa; Michael PETERMAN at Trent University; Paul SOCKEN at the University of Waterloo; Alan SHUCARD at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside; Randall MAGGS at Grenfell College; Jane MOSS at Colby College; Giovanni BONANNO at the University of Messina; Coral Ann HOWELLS at the University of Reading; John OWER at the University of South Carolina; James GILROY at the University of Denver; Linda HUTCHEON at McMaster University; Clifford HOLLAND at OISE; Carol Coates at SUNY (Binghamton); Robert THACKER at St. Law-

rence University; Andrew TAYLOR at the University of Adelaide; Margery FEE at Queen's University; David DOWLING at Massey University; Robert GIBBS at the University of New Brunswick; James GELLERT at Lakehead University; Allen HYE at Wright State University; Lorna IRVINE at George Mason University; Margaret JENSEN at Hamline University; and Frances KAYE at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Laurel BOONE lives in Fredericton; Ralph GUSTAFSON in North Hatley; Rick HILLIS in Swift Current; Pat JASPER in Markham; Helmut KALLMANN in Ottawa; Robert KENDALL in Rahway, N.J.; Linda LAMONT-STEWART in North York; Philip LANTHIER in Lennoxville; Yvonne TRAINER in Calgary; Bruce WHITEMAN in Hamilton; and Dale ZIEROTH in North Vancouver. Bert ALMON, Paul HJARTARSON, and Henry KREISEL teach at the University of Alberta; Marguerite ANDERSEN and Elizabeth WATERSTON at Guelph University; Margaret BELCHER and Ann Leger ANDERSON at the University of Regina; Jacques JULIEN, Alex KIZUK, and Diana RELKE at the University of Saskatchewan; Richard BEVIS, Claude BOUYGUES, Diana BRYDON, Michael BULLOCK, Richard CAVELL, Ronald HATCH, Daniel OVERMYER, and Jack STEWART at U.B.C.; Sam SOLECKI and F. W. WATT at the University of Toronto; Neil BISHOP, Roberta BUCHANAN, and Gerald THOMAS at Memorial University; Michael DARLING and Leon SURETTE at the University of Western Ontario; Margaret DOYLE and Paul TIESEN at Wilfrid Laurier University; Susan Rudy DORSCHT and Thelma McCORMACK at York University; Ben JONES and James NOONAN at Carleton University; Smaro KAMBOURELI, Robert LAWRENCE, and Derk WYNAND at the University of Victoria; and Ann MESSENGER and Andrea LEBOWITZ at Simon Fraser University. Linda ROGERS and Alan WILSON live in Victoria; Marjory LANG, Paddy McCALLUM, C. KANAGANAYAKAM, Lachlan MURRAY, and George WOODCOCK in Vancouver; Lawrence HUTCHMAN, Barbara LECKIE, and David SOLWAY in Montreal; and Phyllis GROSSKURTH, Louise McKINNEY, Eva TIHANYI, and Miriam WADDINGTON in Toronto.



## A Tradition of Quality Fiction

### The Difficulty of Living on Other Planets

An Adult Entertainment

Dennis Lee

Illustrated by Alan Daniel

New from one of Canada's leading literary figures - a delightful collection of light verse for adults and older children in the tradition of Thurber and Nash. Funny, warm, romantic at times, blunt and sardonic at others, this book truly has something for everyone.

\$12.95 cloth

### Getting Married in Buffalo Jump

Susan Haley

A new novel from the highly-acclaimed author of *A NEST OF SINGING BIRDS*. When Sophia and her mother are left to manage their farm alone, Alexander Brebyachuk proposes a unique business arrangement: marriage. The quirky and unconventional courtship of Sophia and Alexander makes this a lively, engaging love story.

\$19.95 cloth

### Unknown Soldier

George Payerle

A powerful novel about war and its aftermath from the B.C. novelist and poet. Sam Collister came home from the Belgian battlefields a hero, unable to cope with the past or the banalities of post-war life. His life-long journey to understand the past and to embrace a future is the story of a shattered soul's struggle to become whole again.

\$19.95 cloth

### Memory Board

Jane Rule

New from the internationally-acclaimed B.C. author of *DESERT OF THE HEART* and *INLAND PASSAGE*. In this warm and compassionate novel of human connections, Diana and David, two long-estranged twins in their sixties, confront the realities of aging and the power of memory when Diana's long-time lover, Constance, begins to lose her memory.

\$14.95 paper

 Macmillan of Canada

Available at your local bookstore

**SEVEN SPECIALIZED BOOKSHOPS UNDER  
ONE ROOF AT THE NEW UBC BOOKSTORE**



6200 UNIVERSITY BLVD.  
VANCOUVER, B.C. V5Y 1W9

- ARTS & HUMANITIES
- LANGUAGE & LITERATURE
- SOCIAL & BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES
- PROFESSIONAL
- HEALTH SCIENCES
- GENERAL

**DREAMS OF SPEECH  
AND VIOLENCE**

**THE ART OF THE SHORT  
STORY IN CANADA AND  
NEW ZEALAND**

**W.H. New**

An analysis of a genre as it has developed in two countries, and a close study of specific authors: Canadians Alice Munro, D.C. Scott, and Margaret Laurence, and New Zealanders Frank Sargeson, Katherine Mansfield, Patricia Grace, and Maurice Duggan.

302 pp \$30.00

**UNDER  
EASTERN EYES**

**A CRITICAL READING OF  
MARITIME FICTION**

**Janice Kulyk Keefer**

Some of Canada's most challenging fiction has come from the Maritimes. Keefer has selected the best and most significant of the past century, and presents an impressively fresh and comprehensive analysis that considers both major and marginal texts. She offers new and controversial perspectives on such figures as MacLennan and Buckler, and places the work of more recent writers within the context of Maritime fiction.

296 pp Cloth \$30.00, paper \$14.95

**LITERARY ESSAYS  
AND REVIEWS**



**A.M. Klein**

**Edited by Usher Caplan and  
M.W. Steinberg**

Among the subjects covered in these typically passionate essays are various genres of Jewish literature, Canadian, American, English, and European literature as general subjects, and specific works and individual writers, including the acclaimed articles on James Joyce.

400 pp Cloth \$45.00, paper \$19.95