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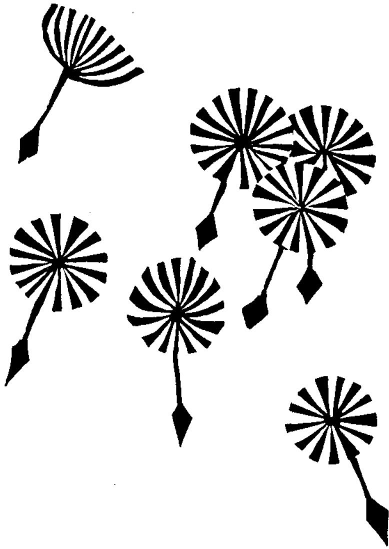

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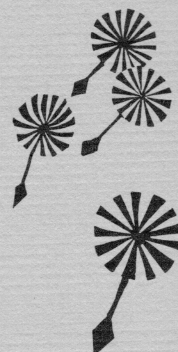

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editorial

IF ANYONE KNOWS . . .

I AM WRITING THIS QUARTERLY EDITORIAL in June, the conventional month of weddings; in Ottawa and Washington, and on hustings from Come-by-Chance west, politicians are still talking Free Trade. I have said before in this column that if "Free" trade were actually what was being negotiated, there might be some economic principle to praise. Among other things, ironically, such a deal would ratify what is, for by far the greater percentage of Canadian-American trade relations, the status quo. But what *is* being worked out is a marriage contract of another kind, which means that it warrants yet another look — and a few more people to stand up with just causes and impediments to put in the way.

Impediment 1: the process. What's happened is that we seem to be negotiating away control over rights and resources for the sake of an illusion. And the illusion keeps shifting; it's a mirage, taking shape as people would like it to take shape. If they'd like Cheaper Consumer Goods, then that's what they have been allowed to think Free Trade will negotiate for them. But the fine print doesn't guarantee continuing choice, and as more and more corporate mergers actually *reduce* the number of real market choices (think about food distribution in Canada, and the numbers games being played by wholesalers' computer-based stock lists), then there is less and less guarantee that real market competition will keep prices low. Prices, however, are not the main point. The main point is the choice, the continuing possibility of an alternative: that means we have to stop thinking of ourselves as branch plants and actually *develop* ourselves. That might mean higher prices — because of taxes — *for the sake of other things that as a society we happen to value*: public health care (rather than market-driven sales of the blood supply), regional development (rather than market-driven regional collapse), public access to the airwaves (rather than corporate control over information), ecological care and concern for the continuity of resources (rather than a market-driven focus on immediate profit only). Now one does have to believe that health care and ecology are worth working for (we don't *yet* have really adequate systems in place, much as we might think). The story of the New Brunswick businessman that was circulated through newspapers a few weeks ago ought to be a cautionary tale: "As a Canadian," he said, "I'm opposed to Free Trade; but as a businessman I'm for it —

and *therefore of course* I have to be for it." Well, I don't buy either the *therefore* or the *of course*.

Consider what Helen Daniel has to say, in *Liars* (she's talking about Australian novelists, not about politics, but her point is relevant:

> LIAR: . . . You can't reveal everything about your business, particularly not to the consumer.
>
> READER: So you're asking me to buy from a liar, a con man, an illywhacker, a used-car dealer and a showman. What do I get out of the deal?
>
> LIAR: Look, I'm a salesman myself. All Liars are salesmen. Selling a different way of seeing things. Selling corrective lens. . . . You only buy if you want to see!
>
> READER: Why should I buy from you? . . .
>
> LIAR: It's free trade. You don't have to buy unless you want to be able to see. You have to try out different lens until you find the ones that suit your eyes. . . . Try Escher's. Keep trying until you find the ones that fit your vision. But buy . . .

What, then, are we buying?

Impediment 2: the text. The next part of this commentary owes everything to R. H. Thomson, whose lecture on the effects of the Free Trade Agreement on the distribution of Canadian films (delivered in Victoria in March) exposed the flaws in the glass that's been held up for people to find their own illusion in. (They're "selling us back our own lies," writes Helen Daniel's "Liar.") Thomson read out what "Article 2005: Cultural Industries" of the Free Trade Agreement actually says, then fastened on how American commentators have interpreted the two (only) clauses, then reflected on the implications of the disparities.

Clause 1 reads this way:

> Cultural industries are exempt from the provisions of this Agreement, except as specifically provided in Article 401 (Tariff Elimination), paragraph 4 of Article 1607 (divestiture of an indirect acquisition) and Articles 2006 and 2007 of this Chapter.

(Article 2006 has to do with honing the Copyright Law so that retransmission of a broadcast in the other country will result in "non-discriminatory remuneration," while Article 2007 removes from newspapers and periodicals printed *in Canada*, the preferential legislation which has been giving those advertising in them a tax advantage.) But Clause 2 of the Article pertaining to Cultural Industries reads this way:

> Notwithstanding any other provision of this Agreement, a Party may take measures of equivalent commercial effect in response to actions that would have been inconsistent with this Agreement but for paragraph 1.

Now I have been asking politicians of all three major national parties to explain this to me, and so far have had a reply from two of them. One says the clause is

"ambiguous and confusing," the other says there's no cause for concern. A Canadian background paper (dated January 1988) says that the "Notwithstanding" clause

> would allow the U.S. to withdraw a benefit Canada otherwise would enjoy from the Agreement should the cultural exemption be used by Canada to introduce a measure that does not comply with the Agreement. However, it places limits on the nature of any U.S. action. The U.S. would have to demonstrate that the Canadian measure is not in conformity with another provision of the Agreement and that it has a "commercial effect" on U.S. interests. Any measure taken by the U.S. would be limited to one that is in proportion to the commercial effect of the Canadian measure.

The official Canadian government position rewords this observation as follows:

> Should a Canadian cultural measure be found to be inconsistent with the free trade agreement, the "notwithstanding" clause will limit the United States to responding with a measure of equivalent commercial effect. This represents an improvement over the status quo. Canadian cultural industries are therefore certainly no worse off, and indeed are better protected from future U.S. actions, as a result of the agreement.
>
> In practice, any U.S. retaliation would, in all likelihood, become a matter for dispute settlement. This will give Canada a voice in the way in which the U.S. responds, should cultural measures give rise to threatened trade actions.

This position is buttressed by a claim that the Agreement shows that the U.S. now recognizes that all cultural activities are not *merely* subsections of the entertainment industry. That much is laudable. But we also know that any "dispute settlement" will still take place, according to the Agreement, by *American* (not Canadian) law. And in any event, is it the *Canadian* interpretation of Clause 2005 that has in fact been agreed to?

R. H. Thomson's references to American documentation — American interpretation of the agreement — suggests that Clause 2 is understood quite particularly (and differently) in the United States. *Inside U.S. Trade* (9 October 1987) quotes a "Confidential briefing paper" as follows:

> Maintaining and promoting Canadian "cultural identity" is an emotional issue for many Canadians who fear U.S. cultural domination. This is of significant political importance for any Canadian government. The Canadians insisted that they maintain freedom of action to take measure to promote cultural development. They agreed to limit these activities to specific industries (publishing, film, video, music, and broadcasting) and agreed that measures they take will not impair the benefits we would otherwise expect from the provisions of the agreement. Canada will:
>
> — eliminate discriminatory postal rates
>
> — eliminate tariffs on printed materials
>
> — provide copyright protection for satellite retransmission

> They have also promised to solve Jack Valenti's problem on film distribution within the next two weeks.
>
> We were unable to resolve the border broadcasting problem (C-58) and a few other existing irritants but we retained the ability to take trade remedy actions on these issues.

In other words the American interpretation *differs provocatively* from the official Canadian interpretation. Despite the fact that the retaliatory measures of "equivalent commercial effect" are *supposed* to be merely the trade sanctions that are approved by GATT, and that the appointees to the Dispute Settlement Board are supposed to be "non-political," Canadians can scarcely forget their own history: the Americans were the ones who considered their Secretary for War to be a "non-political appointee" in one of our previous border disputes. The point is that the lack of clarity creates a problem, and that the American commentary suggests that the U.S. interprets Section 2005 *this* way: (a) a Canadian government has publicly to be *seen* to be supporting Canadian culture, but (b) if Canada, after the trade pact is signed, introduces legislation that gives advantages to Canadian industries (such as Canadian film distribution, says Thomson), then the U.S. will have the right to ask Canada *either* to pay the U.S. the amount of money that is the difference between what it used to get as a percentage of the Canadian market and what it would get after the "preferential" legislation, *or* to ask for an equivalent advantage in kind, with reference to another product. Some freedom. We'll be able to express ourselves, in other words, provided we pay someone else to do so.

J. D. Richard and R. G. Dearden, both legal specialists, have recently prepared a commentary on the legislative aspects of the agreement. I looked in their book — *The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement* (CCH Publishers, 1987) — for an interpretation of Article 2005 clause 2. There's nothing direct. Their paragraph 1600, however, says "As with other elements of the FTA, a more precise appreciation and understanding of the long-term implications of the Agreement on Canada's cultural industries . . . must await the availability of the final legal text." What if that's too late?

Impediment 3: the desire. In other words, do we want this arrangement in place, and what will we get if it goes through anyway? Two comments make an instructive pair. Raymond Williams, in *Culture*, observed some years ago that "the market has played an objectively liberating role, against . . . other centralized forms of cultural dominance," a role still stressed

> by the spokesmen of market relations. Yet to see only this is to simplify the history to the point of misrepresentation. For within market relations two new kinds of control, amounting in some cases to dominance, have become apparent.
>
> First there is the fact that when the work has become a commodity, produced to be sold at a profit, the internal calculations of any such market production lead directly to new forms of cultural control and especially cultural selection.

In other words, you only get what the market produces. And the market will produce, *primarily*, only what it can make the highest immediate profit from (remember the New Brunswick businessman). So that *in a market-driven cultural economy*, "culture" becomes equated not with a greater choice (following the "collapse" of "cultural centralism") but with a greater selection from among a more limited number of categories of choice. What we'll get is the cultural tyranny of the middle of the Bell Curve. Not more *for* less, but more *of* less. Here is Williams again:

> ... second, ... manifest commercial modes of control and selection become, in effect, cultural modes. This is especially clear in the later stages of the market, when the relatively simple relations of speculative production have been joined and in many areas replaced by planned marketing operations in which certain types of work are positively promoted, of course with the corollary that other types are left at best to make their own way. This effect has been most noticeable, for obvious reasons, in the most highly capitalized forms of production. It is the real history of the modern popular newspaper, of the commercial cinema, of the record industry, of art reproduction and, increasingly, of the paperback book. Items within each of these are pre-selected for massive reproduction, and though this may often still fail the general effect is of a relatively formed market, within which the buyer's choice — the original rationale of the market — has been displaced to operate, in majority, within an already selected range.

Williams, of course, is talking of sociological patterns at large. It's possible that Canada's unique position alters the case. Mavor Moore thinks so — but to this end, writing in *The Globe & Mail* (28 May 1988):

> We are the only known mouse living between two elephants, one of which is the world's biggest manufacturer of cultural artifacts. That manufacturer considers our market part of his. The question we must ask of any pact before signing is whether it is specific enough to our uniquely exposed situation. Can it ensure Canadians access to their own culture and at least a piece of their own action? If it cannot, either the pact or Canada will not work.
>
> Of course, those who already buy the U.S. line that culture is business, and vice versa, will be untroubled by such concerns. That line is pretty silly stuff, if you like, although there's a sucker born every minute. But I sure as hell wouldn't trust those who swallow it to stand on guard for thee.

In other words, this isn't a wedding at all except of an old proprietary kind; it's a merger. So *caveat emptor*. If everyone sells illusions, then we have to look at the illusions more than cursorily before we buy them; and if we don't like what we see, or agree with what we find out, stop the sale. Over the summer, someone might announce the betrothal, though it may not last. There might even be time to call off the ceremony.

W.N.

DISCOVERING THE POPULAR AUDIENCE

Diane Bessai

ALTHOUGH MUSICAL PLAYWRIGHT John Gray denies that "any deeply-felt political nationalism"[1] motivates his creative work, he was doing a pretty good imitation of righteous nationalist anger on the public platform of the mid-eighties. For example, as keynote speaker for the Atlantic Canada theatre conference at his alma mater, Mount Allison University, in April, 1986, he identified the failures of his own education as argument for the thesis that, as willing "satellites" of British or American cultural imperialism, "Canadian institutions stifle Canadian culture by design." Thus he scornfully recalled his meagre half-year of potted Canadian history in Grade 7; his extracurricular addiction in high school to American Rock and Roll bands named after American cars, and his university education in English literature that failed to mention one Canadian author or artist. Perhaps most scathing of all was his reference to post-graduate theatre studies at the University of British Columbia that trained him in British and American theatre, from British and American instructors. As a result, when he and his friends went into theatre, they were inevitably to repeat British and American experiments. The tone of this ever-darkening story brightened, however, with the account of his visit to an auction barn in Listowel, Ontario, to see his U.B.C. contemporary Eric Peterson perform in the Theatre Passe Muraille collective creation, *1837: The Farmer's Revolt*. Not only was this Gray's first Canadian history since Grade 7, it was his very first experience of the impact of Canadian content on an audience in the theatre. Farmers in plaid jackets and John Deere caps were cheering, some tearfully, the Passe Muraille-Rick Salutin vindication of their ancestors in this play.

What astonished him most, he elaborates elsewhere, was how the enthusiasm for the show came from people very like the ones he knew back home in small-town Nova Scotia, "practical people who I assumed thought culture had something to do with germs and must be controlled, not encouraged." As a result, "I drove back to Toronto with my head spinning."[2] The experience not only changed his own life in the theatre, it was his first counter-lesson to the colonial-minded Canadian assumption that culture, the arts, and history necessarily come from elsewhere. As born-again nationalistic polemic, this version of Gray's personal story of educational misdirection makes good platform hyperbole, especially from the author of

what was to become contemporary Canada's most universally popular hero play, *Billy Bishop Goes to War*. However, it is curious — even ironic — that his own work finds its material in that very cultural colonialism he is deploring: American popular music in *18 Wheels* and *Rock and Roll*, the themes of British colonialism in the sometimes dark comedy of *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, and a nationally embraced musical tradition rooted in the Scottish migrations of Nova Scotia in *Don Messer's Jubilee*. It is, however, also true that Gray has found ways of appropriating this material for the Canadian sensibility by developing techniques he learned working with Theatre Passe Muraille, such as the use of a raconteur, the definition of specific audience, and emphasis on direct performance.

From the hindsight of this achievement Gray is perhaps unnecessarily dismissive of what he sees as the derivative experimentalism of his apprenticeship years in the theatre as a West Coast director. His early career followed the fairly standard Canadian pattern of the early 1970's that often eventually led to bolder efforts in the development of indigenous theatre. Upon completing his theatre training, he quickly discovered that the only way to acquire professional credentials was to start his own company. From 1971 to 1974 he was founding director of Vancouver Theatre Workshop, later renamed Tamahnous (Chilcotin for 'magic'), in collaboration with U.B.C. associates such as Peterson, Larry Lillo, and Jeremy Long. Like other young Canadian theatre companies of that day, Tamahnous did indeed begin by modelling their work on the styles and texts of the radical counter-culture companies of Britain and more particularly of the United States. Their first production was *Dracula II*, based on a Bram Stoker improvisation created by the Stable Theatre, Manchester, and their second, *The Bacchae*, evolved in the intense ritualistic manner of Schechner's Performance Group.[3] They were "Grotowski-like" out of necessity, Gray was later to say: "We had to explore what we could do with just the voice and the body in an empty space because that was all we could afford."[4]

In its first years Tamahnous was working towards a flexible ensemble method that would allow for experiment "within the widest possible range of theatre forms."[5] The text was fluid, and through group improvisation the work would evolve and change in subsequent productions.[6] Soon the company was working with its own adaptations: for example, Jeremy Long's violently physical *Medea* in 1973, and, in the same year, a group adaptation of *The Tempest* as projected through the mind of Prospero. They also explored original material, including *Bill Durham* by Jeremy Newsome, a vaudevillian satire on the American western, which Gray described to Herbert Whittaker as shaped from "a terrible script with a wonderful plot."[7] Gray, who was denoted by Christopher Dafoe as a perfectionist, had already taken the work through at least three different treatments at Tamahnous and he was now restaging the show at Global Village in Toronto. At this point in his career Gray had no thought of becoming a writer.[8] Long was the

resident Tamahnous playwright, following his version of *Medea* with *The Final Performance of Vaslav Nijinsky*, featuring Eric Peterson as the great Russian dancer.

In a retrospective view of these years to Alan Twigg in 1981, Gray emphasized the élitist and formalist nature of his work rather than its cultural colonialism: "Content really wasn't that important. New theatre forms and staging were just as important to me as what a play said."[9] The environmental theatre of the Performance Group type, from which Tamahnous Theatre Workshop took its initial model, was intended to break down the conventional procenium-audience barrier. For Gray, however, it required Paul Thompson's populist experiments of Theatre Passe Muraille to make him recognize that "the event of having a particular audience becomes just as important as what's happening on the stage." He was discovering a kind of theatre, as he said to Twigg, where: "It's not like there's a little glass cube around the stage and everybody sits there and admires the work of art on display" (102). The connection between the audience and the subject matter became for Gray the major element of a contemporary Canadian play. "People go to a Canadian play for its content," he told another interviewer at that time, even though the work "can be rougher, not as clean and stylish and glintsy [*sic*] as one would sometimes hope for." They go to a British or American play, he added, "for the production values," sometimes the only element that makes a mediocre piece "workable."[10] In *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, he was to turn home-spun informality (i.e., legional hall), into a stylistic virtue.

Over the years Tamahnous gradually moved away from its experiments in ritualistic theatricality, where gesture and movement are as important as language, to the more popular and direct social appeal initiated even before Gray's departure with the Larry Lillo production of Jeremy Long's *Salty Tears on a Hangnail Face* (1974). Gray wrote the music for this cat's-eye view of the vicissitudes of hippydom in a Kitsilano commune, a work described by reviewer Bob Allen as showing every possible variety of popular musical production style.[11] Eventually Tamahnous was to produce the Vancouver premiere and British Columbia tour of Gray's *18 Wheels*, his first original work for Theatre Passe Muraille, premiered in 1977. Tamahnous and the Vancouver East Culture Centre were also to co-produce the premiere of *Billy Bishop*, workshopped at Theatre Passe Muraille, in 1978. In their separate ways, both Gray and his original company were moving into more popular contact with the Canadian audience, although the signs were already there in *Bill Durham* and *Salty Tears*. From U.B.C. and Tamahnous Gray learned the theatre craft that helped him "to write things which work on the stage,"[12] but from Theatre Passe Muraille he acquired that new sense of the popular audience, which became the catalyst for his inherently musical creativity.

Gray moved to Toronto in 1975 where he began composing and performing the music at Theatre Passe Muraille: for Rick Salutin's *The False Messiah*, for

example, premiered in March of that year at the cavernous St. Paul's United Church; in a sharply criticized play and production, Gray's Jewish liturgical music was nevertheless approvingly noted.[13] Later he composed a country musical score for the revival of *1837*, a brilliant pastiche of sacred and secular songs (which he performed on the electric organ) for the Passe Muraille-Betty Jane Wylie *The Horsburgh Scandal*, 1976, and the same year, the music for the belated premiere of Hershel Hardin's *The Great Wave of Civilization*, directed by Paul Thompson at the Lennoxville Festival. In the meantime Gray kept in contact with the West Coast theatre scene. In May of 1975, he and Eric Peterson were both in Vancouver performing in the New Play Centre's premiere production of Thomas Cone's *Herringbone*, which they presented at the Du Maurier Festival as a one-actor multiple-character piece with piano player — as such, of some importance as precursor to *Billy Bishop*.

The idea for *18 Wheels* originated in actor Booth Savage's suggestion for a Passe Muraille collective creation on the life of long-distance truckers. In a manner similar to the development of his earlier hitch-hiking show *Free Ride* (1971), Thompson gave an actor seed money to cross the country (in this case in a truck, not by thumb) with a tape-recorder to gather material that could later be developed by a collective of actors, director, and composer. Gray remained behind to write the songs. The documentary investigation proved too depressing for Savage and the plan for a collective was abandoned, but Gray, inspired by the trucker myths of North American country-and-western sentiment and sound, was continuing to write the songs.[14] The result was the composition of "a conceptual piece"[15] modelled on the musicians' three-set evening gig and the mis-en-scene of local beer parlour or nightclub entertainment. The dramatis personae are the four singers of a country-and-western band who alternately perform feature and support roles in each of the three musical sets. These consist of sung narrative poems on trans-Canada trucking life interspersed with shorter songs, occasional dialogue, and sung or spoken narration.

In effect, Gray was beginning to apply in musical format the basic Thompson-Theatre Passe Muraille principle to which he had responded so enthusiastically in Listowel: the creation of indigenous theatre accessible to a traditionally non-theatre audience. Until Thompson began his collective theatre experiments, it was rare for a Canadian play to acknowledge in both content and style the specific audience for whom the work was being performed. In typical Passe Muraille collective creation at the time, the performers were researching and improvising their material from the specific communities for whom the show was initially designed: *The Farm Show* in Clinton, Ontario, *Under the Greywacke* in Cobalt, *Oil* in

Petrolia, and later *The West Show* and *Far as the Eye Can See* on the Prairies. With special attention to the "textures" of indigenous speech, the community collectives comprised local stories and portraits intermingled with song; they were addressed to the audience in what Thompson described as a Christmas concert format. Gray recognized the creative strengths of the Passe Muraille collective playmaking, but he was averse to the "anarchy" and last-minute panic of the process.[16] More particularly he criticized the "jumble" of language, its quality "that varies with the performers" and "obviates the existence of language as an arrangement of words and sounds that has a consistent mind behind it."[17] Yet he was strongly indebted to Theatre Passe Muraille for showing him "How powerful a monologue can be."[18] During his tours with the company in the small towns of southern Ontario, he noted from his stage position that among audiences with no tradition of the absent fourth wall,

> whenever an actor played directly to the audience in the manner of a storyteller or sang in the manner of a beer parlour act, the audience members caught in the spill of the stage light suddenly relaxed, watched the stage closely, slapped their knees and laughed.[19]

In the balladry of *18 Wheels*, whose audience are the fans of country-and-western music rather than truck drivers, Gray develops variations on the Passe Muraille raconteur style. His thematic concept of the show also provides for a comprehensive variation on that company's interest in the Canadian geographical identities reflected in their actual travels. Thus *18 Wheels* is a trucker's-eye map of the country in motion; the opening song, "Do You Wanna Know the Country?," carries the metaphor of Canada as a concrete river "stretching out from shore to shore" (31). While the individual themes, the temptations, romantic sorrows, and dangers of life on the road echo Nashville and the like, the map is particularized into stories and songs that discover places and people along the route, discoveries lightly informed by regional and nationalistic ironies to which a Canadian audience can readily respond.

Sadie, the Nova Scotia miner's daughter and "nicest waitress on the highway," alternates from lyric, rock and country swing, song and rhythmic speech, to render a long balladic account of the mistakes of her youth: rejecting her devoted trucker for the temptations of Upper Canada, she now works in the greasiest spoon in Alberta for the pleasure of serving these "good honest men of the road," represented by Lloyd and Jim (39-44). Lloyd is the Canadian loser character, an 'independent' trucker who, in an entre-act song, tells resentfully of his share in the "Canadian balance of trade": he gets to haul the offending chicken guts while "The Colonel gets the money" (46). In the third and most dramatically extended set, the story of Lloyd's loss of his long-suffering wife and trucking partner Molly to the American driver of "a Kenworth rig," is a romantic object lesson in Canadian complacence and American enterprise. This time two raconteurs (the Jim

and Sadie of the previous sets) guide the audience through the tale, with the interspersal of dramatized moments from the principals, either in speech, song, or mimed comic illustration. As the plot thickens the narrators play other brief roles (Passe Muraille style). They also become chorus to the repentant Lloyd's futile search across the whole U.S.A. for his Molly, now lost forever as an American citizen and one of the best truckers on the road.

In substance the second set, "Night Driving," is closer to a Passe Muraille episode as the true story of James New, a trucker who suffers from the dark memories of a highway pile-up during a white-out on the 400 (Savage had provided coroners' reports on the incident). James New initially addresses the audience directly and factually before breaking into a ruminative song about stark nights on the road; the documentary detail of his memories of the accident is alternately narrated by the other three, who speak to a musical background that is occasionally suspended for effect, for example, during their litany of the names of all those who died (54). The focus alternates between the two narratives: the haunted reflections of James New as he cautiously drives his route in the dramatic present and the narrators' retrospective accounts of the harrowing events of two years before. The two lines merge towards the end as James reveals himself to be the trucker involved and are mediated in the concluding up-beat of "Ridin' with Jesus," a gospel song inspired by Gray's discovery of a truck-driver's magazine, *The Highway Evangelist* (Preface, 22).

Overall, *18 Wheels* shows Gray already working towards the structural flexibility and tonal variety that was to challenge him further in the storytelling of *Billy Bishop* with its reversed proportion of music to speech. In this important shift of format the play most precisely reflects the Passe Muraille influence, in its spoken monologues, its multiple characterization, and in its close attention to Canadian speech textures through the collaboration of a gifted Theatre Passe Muraille improvisational actor, Eric Peterson. In subject matter and tone this play is the natural descendant of the Passe Muraille-Salutin *1837*. Although Gray told Robert Wallace that he came to dislike what he called "the tragic aspect of Passe Muraille plays," specifically alluding to *1837* in this respect (48), the two works share the same mocking view of textbook history that characterizes the Theatre Passe Muraille sensitivity in the 1970's to the issue of lingering contemporary colonial dependence. The difference in Gray's work is in his rejection of the loser theme that ultimately could not be ignored in *1837*; he chooses a hero who wins "Because he was the best" thereby presenting "one image of Canada we don't often see."[20]

THE GERM OF *Billy Bishop* began in November, 1976, when Gray was still completing *18 Wheels* and also performing, along with Eric Peterson,

for Theatre Passe Muraille in Ottawa. Peterson discovered Bishop's autobiography, *Winged Warfare*, in an Ottawa bookstore, and over the next year they both became immersed in Billy Bishop's extraordinary record as a fighter pilot and related First World War material. They decided on a raconteur one-man structure for a play about Bishop's amazing capacity as a war ace for killing and surviving, with Peterson performing all the parts and Gray playing the music, in the general manner of their production of Tom Cone's *Herringbone* in 1975.[21] Early in 1978, Gray began the actual writing, completing a script in March for which Theatre Passe Muraille offered a three-week workshop and Tamahnous a production the following autumn. In their joint research Peterson made an important contribution through his interest in the technology of the time and also in his recovery of the popular expressions of the period. In contrast to the usual Passe Muraille collective method of evolving the text from actor improvisation, they worked from written speeches; Gray writes that these were "trimmed and shaped to Eric's speech patterns."[22] Eric Peterson's versatility was crucial to the success of the conception and so his seventeen additional roles for the embellishment of the flying adventures of Billy Bishop posed no particular difficulty, especially since, unlike *Herringbone*, no more than two speakers are in dialogue at once. *Billy Bishop* is presented simply as "a champion story" told by "a champion story teller,"[23] its comic ironies and its excitements of fighter combat frankly stated and in large measure directly shared between the speaker and his audience.

Like Passe Muraille's young Donnellys before him (*Them Donnellys*, 1973), Billy Bishop is depicted as a typically unruly small-town boy with no very constructive channel for his energies; his cadet life at Royal Military College is a fiasco and he joins the army only because he is on the verge of expulsion for cheating on exams. As a cavalry initiate in England, he is an accident-prone disaster, his one bright moment occurring at his first sight of a single-seater scout, the pilot warm and free from mud, horses, and officers. That Billy Bishop is both a colonial *and* a hero is the comic contradiction of the work and the essence of its strongest contemporary theme behind the personal story. For a Canadian audience, Gray's best laughs in the first half of the play come from his digs at the colonial inferiority complex: "How can I get into the Royal Flying Corps?" asks Bishop of a Cockney R.F.C. officer. "I'm Canadian. I'm cannon fodder,"[24] and at imperialists with sharp eyes for exceptional gifts beneath the "rude Canadian exterior," like Lady St. Helier, the grand dame of Portland Place who perceives in Bishop the "power that will win wars for you" (52-53). If Gray's point is that "there is such a thing as a colonial attitude that makes you try harder,"[25] then this benign Lady Bracknell has efficiently tapped this resource when she takes the blundering Billy Bishop in hand, especially since the normal life expectancy for new fighter pilots "is about eleven days." But by the end of the play Billy is so good at killing and surviving that he has to be taken out of active service before the laws of chance against fighter

pilots finally strike him down. As a "colonial figurehead" they cannot afford to lose him since, says General Trenchard, "the problem with your colonial is that he has a morbid enthusiasm for life" (92). The British on the other hand, in Gray's view, "like their heroes / Cold and dead."[26] The storytelling in *Billy Bishop Goes to War* denotes its essential Canadian structural feature for Gray although it also has a direct origin in the military life as Billy Bishop himself records it in *Winged Warfare*, 1918. Bishop tells of how the members of his squadron used to exchange stories of their air fights in the relaxed atmosphere of the officer's mess, which indeed is the opening setting of the play. What is particularly relevant is the way they used to tell them:

> It was typical of the attitude of these comrades of mine that when a man had been in an exceedingly tight corner, and had managed to squeeze out of it, it was later related as a very amusing, not as a very terrible incident, and as the narrator would tell his story the others would shriek with laughter at the tale of how nearly he had been hit and how "scared" he had been. It was such a wonderful way to take life that upon looking back at it I feel that nothing the future can ever hold for me can excel those wonderful days.[27]

This is exactly the tone that Gray is so successful at achieving — and then some — through his legion hall version in which the difference is only in degree from what the actual Bishop described. The Billy Bishop of the play, with the musical accompaniment of the piano player, takes the storytelling further, into song as well as dialogue, with characters he gleefully caricatures. But the important thing, especially in the first act, is the note of irreverent conspiracy with the audience; everyone participates in the camaraderie of waggish off-handedness and exaggeration, which is of course a time-honoured public way of dealing with essentially dark matters, the war itself, always from a colonial's perspective, and Billy's personal involvement in it.

As a tonal device for shared intimacy with the audience the raconteur technique of the play functions thematically in at least two dimensions that are directly shared between storyteller and audience, and explores a third as far as the limits of the monologue will allow. In the last analysis, Gray's special achievement in this play is to acknowledge and transcend those limits through the ironic dimension of his songs. In *Billy Bishop* he shows the capacity, not merely to make a song "a natural extension of the narrative"[28] but rather to put into a song something that "needs to be said that a character can't really say."[29] First, there is the shared theme of acknowledged contemporary hindsight expressed in the play's pervasive comedy of colonialism. Of course the historical Billy Bishop would not sense this with quite the same bemusement in his own day as the stage character confidentially shares with us in ours: both in his self-deprecation as a colonial bumpkin and in his caricatures of imperial condescension, for example, in Lady St. Helier's patronizing poetic analysis of him as a "typical Canadian":

I'm awfully sick and tired
Being constantly required
To stand by and watch Canadians make the best of it,
For the Colonial mentality
Defies all rationality.
You seem to go to lengths to make a mess of it. (50)

Second, there is Billy's self-deprecating version of himself as the high-spirited perennial bad boy who resents military discipline (especially when he is not having any fun) that fits well within Lady St. Helier's view of him. And he definitely lacks the correct war-time idealism of most of his contemporaries: his momentary enthusiasm inspired by the patriotic fervour of the embarkation at Montreal is quickly deflated by the uncomfortable crossing on "the good ship Vomit." His unheroic view of his circumstances, and of himself as a person randomly swept along on the tide of events, is equally expressed in his burlesque dramatizations of the military figures he encounters. Billy is a winning storyteller throughout the first act because of his robust sense of humour at his own expense as well as of others: in his frank confession of incompetence as an aviator and in his alternating fear, panic, and exhilaration in the struggle for survival under the pressures of this frightening new type of warfare. Almost in spite of himself does he become one of the best fighter pilots of the Great War.

But the disarming raconteur style, of itself, is less adequate to the third motif, emerging in the second act. There are ironies of personal unawareness also evident in Billy's narration, such as the questionable implications of his aggressive pleasure in killing and of his obsession with his rising score. To a point Gray strives to reconcile the dehumanizing note within the theatricality of the legion hall raconteur style by characterizing Billy's mounting enthusiasm for combat killing in the distancing stage language of adolescent game. However, this approach can only serve the need for irony by indirection, for example as illustrated in two contrasting Act II passages that inferentially comment on each other with respect to the war-as-game motif.

The famous one-man German aerodrome raid is deliberately "half-told, half acted out" as "an adventure story" exuberantly presented "as a boy might tell a story, full of his own sound effects."[30] At the end of the "adventure" he limps home, his plane in tatters, an exultant survivor who "Never had so much fun in me whole life!" Later, resentful that he is to be withdrawn from active service, Billy is anxious to increase his score in the short time left. This leads to the sobering experience of witnessing his target plane disintegrate in the air with its two occupants still alive and falling. Here Billy experiences his first and only demonstrable qualms about the killing game and so he is "pretty glad to be going after all" (94). While not a sustained moment of moral awareness, it tries to give a certain balance to the character as a still sensitive human being. Yet only briefly does it deflect

from our growing uneasiness about the nature of a militant hero as he now goes off to enjoy the honours heaped upon him by the King.

A more detached perspective on events and attitudes emerges with the aid of the songs and the image patterns of their lyrics. While Gray argues that the play "does not address itself to the issue of whether or not war is a good thing or a bad thing" (Introduction, 12), nevertheless he is conscious of the defence mechanisms of survival under war-time conditions. In the songs these are comprised in two ironic mythic motifs, the romance of war and the romance of imperialism. Sung sometimes in solo by one or other performer, in duet or in choral refrain, the songs provide the foundation for a comprehensive ironic structure that by itself the spoken text can not sustain. This is to say that in *Billy Bishop* Gray is more than merely reversing the *18 Wheels* proportion of song to spoken text. While speech in the latter provides tonal variety within the narrative function of the music, the songs in *Billy Bishop* work more complexly, not only as personal response to event or situation, but also as a more detached counterpointing commentary to the spoken narration.

In the first act's general movement from innocence towards experience, the songs speak ironically to a succession of evolving notions (either collectively held or individual to Billy Bishop) of the heroic romance of war (ranging from the innocent jingoism of "We were off to fight the Hun" to the chivalric accommodation of dancing together "In the sky"), and of its corollary in moments of stress, the pastoral romance of home ("Thinking of December nights," and "Nobody shoots no one in Canada"). In the second act's concern with the realities of survival, the romance of war motifs of the songs take a more sardonic turn (for example, in the mordant stanzas of "the lovely Hélène" telling of those who, unlike the cooler killer Billy Bishop, "didn't survive"). The focus gradually shifts to what for Gray is the overall national issue of the play: not the pros and cons of war, but the romance of imperialism as seen from our own ironic post-colonial perspective.[31] In "The Death of Albert Ball" ("performed like a Robert Service poem") Gray examines the doomed fanaticism of an imperial hero, product of a decadent culture, for which, as he remarked to Wallace, "Dying for something is a value," in contrast to a colonial culture, for which "living for something has value" (52). Billy's haunting recitation depicts a man who "courted the reaper, / like the woman of his dreams" (77). In the poem Bishop is infected as well as angered by the implications of Ball's story, bitter at the collective insanity of the martyr principle wherein "Just to be alive is something of a sin," and yet himself momentarily drawn into the fatal spell of the idealism Ball represents: "And my name will take the place of Albert Ball" (79). While his successful one-man assault on Douai (which Ball had suggested, but did not live to carry out, as their "grand gesture" of heroic martyrdom) asserts the point about the pre-eminence of the colonial "Life-wish," the seductions of the imperial romance present themselves to Bishop in another

guise: as the celebrated "Number One" *live* hero, "Just a Canadian boy, / England's pride and joy, / My fantasies fulfilled" (84). Colonials try harder also because they are striving for recognition and success makes them susceptible to the imperial will. Our contemporary uneasiness about the military hero is somewhat redressed by Gray's broadening emphasis on the theme of colonial co-option. Towards the end of the play we also see how the ironies of the romance of imperialism affect Billy Bishop in his subsequent career as "living colonial figurehead" and, by implication, 'us' the collective colonial society, singing chorus to the imperial scheme of things through another world war. The "dance of history" metaphor of the wryly celebratory tango, "The Empire Soirée," echoes the dance motif of "In the Sky." The words of the former, sung "sotto and sinister," speak of an anonymous power behind the scenes forever calling the ominous tune, making social requirements, as it were, like Lady St. Helier of Bishop, that cannot be ignored, least of all by the Billy Bishop basking in royal recognition.

With the aid of the ironic substructure of the songs, the playwright takes the irony at Billy's expense a little further than his one moment of qualm in the air. In the end Gray targets both the colonial and the imperial mentality, although the former is somewhat softened in the context of the latter. Bishop's last spoken utterance in the play is a Second World War recruitment speech, which is to say that twenty years later a new dance at the perpetual "Empire Soirée" has begun, but the tune is a repeat, so to speak, as indicated by the reprise of the play's opening "We Were Off to Fight the Hun" preceding Bishop's impeccable imperialistic war rhetoric. As a figurehead he has now become the useful colonial voice of the imperial romance, even though he seems a little weighed down by his medals when he speaks. But his final personal note, howbeit slightly bewildered, is ultimately complacent: "Makes you wonder what it was all for? But then, we're not in control of any of these things, are we? And all in all. [*sic*] I would have to say, it was a hell of a time!" (101). The deeper irony rests in the concluding reprise of "In the Sky," no longer a lilting reinforcement of the romance of flying, but an enigmatic reminder of the seductive power of myth in the face of the stark complexities of another war-time reality.

IN DISCUSSION WITH ROBERT WALLACE about the destructive side of his Billy Bishop character, Gray remarked that he approached the play "as not being about Bishop but someone I know in Truro, a type of person that is useless in peacetime but whose destructive urge is really useful in war if channelled rightfully" (51). A preliminary stage direction notes that Billy Bishop's "speech pattern is that of a small town Canadian boy who could be squealing his tires down the main street of some town at this very moment" (19). Gray's memories of Truro

and what the squealing tires imply explicitly emerge in his next work, the musical play *Rock and Roll* of 1981 which, like Billy Bishop in the one respect, focuses on the undisciplined and rebellious energy of late adolescence. Here the restless young people of the fictional Mushaboom (generic nowhere town), Nova Scotia, of the 1960's escape the stultifying restrictions of small-town life through the liberation of rock and roll. The Monarchs are a memory of Gray's own band, the Lincolns (in which he played from 1965 to 1968) while the frenetic high-flying of the period is epitomized in the ghost figure of Screamin' John McGee, the presiding spirit of local rock and roll whose destructive urge leads to his demise in a spectacular crash at the age of nineteen.

Gray was inspired to write the play after the popular success of a Lincoln's reunion and dance in 1978. The occasion was a catalyst (in modern dress) of the same order as his Listowel experience of audience enthusiasm four years previously; the old fans loved the music because it was "*their band*" and evoked *their* collective memories. Writing in 1981, he was calling this kind of music-making "small town Canadian culture," a popular culture that, like Parker in the play, he had always assumed "you left home to find."[32] Only later on the nationalist platform was he to emphasize the derivative nature of this Canadian institution of local American rock and roll bands named after American cars. Borrowed or not, the popular culture *Rock and Roll* explores, the raucous one-night gigs passing for musical performance is wholeheartedly the characters' own way of being young, free, and wicked before growing old and ordinary. The same applies to the fans. In the words of Shirly, the Monarchs' staunchest supporter, "there are a lot of people out there who think you're more important than the Beatles and the Rolling Stones combined" (149). Here in Mushaboom, at their reunion performance, the Monarchs have replaced Screamin' John McGee as local myth.

Framed in the present time (1980) with the Monarchs nervously gathering for their reunion, the body of the play is a retrospective of the 1960's, tracing the growth of the band, primarily through its rehearsals and performances, from eager and incompetent sixteen-year-olds to popular local success by the time they break up five years later. Overall it shows the four Monarchs individually coming to terms with their past and present lives and, in the process, finding a collective meaning in the bond with their local audience, a reality that has nothing to do with riches, success, or the lack of it in their personal lives. Gray has described the personal story lines of the performers as the Monarchs' "unsentimental examination or playing through of 'the time of their lives'" as they put the past and its unfulfilled hopes behind them in the reunion night performance. By "Completing something, the characters can go on." He cites the concluding song "Hello Tomorrow" as "the key to the play."[33]

As a play of character growth and dramatically articulated recognitions, the work is slight. Their dramatic reality lies in the needs the band has served each as

an individual type, what each has brought to it, and the disagreements that still comically divide them. One point is clear throughout the retrospective scenes, that except for the sideliner Shirly, the music and the audience are a distant second to their more basic concerns: volatile rich boy Manny and cynical poor boy Chink are in it for the disreputable adventures of the road, aspiring Brent for the money, and Parker for the possibilities of becoming a star (132). Only at the end are these aims (and the ensuing disappointments of the next fifteen years) made to seem less important than the fact of their audience's wholehearted pleasure in their collective return. The playwright does not explore the ironies of personal failure he raises in his characters, but leaves them resting on their laurels in the final moment of union between the band and its audience.

As in Gray's previous work, the structure is clearly designed to establish immediacy with its audience, in this case specifically addressed to the playwright's own generation (at the time of writing between the ages thirty and forty) who, like the characters, are being invited to share in what Martin Knelman refers to as "the ambivalent longings of adults looking back on the joy-ride that didn't take them anywhere."[34] For his sense of place Gray draws on the society and townscape of Truro, Nova Scotia, but this conveys the local colour of typical Canadian small-town life generally rather than an argument for specific regional uniqueness, explored, for example, by Christopher Heide in *Bring Back Don Messer*, Mulgrave Road Co-Op, 1980.

The music, of course, has the most direct appeal. Essentially *Rock and Roll* is cast in its appropriate popular performance mode, and like *18 Wheels*, the music is integral to the subject and format of the play. Since the performers are characters who exist both within and beyond their musical material, however, this calls for a number of behind-the-scene conventionally dramatized interactions of the characters for which songs often serve the narrative and theme as expressions of individual character. For example, Parker's "The Fat Boy" solo is essentially a well-placed response to derision about his appearance when he applies to the band as the much-needed singer; his point that one day "you" will be the same and the "Fat Boy" will have the last laugh is only one of the many pervasive allusions in *Rock and Roll* to the brevity of "the time of their lives" (125-26) and that of the audience to whom the song is actually addressed. In the second act, Shirly and Brent (in the privacy of their favourite haunt, the Roby Street graveyard) sing solo and duet on the subject of their future together as "Normal people, living in the normal world," a song that climaxes a predictable romantic relationship (139-40). Gray makes a livelier point through Shirly's private ruminations on the subject of the macho "Boys Club" that in those days excluded girls from participating in the on-stage excesses of rock and roll (117-18). Such motifs help tell the story and also draw the audience into their own retrospection. In keeping with the general format of the play, such songs are presented as performances, since the play is

largely enacted in some variation of a performance setting, although there are two shifts in scene to the graveyard where Screamin' John is, in effect, emcee-performer.

Integrating the recollective dramatization of the story into actual performance event is Gray's most successful method of directly engaging audience in the spirit of the times. For a play largely about performers performing, he incorporates *Billy Bishop*'s raconteur style into their rock and roll presentationalism. The work opens, in song and argument, as the rehearsal for the reunion. To initiate the retrospective history, each character, within the frame of the song "Just a Memory," has a spotlight focus for an introductory personal monologue spoken in the manner of on-stage patter of performers to audience (101-04). Over the course of the play, different characters alternate in this raconteur-emcee role, introducing, through their personal accounts and thoughts of the time, the succeeding phases in the band's development demonstrated in the music of the scene. The best example of musical performance as dramatic event is Parker's description in performance (the others playing "as though the band were at a dance") of his first night as lead singer. His actual singing is framed by his graphic narration of events before, during, and after that memorable occasion (126-29). Shirly is the more ruminative raconteur in the opening segment of Act II. The scene begins with Parker's singing of "The King of Friday Night" to underline that the Monarchs are at the peak of their success; however, in her comments, spoken from her perennial spot at the side of the stage, it is clear that their disintegration as a group is at hand. There are also several extended dramatic monologues that further the narrative from individual points of view: Manny's take the form of confession and prayer to a deity whose balance-sheet prerogatives resemble those of his resented father, the local rich man, D.B. (114, 140); Parker's is addressed to his widowed mum at supper, explaining that he has to go to Toronto because "I wanna be something a whole lot different than me" (145).

The enigmatic figure of Screamin' John McGee, identified as the local spirit of rock and roll, hovers nebulously between the performance and the dramatic dimensions of the play. Here Gray seems to be moving ambivalently between the composer's urge to recover the rock and roll cult of his youth and the writer's retrospective compulsion to anatomize its components. Like the performers of *18 Wheels*, Screamin' John is a recurring theatrical rather than naturalistic presence, his role cast in song, musical rhythms, or in verse. As a local rock and roller he is the hero and inspiration of the band, before his grisly accident giving them equipment and teaching them songs — passing on the torch, as it were. As such he fulfils his most coherently realized function in the play as archetypal Performer, principally encapsulating the high energy of the rock and roll craze and at the same time infusing that whole scene with a cautionary edge. He is at once the explicit embodiment of the frenetic side of the carpe diem activity and the implicit warning of its letdowns and dangers.

At his first appearance (not yet a ghost) his warning song precedes the rock and roll: seedily dressed in the 1950's performance costume, he sings of himself as a burnt-out joy rider whose "visions of mortality," at the age of 19, include the awful possibilities of capitulation into boring suburban routine (110-12). In this perhaps surprising middle-class concern (despite the potential violence in his tone) he anticipates the doldrums of the later Brent, while his fear of lumps and "pitter-patter" in the chest suggests Manny. In his "shoot the shit" seediness and contempt for small-town restraints he is closest in nature to the cynical and perennially unemployed Chink. His philosophy of release from everyday tedium and adolescent stress is, of course, through motion (112-13). Later, as a graveyard ghost, he reminds Chink, who is in despair after the band's breakup, that "When the situation's out of control / You better rock / You better roll."[35]

At the same time, like Billy Bishop's flying corps companions lamented by the Lovely Hélène, he has not himself survived. In the words of his song in the penultimate scene of the original version of the play, he is "Stuck in time, in my prime, / the ghost of nineteen fifty-nine" (117), a little reminiscent of the fading names on the statues of "Friends Ain't S'posed to Die" in the earlier play. Nevertheless, it is thematically fitting that his signature song, "Play a Little Rock and Roll," is sung at the reunion scene by all, including Shirly, at last initiated into full membership in the cult of local rock and roll (150). He makes a final appearance to sing a verse of "Hello Tomorrow" and thus the spirit of Screamin' John is absorbed into the final performance as part of the process of completion that the reunion is intended to represent.

In a more intrusive manner, the Screamin' John figure also functions at random as a kind of choral commentator in various personal scenes. While this could be rationalized as appropriate, since he also embodies the particular spirit of rebellion that finds its outlet in the music, the effect is to overload the retrospective irony in a rather belaboured effort to exchange reminiscent winks with the audience: for example, as sardonic voyeur and pontificator in verse and song on the nervous gropings of Brent and Shirly (parked in the Roby Street graveyard [119-22]). Later he narrates the cautious negotiations of Parker, "the underage drunk" (and could as well be Parker speaking), sneaking conspiratorially into his church-going household at 6 A.M. on a Sunday morning (129-30). Somewhat out of character, Screamin' John has the playwright's own sharp eye for textural detail and ironic juxtapositions, in his description of the furnishings of Parker's home, for example, or when he establishes the setting for the second act graveyard scene (Brent is about to propose to Shirly): "Oh, there's a bit of a view to the south of the Salmon River, lazily makin' its way to the Bay of Fundy / Carrying the crap from D.B.'s hat factory" (137). While his individual moments are often vividly expressed, his role as ghostly emcee to the audience on a guided tour of Mushaboom is dramatically speaking redundant.

Gray has recently shed some light on the origins of the character (and therefore the problem) as a "parody" of the Stage Manager in Wilder's *Our Town*: "In Screamin' John I wanted to create that Stage Manager's nasty Canadian relative, who has similar insights, but without all the pious wisdom, without all the answers" (Preface, 91); this also helps to account for Gray's choice of the graveyard as alternative setting. Unfortunately, the overall effect is to diffuse the primary intention of the figure as the spirit of rock and roll, and perhaps to truncate the dramatic potential of the individual living characters. In the light of Gray's "Canadianness" (a term he finds more acceptable than nationalist),[36] this points to a burden of unresolved irony in *Rock and Roll.* It has less to do with the implicitly acknowledged "derivative sensibilities" of the local band; as in *18 Wheels,* Gray's ability to write his own popular music (often with just the smallest suggestion of parodic edge) frees him from the charge of being a colonial sycophant. He uses popular music to reach his audience in familiar ways that, with the help of his lyrics, also reminds them of Canadian difference. Since Gray had already learned how to break through the proscenium from his experience at Theatre Passe Muraille and in the writing and performance of *Billy Bishop,* the Wilder model is itself redundant. In *Rock and Roll,* he is trying to reach his audience on two levels of direct address, the immediate and the retrospective. But what he seems to have temporarily forgotten is the marked difference of effect on the audience between the informality of a good ranconteur, Chink or Parker, for example, and the pseudo-literary commentary of a discursive narrator. The parody backfires: not only does the work lose immediacy when Screamin' John becomes a voyeur word-painter, but Mushaboom is diminished by the intimation of a Canadian *Our Town,* especially since this alludes to a dramaturgical weakness in the play.

GRAY'S NEXT WORK, *Don Messer's Jubilee,* 1985, commissioned by Tom Kerr for Neptune Theatre,[37] is closer to *18 Wheels* in its musical format than to *Rock and Roll.* The piece is not a play , but in Gray's own words on the program, "a fan letter," formally cast in an approximation of a typical Don Messer show. He shows two specific intentions in the new work: first, to demonstrate that in their nearly forty years of radio and television broadcasting Don Messer and the Islanders preserved and transmitted an 'old time' musical culture expressing the traditional values of ordinary Canadians everywhere; second, to advance a political point, characteristic of his platform stance of the period, that "Canadian institutions stifle Canadian culture by design." In respect to the latter his specific target is the CBC, whose abrupt cancellation of "Don Messer's Jubilee" in 1969, despite ten years of continuing top ratings, to him "symbolised the rejection of the whole of Canadian culture."[38] While either point may be ultimately

debatable, the work is nevertheless of considerable interest for its theatrical methods of engaging audience in a further variation of the performance mode that has been Gray's most constant form of creative expression. In this respect *Don Messer's Jubilee* may be regarded as a Passe Muraille-like community theatrical encounter writ large, a country-wide collective community of one-time Don Messer television fans.

Before discussing the point however, it is useful to note some telling thematic connections with *Rock and Roll* that in hindsight seem to anticipate Gray's increasing cultural nationalism. One has to do with the Monarchs' discovery of their special place as a local band in their own generation's community mythology. Although Gray himself was to allude subsequently to his own rock and roll days with the Lincolns as "basking in second-hand glamour and borrowed charisma,"[39] the general point still stands: a home-grown version has a more immediate audience appeal than an imported one. A related theme from *Rock and Roll* is Parker's insistence to his mother that he must go to Toronto if he is ever to become a singing star. He believes that in Mushaboom he will always remain just "the fat kid on the block" whereas away he can become "a whole lot different." He also feels alienated from the solid small-town values of his parents, specifically expressed in the song "Mom and Dad." In his eyes, parents belong to a simpler and more stable world ("And straight meant no lying. / And gay meant not crying") foreign to him (146).

Through the exploration in *Don Messer's Jubilee* of what he takes to be a rooted rather than a synthetic form of musical culture, Gray seems to be making his tacit apology to Parker's mom and dad for his own generation's natural distrust of the traditional small-town world and that generation's contribution to the demise of the cultural tradition represented by Don Messer.[40] He is also demonstrating the fallacy of the common Canadian assumption that to be a successful artist one has to become (like the CBC mandarins of Toronto) a 'culturally displaced person.' Thus the new work in effect begins where *Rock and Roll* ends, in down-home cultural territory. But this time it is regionally rooted, the musical and dance traditions brought from the old country by earlier generations and kept alive by rural fiddlers such as Gray's own grandfather. Performers become stars, not by going away and trying to become "a whole lot different," but by remaining home and staying the same. Don Messer, the perenially smiling old-time fiddler; Marg Osborne, homely but wholesome, and Charlie Chamberlain, everybody's stout and slightly raffish uncle, are here celebrated as the modest Maritime performers who, by remaining local in their music and their stage personnae as just plain folks, become "Canada in musical form" to a country-wide audience.

Here he is casting his popular entertainment net wider than ever before. Perhaps this causes him to make more sweeping assertions about the universality of British-Canadian down-home tradition than the multicultural complexity and regional

disparities of the country warrant. Knelman writes: "For those who were urban and non-British, any old American sitcom seemed closer to home than Don Messer."[41] The point that the CBC killed Canadian culture when it cancelled the Don Messer show is satirically asserted more than convincingly explored — a dash of mother-corporation bashing that speaks resentfully of "culturally displaced persons" adorned in Nehru jackets and love beads who believe that programming should reflect "the correct aspirations of those in charge." In the words of "The Corporation Reel," as performed by the Buchta Dancers: "We wanna hear the Beatles sing / Messer is embarrassing" (196). Otherwise, within the confines of the performance mode Gray has chosen, he is largely reinforcing collective sentimental memories about the popularity of the show itself and of the stage reality of the performers.

In this work Gray is ostensibly simulating Messer-style performance. Within the performance structure, the Islanders' clarinetist and emcee Rae Simmons combines his colourful stage patter with an on-going, somewhat editorializing, narration in which he recounts the origins of the band, the traditions from which it comes, and its subsequent history. His story is illustrated by backprojections of actual photographs; in fact photographic icons are the only way in which the taciturn Messer is himself present in the show;[42] his part is otherwise fulfilled by the musicians. In contrast to Christopher Heide's earlier play, *Bring Back Don Messer*, in which the playwright demonstrates the importance of the Messer tradition in the lives of a particular fictional family and community, Gray is directly evoking the Messer era in an actual theatrical experience of the show.

However, audience participation is more than merely foot-stomping, applauding, singing "Smile Awhile" and approving of the sarcasm towards the CBC. Despite the emphasis on clever simulation, there is a degree of difference between what Gray and his cast effect on stage and an actual Don Messer television evening. It is on this level of difference that *Don Messer's Jubilee* best demonstrates his ability to draw the audience actively into the performance. As a community theatrical encounter and as a myth-making enterprise, the work demonstrates its descent from the collective creations of Theatre Passe Muraille. The community is of course a very large one, defined not by regional geography but by airwaves and television signals and consists of all the people who were once fans of the Don Messer show. As a large element of Gray's audience also, they are invited into a familiar world of popular performance personalities who in their stage representations are not entirely like either the pictures on the backprojections or the remembered figures and voices of the originals. For example, Jodie Friesen in the cross-Canada tour was a disconcertingly slim Marg Osborne, but in the words of one reviewer "in the way she carries herself, sets her feet, and cups her hands . . . she is Marg Osborne."[43] The same sense of recognition is familiar among the audiences of community collective creations when an actor like Eric Peterson may feel that his "line drawing"

of an actual person is "nowhere close," but the audience supplies the rest.[44] In such cases the creative encounter between actor and audience is an important form of the participatory process.

Similarly the songs have the familiar sounds and many of the familiar sentiments, but they are, of course, written by John Gray in an approximation of the Messer repertory. This gives the composer-playwright a certain leeway, for example, to articulate the popular performance personalities, particularly of Marg and Charlie, through songs about themselves. In this respect Gray is fulfilling his aim to "mythologize" the Messer group, so that even audiences who never knew them (like the subsequent audiences of the initially specific community collectives) can respond to the characteristics the Messer performers came to represent in the collective mind of their public. The unglamorous Marg is a model in her own way ("Never give up hope, girls / even I became a star" [172]), but she also shares the unhappiness of all the "Plain girls in love with / conceited young men" (186). Charlie, with his "voice like a New Brunswick spring" singing his "songs of old emotion" (such as "My Little Flower"), pumps gas in the summer, presumably to keep himself in beer (175-77). There is a duet of comic behind-the-scenes discord ("It's Been Going on For Years") between the prim Marg ("If she's ever perspired / I would be very much surprised" [194]) and the earthy "slob" Charlie ("Droolin' on my nice dress / And snappin' my brassiere" [192]) not entirely in keeping with the soulful tranquillity of their regularly featured "Quiet Time" gospel song. Messer's physical absence from the show may also be part of the myth-making, specifically in allusion to his role as all-Canadian victim to corporate insensitivity. Certainly by the end of his show Gray exceeds himself on this score by insisting that, in the aftermath of the CBC cancellation, Don, Marg, and Charlie virtually died, not of heart trouble, but of broken hearts.

JOHN GRAY'S WHOLE CAREER in the theatre may be viewed as a matter of going away in order to come home; as a process of discovering or rediscovering the nature of the audience for a Canadian contemporary theatre. His epiphany in Listowel, when the southwestern Ontario bean farmers stood to cheer Theatre Passe Muraille's *1837*, has been significantly operative because it led him to recognize the appeal of popular culture in its indigenous environment; in this vein his rediscovery of Don Messer's Canada is the most widely (if not the most deeply) evocative as yet. Listowel also led him to formulate his view of the raconteur mode as the native Canadian theatrical expression, a concept that has consistently shaped his creativity in both its verbal and musical components. In three out of his four major works Gray has drawn on his particular gift for witty musical pastiche as the initial point of cultural contact with his specifically identified

audiences: the fans of country and western in *18 Wheels*, the sixties generation in *Rock and Roll*, and the mom-and-dad generation presumably still lurking in the ancestral memories of all Canadians in the old-time music of Don Messer. Thus his most important contribution to Canadian drama and theatre has been in the exploration of Canadian themes and character through accessible popular entertainment modes: the legion hall and tavern entertainment, the rock and roll dance band, and the television variety show. His singular ear for popular music has been a major factor, notably, as in *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, in combination with the wit and irony of his lyrics. While *Billy Bishop Goes to War* is undoubtedly his strongest dramatic work, showing his capacity to work collaboratively with an actor of like mind on the potentials of creative storytelling, it has not as yet proved to be his most characteristic form of expression. Gray's recent completion of a musical version of John Buchan's *Thirty-Nine Steps* (its hero is a Canadian!) seems to confirm that musical theatre rather than drama per se remains his strongest inclination.

NOTES

[1] Introduction, *Local Boy Makes Good: Three Musical Plays* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), pp. 14-15.

[2] Martin Knelman, "Roots," *Saturday Night* (December 1985), p. 70.

[3] Renate Usmiani, *Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia, 1983), p. 69.

[4] Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman, *The Work: Conversations with English-Canadian Playwrights* (Toronto: Coach House, 1982), p. 46.

[5] "Total Theatre," Max Wyman, *Vancouver Sun* (19 March 1976).

[6] See Christopher Dafoe, "The Tamahnous Theatre: scripts are a point of departure," *Vancouver Sun* (5 Feb. 1974), on their retrospective season of that year.

[7] "A Western myth with Canadian point of view," *Globe and Mail* (20 June 1974).

[8] Wallace, p. 46.

[9] *For Openers: Conversations with Canadian Writers* (Madiera Park: Harbour, 1981), p. 102.

[10] Audrey Johnson, "Distinguished Visitor doesn't mince his words," Victoria *Times-Colonist* (28 Nov. 1981).

[11] "Talent in light vein," Vancouver *Province* (9 May 1974). Jeremy Long continued along this line with what was now projected as a musical trilogy, the second of which was *Eighty-Four Acres*, premiered in March 1976; this was a light focus on the threats of land developers in the British Columbia wilderness. In 1978 Bruce Ruddell and Glen Thompson wrote *Liquid Gold*, also a musical, telling the story of the formation of a British Columbia fisherman's union.

[12] Twigg, p. 103.

[13] Daniel Dematello, Toronto *Varsity* (26 March 1975).

[14] Preface to *18 Wheels*, in *Local Boy Makes Good*, pp. 19, 21.

[15] Wallace, p. 50.

[16] Preface to *18 Wheels*, p. 20.

[17] Wallace, p. 49.

[18] Twigg, p. 102.

[19] Introduction, *Local Boy Makes Good*, p. 12.

[20] Viveca Ohm, "John Gray," U.B.C. alumni *Chronicle* (Spring 1979), p. 28.

[21] Gray records that Cone had originally written the work for a large cast but was persuaded by Gray and actor Jim McQueen's perception of the work as a one-actor play in which the main character tells his own story by playing all fourteen parts, pp. 46-47; see also Wallace interview with Tom Cone, p. 37.

[22] Letter to D.B., 22 Nov. 1987.

[23] David McCaughna, "Billy Bishop Goes to War," *Toronto Star Week* (17-24 Feb. 1979).

[24] *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981), p. 34.

[25] John Lekich, "The co-pilot brings Bishop in smoothly," *Globe and Mail* (13 Nov. 1982).

[26] P. 77; see also Wallace, p. 52.

[27] (New York: George H. Doran Company), p. 169.

[28] Introduction, *Local Boy Makes Good*, p. 13.

[29] Twigg, p. 104.

[30] P. 85; Billy has already demonstrated the fears and triumphs of his solo flight in a similar manner, p. 57.

[31] "I think the whole notion of war being futile and a bad thing is a smoke screen.... It's a device to divert people from the real issue which is imperialism" (Lekich).

[32] Author's Note to *Rock and Roll*, published first in *Canadian Theatre Review*, 35 (Summer 1982), 68. See also Preface to the revised text (1983) in *Local Boy Makes Good*, pp. 89-90. Unless otherwise indicated, references to this play are from the second publication.

[33] Wallace, p. 53.

[34] "The King of Friday Night," *Saturday Night* (May 1981), p. 71.

[35] Pp. 143 and 144; cf. the original "It's the rhythm of life, rock and roll. / Follow the beat and save your soul" (113). Gray's later explication of the title relates to this advice: "the combination of words implied an approach to life; an alternating rigidity and flexibility, both of which seem essential if one is to survive life's inevitable and various transitions. Sometimes you have to be a rock; sometimes you have to roll with it. The trick is to know when" (Preface, 90).

[36] Introduction, p. 14.

[37] In 1983, Tom Kerr had premiered Gray's one completely non-musical play, a comic murder thriller of mistaken identity (among four Santa Clauses), *You Better Watch Out, You Better Not Cry*, set on Christmas Day in Victoria's Empress Hotel.

[38] Nora Abercrombie, "Love song: Messer by Gray," Edmonton *Bullet* (1 Feb. 1986), p. 8.

[39] Knelman, "Roots," p. 70.

[40] Cf. Preface, *Don Messer's Jubilee*, in *Local Boy Makes Good*, p. 159.
[41] *Op. cit.* p. 71.
[42] See Preface, p. 161.
[43] Bill Robertson, "Islanders Remembered," *NeWest Review* (March 1986), p. 17.
[44] In conversation with R. H. Thomson, "State of the Arts," CBC (12 July 1987).

KEATON

Ron Miles

i.

Stories they tell.

I am born in a country church
on a dark and stormy night.

Half a year later
I topple down a flight of stairs
and laugh, at the feet of Houdini
who names me Buster.

I crawl at nine months
onto stage, into vaudeville, tug
at my father's leg
getting his best laugh
of the night.

When I'm three a Kansas cyclone
sucks at a second-storey window
and spits me out three blocks away
unscratched.

I attend one day of school.

My father bills me as a midget
in my seventh year
avoiding the child labor laws
and those who condemn violence
toward minors.

All of these stories should be true.

ii.

A trick of the body.
Most of you guard your flesh
against the door
frame, the misplaced
table, the anger of others
wanting each muscle, every stretch
of skin to die untouched
four generations later.
Such luxury.
My bones and flesh were tested
daily, millions of cells sacrificed
to the astounding image.
Once I took a fall
that left me blind
with headaches for months
later learned my neck
had been broken. Still
physical risk beats the other kind.

Most of the time my father drank.
All of the times he drank
my father beat me.
On stage it was part of the act
I could beat him back.
One night he threw me at hecklers
college boys, broke the nose of one
the ribs of another.
One night he kicked me dead
for eighteen hours.
One night I shot him in the face
with a blank, but close.
I decided against drink.
Too risky.

iii.

Stories they tell.

When I laugh the critics don't.
When I play at being sad
they howl. It doesn't take me long
to catch on.

I am the main attraction
at any zoo. Lions and tigers
come to me immediately, birds
settle on my head and shoulders.
If the crowds remain calm
we are not afraid.

Called me idiot at bridge
I become expert, playing
for high stakes against all
comers, days on end
and nights. After twelve hours
of filming I play bridge
after supper till past midnight
have a few belts
sleep for four hours
then head to work.

In Arizona the film emulsion
almost melts on the desert in July.
We pack the cameras
with canvas shrouds of ice.
Brown Eyes the Cow, my female lead
goes into heat for two weeks
causes a bulging budget
leaving the producers unamused.

After her second child
my wife becomes celibate
her two sisters, childless
insisting that two are plenty.
We occupy two bedrooms
live two lives from 1924
to 1932 when she divorces me
for adultery, taking my sons
my house, my final reason
for staying sober.

All of these stories are almost true.

iv.

When all else fails
give me a good obsession

bridge, baseball, booze
any substitute for the real.

By 1925 I was burning fuel
and getting it done, my best work

by the early '30s a bottle a day
to keep the pain private.

Then it turned public, the stunts
couldn't be done, except by doubles

the binges lasted most of a week
I couldn't count

couldn't recall what I'd done
what I'd walked through and spent

couldn't remember to get to work
what my work was, that used to be play

couldn't remember all the names
women, spas where I took the cure

sons I didn't see for eight years
the studio that told me
I was finally done.

v.

Money belongs to the people
who count on it
their own worth
coin heavy in their hearts
numbers all they imagine.
I can imagine how much
I had of it, and having it
again, and the mansions
surrounded by trees and moguls
servants who showed me
what to wear each day
what to eat
producers who told me to talk
hired writers who told me

the wrong things to say
to pay for a life
my wife wanted only
because her sisters had it
to pay partly for a life
while great debts accumulated
taxes I ignored
yachts and cars and favors
friends in the fair weather
bankruptcy declared.
For years I paid
all of it back
but no one paid me
the fair price of laughter.

vi.

Stories I tell.

I take my sons on holiday to Mexico
where border guards hold us
on the word of my wife
call me kidnapper.
The papers love it.
The boys are too young
to understand.

Making enemies is never hard.
I do it by forgetting people's names
even the stars, by throwing dishes
at the darkness just outside
the party. I do it
easy as falling off a log
cabin, over a waterfall
under a speeding locomotive.
I do it because I hate
doing it, especially to friends.

My second wife does tricks
not circus, not the practical jokes
the old gang plotted for weeks
that lasted all night
but visits to men she knows
in hotel rooms, generous friends
when times get tough.

In the mental home I wed
sobriety, learn to lean
on her cold but reliable shoulder
making nicotine my only mistress
four packs a day for the rest of my life
until my lungs become a garden.

Most of these stories should be fiction.

1895-1966

vii.

Always willing girls
when I was young
and after my first wife
had her second child
and enough of me

girls who liked me shy
best of all sister acts
who knew how to share
a man with a wife
who sees nothing
but faults.

If you marry three times
make them different.
My first was festive
rooms full of roses
stars in attendance.
My second I can't remember
in Tijuana with a woman
I found in bed.

When I wed Eleanor
beautiful 21 to my 45
the judge took her mother
for the bride, got flustered
kept using the wrong names.
For ten minutes
fire engines screamed
outside open windows.

Finally the judge screamed
that we were man and wife.
I wish I'd written it.
I wished for rolling cameras.

And it was lovely
for twenty-six years
and beyond.

viii.

Two cameras
side by side
in case one fails.

We wrote the stories
rolling
doing impossible things
in a pair of reels.
Features were different
had to be believable.

All great plots depend
on perfect symmetry
transformation of a fool
into hero, laughter
into tears that never fall.

It wasn't work.

Got tough
only when the bosses
wouldn't believe what I knew
here, in the stomach
not in their heads full of schools.

My best films cost and lost
the most, were called masterpieces
only decades after.
It doesn't matter,
we stepped into the dream.
Laughter, like everything
leads to the grave.

"STILL CRAZY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS"

The Uses of Madness in Recent Quebec Drama

Jane Moss

FOR YEARS, MADMEN and madwomen have been spotlighted by Quebec dramatists, a fact which has not gone unnoticed by critics. Pierre Gobin's 1978 study, *Les Fou et ses doubles: figures de la dramaturgie québécoise*,[1] and my 1984 article, "Les Folles du Québec: The Theme of Madness in Quebec Women's Theater,"[2] analyzed the religious, political, economic, and social climate of Quebec in order to understand the forces responsible for the madness. In the last twenty-five years, Quebec society has been transformed and yet, despite the changes wrought by the Quiet Revolution, the Parti Québécois, and the Women's Movement, Quebec theatre is still obsessed with madness and mad characters. Normand Chaurette and René-Daniel Dubois, touted by Quebec critics as the shining stars of the new generation of dramatists, have both written plays centred on mad characters. But madness in these plays serves a wholly different function than it did in the works of their predecessor. In this paper, we will examine the new uses of madness.

Madness is no longer the pathological symptom of social injustice and psychological repression. In the plays of Chaurette and Dubois, the madness theme is not used for political or ideological purposes. It is more than an escape from an unbearable reality. It is the key to deconstructing reality which structures the play. The psychodramas of these young authors are mind games conducted by mad characters. Realistic decor, linear plot, unified personality, and simple meaning are discarded in favour of minimalist settings, dream logic, fragmented and multiple personalities, and multiple levels of interpretation. This new drama exposes theatrical conventions, brings the author and the text onto the stage and emphasizes its own intertextuality with ironic humour. Mental alienation has little or nothing to do with Quebec society in these anti-realistic plays, a point made by their frequent use of foreign characters, settings, and languages. The only plausible, apparent source of alienation in some cases is homosexuality.[3]

Commenting on recent French and Quebec theatre, Georges Banu and André-G. Bourassa have noted a trend towards fragmentation. Banu writes:

> Lorsque les grands systèmes perdent leur certitude et que le Multiple fuit l'emprise du Un rassembleur, on s'attend à ce que la brisure et ce qu'elle amène, *le fragment*, investissent autant la culture que la vie.[4]

It is my contention that the phenomenon of the exploded text can best be explained by deconstructive theories. While Bourassa does not invoke the name of Derrida to explain the difficult, fragmented puzzle plays he describes, American critics Gerald Rabkin and Elinor Fuchs have remarked on deconstruction's impact on recent English and American experimental theatre. In a 1983 article, entitled "The Play of Misreading: Text/Theatre/Deconstruction," Rabkin invites American critics to renew the theoretical discussion of drama by examining the concepts of textuality, intertextuality, demystification, and misreading as described by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and the Yale Critics Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom, and Paul de Man.[5] Although these deconstructionists have not concentrated on theatrical writing, their ideas can help us read the jumbled tangle of the fragmented text. Fuchs responds indirectly to Rabkin's call for deconstruction in her 1985 article, "Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-thinking Theatre after Derrida."[6] She points out that recently American dramatists "have begun to expose the normally 'occulted' textuality behind the phonocentric fabric of performance" (166) by placing "writing — as subject, activity, and artifact — at the center" (163). The devaluation of the actor's presence and the speech act in favour of the author's text and the writing act has a destabilizing effect on the play. Fuchs describes experimental plays which deconstruct theatrical illusion with their textuality, intertextuality, use of fragments and *mise en abyme* effects.

Chaurette and Dubois make use of the same deconstructive techniques but go one better in their attack on the logocentrism of Western metaphysics by presenting their texts through the fragmenting prism of madness. Once the spectator/reader has entered the stageworld of Chaurette's criminally insane actor (*Provincetown Playhouse, juillet 1919, j'avais 19 ans*), or visionary schoolgirl (*Fêtes d'Automne*), Dubois's dying Docteur Münch (*Adieu, docteur Münch*), or soon-to-be-murdered Russian princess in drag (*26 bis, impasse du Colonel Foisy*), there is no doubt that we are in a theatrical space of obsessional images, fragmented memories, and hallucinatory dreams where time and logic have lost all meaning.

CHAURETTE IS A MONTREAL WRITER in his early thirties who has published four plays. In the "Introduction" to his first work, *Rêve d'une nuit d'hôpital*,[7] he explains his borrowing of the title of Emile Nelligan's poem by expressing his identification with Quebec's famous "poète maudit," who spent the

last forty years of his life in an insane asylum. The author's comment reveals an acute sense of the relationship between artistic dreams and madness: "Lui et moi, nous avions probablement les mêmes raìsons de penser qu'au bout du rêve il y a toujours le risque d'un hôpital" (21). Fascination with the mad poet is a collective obsession in Quebec, as evidenced by two 1981 productions: Armand Laroche's *Nelligan blanc* (September 1981) and Michel Forgues's *Emile-Edwin Nelligan* (October 1981, reprise 1986).

Chaurette's "Introduction" makes it clear that he is not interested in biographical drama. He wants to recreate the hallucinatory reality of the deranged Nelligan with all its unbalanced, unreasonable dream logic:

> En douze tableaux, j'ai voulu cerner quelque chose qui soit près du rêve, avec tout ce qu'il comporte de "logique" . . . (21)
>
> *Rève d'une nuit d'hôpital* n'est pas seulement un récit dramatique centré sur la folie du personnage d'Emile. Les autres personnages, ceux qui l'environnent, y trouvent chaucun une part de déraison, comme pour s'intégrer au seul espace possible qui les mette en présence du poète. (22)

Chaurette's insistence on deconstructing the conventions of realistic drama and on intertextuality are made clear in the "Prologue" pronounced by the Choir of voices who will later recite portions of Nelligan's poems. The Choir says:

> Cela commence gravement mais en douceur.
> C'est un rai de lumière qui jaillit comme une chose de métal, une lame ou un miroir.
> A moins que ce ne soit une vision . . .
> Le crucifix de bois se transfigure silencieusement en attendant que sonne l'angelus . . .
> Et le temps va-t-il encore s'arrêter? Pourquoi faut-il que soit toujours cette chambre qui s'éclaire comme un théâtre?
> Le poète a des vision!
> Il entend les cloches, les portes s'ouvrir et se reformer, des Bateaux Ivres, des Vaisseaux d'Or, des flûtes, de la musique baroque et du Chopin. (31)

The asylum room where Emile's visions, fragmented memories, and infernal nightmares are acted out is a shifting, white closed space, the stylized theatre of the mad poet's mind. Time and space have no meaning here; the tableaux jump back and forth from school to asylum to Nelligan's childhood home to Montreal across an indeterminate time period while remaining fixed at twelve noon on Monday, July 11, 1932. Textuality and intertextuality are emphasized by numerous quotations from Nelligan's poems and by references to Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* and Rimbaud's *Illuminations*. The danger of the poet's dream, of the visionary's quest for the ideal, is the risk of hellish madness described by Rimbaud's *Saison en enfer* and relived by Nelligan in Tableau 10 of *Rêve d'une nuit d'hôpital* (81-83). Here, as in Chaurette's later plays, there is no clarification of the madness

question, no return to sanity. Dramatic characters and spectators alike experience the poetic madness which undermines the structures of reality and of theatre.

Chaurette's second play, *Provincetown Playhouse, juillet 1919, j'avais 19 ans,*[8] also takes place in the closed theatre of a mental patient's mind and deals with the fine line between artistic vision and insanity. It is a play within a play, the one-man show of a lunatic who conjures up the setting, props, lighting, music, characters, and audience he requires. Charles Charles has obsessively directed the same theatrical fantasy every night of the nineteen years he has passed in a Chicago mental asylum. He is replaying the performance of an experimental play written for a single staging on July 19, 1919, at the Provincetown Playhouse. Intended as the symbolic sacrifice or immolation of beauty, the play became a melodramatic murder mystery when it was discovered that the theatrical knife blows had killed a real victim, not just a symbol. While the two other actors were condemned to death, Charles Charles escaped hanging by declaring himself insane. Being a perfectionist devoted to the dream of making art and life coincide, he has become insane in order to play his role correctly. Towards the end of the play, Charles Charles admits he set up the murder to punish the infidelity of his lover, Winslow Byron, with the other actor, Alvan Jensen. Even when the mystery appears solved, the question remains whether the events of July 1919 were real or simply the hallucinations of a madman.

Chaurette's psychodrama mocks the notion of "théâtre de la vérité" by denying the existence of objective reality. Charles Charles demystifies theatrical illusion in the opening scene by introducing himself as an actor and playwright and by showing us the text of his play. The textuality of *Provincetown Playhouse* is deepened by the insertion of excerpts from Charles Charles's *Mémoires* between scenes (41, 51, 73, 79, 85). The devaluation of the performance or speech act, threatened by memory blanks and interrupted by late-arriving spectators, further underscores the primacy of the writing act. Chaurette plays with intertextuality by having his characters refer to classical Greek drama and to figures of modern drama, such as Stanislavski, Strasberg, O'Neill, and Moody (Tableau 5). He goes so far as to make Charles Charles defend his text against critics who found it confusing and obscure. The defence is an ironic defence of the misreading advocated by deconstructionists:

> ... on ne demande jamais à un auteur de raconter sa pièce, vous devriez savoir. Un auteur peut difficilement raconter avec objectivé. Il aura tendance à dire des choses qu'il n'aura pas réussi à faire passer dans l'écrit. Ou il attirera l'attention sur son aspect, à son avis, le mieux réussi ... il va essayer de brouiller les pistes, expliquer à l'outrance, ce qui revient au même. Compliquer ce qui est simple, simplifier ce qui est compliqué. (88)

And, as the deconstructionists would have it, there is no closure to this text, no single interpretation, no univocal message. The lights go out but Charles Charles

assures us that tomorrow night, he will play out his obsessional fantasy again ("... ça n'en finira jamais..." [113]). The only coherence we find here is "a cohérence fautive" (85), the faulty and/or guilty coherence of a criminally insane man who claims that his writing proves his madness because "... J'écris des pièces que seul un fou peut écrire" (36).

The production of *Provincetown Playhouse* by "les Têtes heureuses" of Chicoutimi at the Ecole national de Théâtre in Montreal emphasized the two key themes: "écriture" and "folie." Giant scrolls of printed paper covered the walls and ceiling of the stage, tangible evidence that the actor was playing on (and in) a text. The mental alienation represented by the two Charles Charles figures in Chaurette's text — that is, Charles Charles at 19 and Charles Charles at 38 — increases in the "Têtes heureuses" production by having one actor play all four roles. In this way, the double and divided (Charles Charles; Charles at 19, Charles at 38) becomes multiple and fragmented. The theatre of madness is the theatre of the madman's text.

Chaurette's obsession with madness and writing has led some Quebec critics to speak of a familiar resemblance between the tragically insane writers of his plays.[9] In *Fêtes d'Automne*,[10] his third work, the central character is Joa, a schoolgirl poet who has written the text of her drama. Inspired by the writings of Danielle Sarréra, a young French girl who committed suicide at seventeen in 1949, Joa's text is a mystical mélange: part schoolgirl diary, part erotic fantasy, part biblical vision, part sacred ceremony. It operates on so many levels — theatrical, poetic, mythic, and religious — that it defies interpretation. Any summary of the play is a misreading. On one level, *Fêtes d'Automne* is the story of Joa, a convent student who has hated her mother, Memnon, since a childhood accident years before. She finally revenges herself by bringing about Memnon's death. On another level, it is a passion play inspired by the mysticism and eroticism of a young girl who confuses Christ's call to love and a new life with an invitation to death. On still another level, it is a poet's quest for creation through subversion and transgression of the established symbolic order. Joa, the daughter of Socrates and sister/lover of Christ, undermines the basic notions of Hellenic Judeo-Christian culture with her writing. Her madness undermines the rationalism characteristic of western thought and her eroticism profanes its sacred myths. As author/narrator/actor in her own text, she appropriates power over others and over her own destiny. Unfortunately, the poet's dream of creation has tragic consequences for Joa as it did for Danielle Sarréra, for Charles Charles, for Emile Nelligan.

Writing and madness determine the structure of *Fêtes d'Automne* as Joa narrates the text from the foreground of the bare stage. According to Chaurette's instructions, "C'est le lieu de l'imaginaire... c'est dans cet espace... que surgissent les objets et les personnages créés par Joa" (3). This place of the imagination is also the place of nightmares and madness. The progression towards death and

transcendence follows the logic of Joa's obsessive fantasies rather than a linear plot or chronological order. Joa's writing pushes the plot along and becomes an object of discussion. When asked what she writes, Joa tells one character, "J'écris au jour le jour ce qu'il sera bon que je me rappelle, au cas où j'aurais trop peur" (79, 113). To another character she claims to have written "mon testament" (107). After Joa's death, her mother says, "Elle écrivait des phrases pleines d'incohérence... j'ai lu des phrases qui n'avaient aucun sens" (112-13). Incoherent as it may be, Joa's writing creates the play, dictates the madness of others and draws the spectator/reader into its dementia. The result is a difficult work which radically subverts reality, theatricality, and Christian myths, replacing them with a form of writing which eludes authoritative interpretation.

RATHER THAN ANALYZE the uses of madness in Chaurette's fourth published play, *La Société de Métis*,[11] let us move on to the work of the other rising young star of Quebec theatre in the 1980's, René-Daniel Dubois.[12] Like Chaurette, Dubois is a Montrealer in his early thirties. In addition to having written eight plays between 1980 and 1985 (five of them published by Leméac), Dubois acts, directs, and teaches. His brilliant interpretations of all the characters in *Adieu, docteur Münch* and *Ne blâmez jamais les Bédouins* have earned him much critical acclaim. Given Dubois's commitment to theatre as performance, it is not surprising that his plays do not always feature writers or the writing act. Their textuality and intertextuality differ from what we find in Chaurette's work. Dubois's plays dazzle the reader/spectator with literary allusions which run the gamut from Dante to Tintin, with cultural and scientific references from Darwin and Freud. His use of madness is also of a different nature. While Chaurette's characters drift into madness when they realize that their dreams of pure artistic creation and thirst for the ideal cannot be satisfied in the real world, Dubois's characters often seem caught in a cacophonous, hellish, nightmare world of doubt, solitude, and inanity. Their delirium is symptomatic of world chaos: their distintegration of being reflects the disconnectedness of modern life, their verbal delirium echoes the dissonance of world politics. Given the absence of logic, purpose, and meaning, there can be no representation of unity; there can only be a collage of fragmented characters speaking in different voices, accents, and languages.

Adieu, docteur Münch,[13] Dubois's second published play, is a good example of his use of a deranged character and an exploded text. The author himself played all twelve roles of this "Sonata for one actor" in the original production at the Café théâtre Nelligan, October 1981. Sitting in front of his own tombstone, the recently deceased Doctor Münch takes stock of his life. His first words, "Je suis le docteur Carl Octavius Münch. Et j'ai faim," announce two key themes: the need

to establish one's identity and the unsatisfied existential hunger for knowledge and meaning. As the anonymous Voice attempts to determine the facts needed to fill out the death certificate, Dr. Münch begins the bewildering process of questioning his identity, his past, and his beliefs. He is a world-famous medical doctor and the author of major scientific and linguistic texts. He is also a solitary man troubled by the hunger, doubt, and limp which are part of his being. As he searches for truths, he becomes frustrated, confused, and lost in a verbal delirium. Obsessions, fragmented memories, ideas, and artistic images besiege him in a deluge of words. As the monologue becomes a diatribe against modern life, Münch disintegrates into a hallucinated cast of others: the Statue of Liberty, the Pietà, Indian goddesses, disembodied telephone voices, laboratory rats, etc. There is no reintegration at the end of the play, no answers to all the questions, no conclusion. Doubt ("le monstre, l'hydre" [71]) has driven him mad:

> Le doute! Le doute? Je m'égare! Je sens que je m'égare! Je perds pied. Je glisse sur les images. Mon axe éclate, se disperse. Je m'égare. Je sens que je m'égare! Soit! Égarons-nous! Dispersons-nous! (50)

Münch's derangement deconstructs the text; the monologue explodes into polyphonic dissonance as his identity disintegrates. His logorrhea undermines logocentrism; despite his training in logic, linguistic, and scientfic reasoning, he cannot find truth or meanng, and he gets lost in words which cannot describe the universe:

> Si une portion d'une affirmation se révèle inadéquate à décrire l'univers ambiant, la somme, l'ensemble et l'addition des segments descriptifs composant le reste de cette dite affirmation, fût-il ou elle adéquat ou adéquate à la fin de décrire ce même univers ambiant en tant que tout, donc, par concordance interpolatoire aussi bien dans le détail que pour la somme, l'ensemble et l'addition de ces segments composant par juxtaposition. Cette somme, ensemble ou addition, voire cette somme, ensemble *et* addition, cette portion, si infime soit-elle en regard de cette somme, ensemble et/ou addition résiduelle, cette portion donc, par son inadéquation, entraînera l'ensemble de la proposition sous la rubrique infirmative!
> Voyez-vous? (11)

As in the absurd world of lonesco, logic and language break down. The disrupted syntax of the text reflects Münch's delirium and his memory blanks. Since communication has been disrupted in the modern world, the voices Münch hears can only utter fragments, the debris of language:

> Mes premières années se sont passée à retrouver le bout d'une communication suspendue . . .
> Je ne l'ai jamais retrouvée. . . . Attendait-on seulement une réponse? . . . Ou n'ai-je rien compris?
> J'ai couru . . . J'ai couru . . . Sur un fil . . . Les fils m'ont conduit . . . bouts de phrases rencontrés au hasard d'un poteau d'un relais . . . et nouveau départ . . . Parfois . . . une courte suite . . . la brève amorce d'une réplique . . . mais jamais de conclusion . . . (41)

Just as Münch searched vainly for answers and conclusions, so the spectator/reader of *Adieu, docteur Münch* must abandon the search for a simple interpretation of this hallucinatory text. We must "dé-lire" with Münch as he tells us:

> Je suis égaré, vous voulez me suivre et je suis égaré, alors je vous égare . . . je veux tant que vous voyiez! Je . . . Je vais vous raconter une histoire. Très cohérente! Je vous le promets! Ne partez pas . . . L'histoire du bébé littéral . . . Du bébé qui ne comprenait que ce qu'on lui signifiait clairement. Attendez! Ne partez pas . . . C'est une histoire . . . fausse, bien sûr . . . je ne connais pas la vérité, mais je connais cette histoire-là. . . . Prenez-la juste . . . du bout des doigts . . . (43)

Literal babies beware! No clear meaning here! The spectator/reader can only expect multiple levels of meaning, endlessly displaced.

Dubois's third published play, *26 bis impasse du Colonel Foisy*,[14] also invites us to listen to the fragmented monologue of a bizarre character. The epigraph from James Joyce warns against interpretation: "Close your eyes. Stop being intelligent and listen" (5). The lone character, an aging, exiled Russian princess, adds her own advice at the beginning of the play: "Ne riez pas . . . seulement souriez. C'est plus chic" (7). Dubois labels *26 bis* a "texte sournois en un acte (et de nombreuses disgression [*sic*] pour un auteur, une princesse russe et un valet." For all its irony, humour, and outrageousness, it is a difficult, literary text dealing with the anguish of exile, unfulfilled desires, the failure of language, and fear of death. It is also a self-conscious text which ridicules its own theatricality, questions character/author and character/spectator relationships, and discusses other genres and other plays. Madame Michaela Droussetchvili Tetriakov interrupts her own monologue to complain about the text, the author, the critics, the audience, and her own memory lapses. She is also interrupted by the intrusion of the author into his own play and by an obsequious valet who has strayed in from Parisian boulevard comedy. Madame, "accablée d'un hénaurme accent slave," wrapped in a moth-eaten boa and blowing cigarette smoke, addresses the audience while reclining on a Madame Récamier couch on an otherwise empty stage. Her eccentricity — she calls it her "crazyness" (66) using but misspelling the English word — is further exaggerated by Dubois's insistence that she be played by a male actor in drag. "She" begins by telling the audience that shortly, her desperately passionate lover will burst through an imaginary door, threatening to shoot her with a revolver. The rest of the play is a collage of obsessive memories, flashbacks, a poem, literary commentaries, digressions, and intrusions leading up to the climactic murder.

Madame's madness ironically justifies the subversion of the text, the demystification of its dramatic conventions. Always addressing the audience directly, "she" never forgets she is a character in a play created by an author. When she forgets her lines she says:

> Merde, encore un blanc!

> Mes dernières lignes étaient tout au bas d'une page, l'auteur vient de tourner, et je ne sais plus où j'en suis . . . (10)

At one point, she speaks to readers and students of the text:

> Je ne sais pas si vous me lisez à la maison, si vous me coupez en tranches au Cegep ou si vous m'écoutez au théâtre, mais c'est du gratiné . . . si j'ose dire. Je n'ai pas l'accent russe pour le seul plaisir de faire baver les acteurs. . . . C'est de la classe! Ces deux lignes-là, c'est de l'anthologie Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. (22)

Another interruption comes when she objects to a portion of her text:

> C'est hors de question! Auteur! Je réclame l'auteur! . . .
> Je refuse de jouer cette scène là! Nan, nan, et re-nannan! (22)

Even her death scene reminds us that she is only a character in a play.

Intertextuality reinforces the textuality of *26 bis* with irony and humour. Some of the "nombreuses digressions" are mock defences of Dubois's earlier work against the critics; comments on naturalism, melodrama, comedy of the absurd, and pure theatre; allusions to Tremblay plays. References to Verdi, Tennessee Williams, Proust, Darwin, Freud, Jung, and others demonstrate "Madame's" broad culture. There is even a marxist analysis of LaFontaine's milkmaid fable!

All of these reminders of the play's status as a theatrical text within a cultural tradition serve not only to demystify the writing act but also to fragment the life story being told by the main character. Memories of her life in exile, her wandering, and her search for love are interrupted, begun again, recreated with new variations. The discontinuity of the de-centred text seems to prove her madness. She herself understands that her craziness is related to her exile and her unfulfilled desire. In a flashback to a bar pick-up scene, she links the sources of her alienation:

> Of course, I'm crazy. . . .
>
> Of course my mother tongue is not English. So what? For non-understandable expression of unspeakable self-burning, this language will do as well as any other that I use so badly can. (65-66)

With the exception of his most recent play (*Being at home with Claude*), Dubois's other plays (*Panique à Longueil, Ne blâmez jamais les Bédouins*) also subvert the conventions of realistic theatre by presenting bizarre characters in nightmarish hallucinations open to multiple interpretations.[15] If this madness is a new form of existential madness, brought on by the unbearable banality and solitude of the real world, it is also a literary madness which deconstructs reality through the act of writing.

The mad characters of Dubois and Chaurette are not the oppressed or repressed victims of Quebec society who people earlier Quebec plays. Their madness has little to do with social, nationalistic, or ideological messages. It is rather a "maladie de l'imaginaire," a "dérèglement des sens" exploited for its power to subvert and

destabilize. Chaurette and Dubois, each in his own way, use madness to create a demystified theatrical discourse, to invent a sort of metatheatre which constantly multiplies its levels of meaning to reflect the fragmented mind of the mad character and to draw attention to the impossibility of fixing truths and to the power of writing over speech.

NOTES

[1] Pierre Gobin, *Le Fou et ses doubles: figures de la dramaturgie québécoise* (Montréal: les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1978).

[2] Jane Moss, "Les Folles du Québec: The Theme of Madness in Québec Women's Theater," *The French Review*, 57, no. 5 (April 1984).

[3] There is an interesting relationship between homosexuality and madness in the works of Chaurette and Dubois which should be examined separately. Any discussion of this topic should also include Michel Marc Bouchard, author of *La contre-nature de Chrysippe Tanguay, écologiste* (Montréal: Leméac, 1984).

[4] Georges Banu, "Le fragment: crise et ou renouvellement?" in *Id., le Théâtre, sorties de secours* (Paris: Aubier, 1984), p. 13, quoted by André-G. Bourassa, "Une nouvelle écriture scénique: le théâtre en morceaux," *Lettres québécoises*, 42 (Été 1986), 38.

[5] Gerald Rabkin, "The Play of Misreading: Text/Theatre/Deconstruction," *Performing Arts Journal*, 19, VII, no. 1 (1983), 44-60.

[6] Elinor Fuchs, "Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-thinking Theatre After Derida," *Performing Arts Journal*, 26/27 (1985), 163-73.

[7] Normand Chaurette, *Rêve d'une nuit d'hôpital* (Montréal: Leméac, 1980).

[8] Normand Chaurette, *Provincetown Playhouse, juillet 1919, j'avais 19 ans* (Montréal: Leméac, 1981). See reviews by Gilles Lapointe in *Jeu*, 23 (1982), 156-57; Jane Moss in *Canadian Literature*, 96 (Spring 1983), 143-45; Diane Cotnoir in *Jeu*, 38 (1986), 104-05; and Jean-Cléo Godin's article, "Deux Dramaturges de l'avenir?" in *Etudes littéraires*, 18, no. 3 (Hiver 1985), 113-22.

[9] See Stéphane Lépine's review of *Fêtes d'automne* in *Jeu*, 24 (1982), 120-22, and Monic Robillard's preface "Portrait de l'Artiste," *La Société de Métis* (Montréal: Leméac, 1983), p. 23.

[10] Normand Chaurette, *Fêtes d'Automne* (Montréal: Leméac, 1982). See my review in *Canadian Literature*, 98 (Autumn 1983), 89-90, and Robert Lévesque's article in *Le Devoir*, 20 mars 1982, pp. 17-18.

[11] Normand Chaurette, *La Société de Métis* (Montréal: Leméac, 1983). See Chaurette's comments on the origin of the play, "La Chinoise," in *Jeu*, 32 (1984), 79-86, and my review in *Canadian Literature*, 102 (Autmun 1984), 100.

[12] See Godin's article and Diane Pavlovic, "Le déploiement d'un cri: sur deux oeuvres de René-Daniel Dubois," *Jeu*, 32 (1984), 87-97.

[13] René-Daniel Dubois, *Adieu, docteur Münch* (Montréal: Leméac, 1982). The published text has an excellent introduction by Michel Larouche, pp. ix-xxiii. See also reviews by Gilles Lapointe in *Jeu*, 24 (1982), 119-20, and Jane Moss, *Canadian Literature*, 98 (Autumn 1983), 88.

[14] René-Daniel Dubois, *26 bis, impasse du Colonel Foisy* (Montréal: Leméac, 1983). See Pavlovic's article and my review in *Canadian Literature*, 102 (Autumn 1984), 172-73.

[15] René-Daniel Dubois, *Panique à Longueil* (Montréal: Leméac, 1980); *Ne blâmez jamais les Bédouins* (Montréal: Leméac, 1984); *Being at home with Claude* (Montréal: Leméac, 1986). See Pavlovic, and reviews by André Dionne in *Lettres québécoises*, 35 (Automne 1984), 60; *Lettres québécoises*, 41 (Printemps 1986), 55.

THE PROBLEM OF SEEING

(After a day at the beach)

Robert Hilles

The problem of seeing is knowing
when to stop. What do you eliminate
because something reminds you of
the summer your father stripped bare
and dove off the dock into the lake
water settling above him forever
as he called from the shore behind you,
frightened of his new heights.

As you turned to him, life and death blurred
trees along the shore, were twisted from their roots
birds formed a black cloud above your head.
Your hands felt below the water for your body,
for a pocket of air to grasp.
Turning still, you fell into a dizzy dream.

Your father's hands reached beneath you
until there was air everywhere.
His mouth near yours as wet as eternity,
his lips a warm ring around you.
He dragged you towards the shore
calling to a distant figure on the shore.
After lying in the sun for hours with
hands wrinkled from the water, you
watched your father back his old
Ford slowly towards the water as though
preparing to tow the lake away.

Instead he folded it into the trunk, bucket by bucket.
Stopping to look past you towards your
mother waving on the beach
her feet pushed beneath sand.

When your father finally drove away
his car changed shape and color every few feet.
Cigarette after cigarette butted into his ashtray.
He left you on the beach with your mother
watching the dust settle on the road.
Your mother and father are figures too near the water.

After a day at the beach, there is only destruction.

Buildings torn from your life as though
struck by a tornado. Cars decay in minutes
clothes burn in closets. After a day at the beach,
you are no longer young: your parents move out,
taking their furniture, clothing.
Your feet stay wet all night no matter
how many times you dry them.
You leave the window open
with hopes of hearing their return
your father's car grinding across the gravel.
The all-night disk jockey plays songs
your parents used to sing.

(The next day at the beach, your father is still
swimming; his breath forming small waves on the water.
Your mother is searching for shells
to put on the dresser.
You are a teenager hiding in the water
waiting for your friends with new cars,
waiting for your body to turn beautiful.
Out over your head,
you try to find the shore again with your feet.
Discovering who you are one cell at a time.
No one comes to rescue you.
Boats pass too far away to hear you, to see your
father swimming in a circle around this spot.)

THE EXPRESSIONIST LEGACY IN THE CANADIAN THEATRE

George Ryga and Robert Gurik

Sherrill Grace

> Anyone in this day and age . . . who does not "openly and honestly declare war on naturalism in art," must capitulate in the face of every newsreel.[1]

TODAY TO "declare war on naturalism in art" does not necessarily mean that an artist must work expressionistically. It is nevertheless true that expressionism has had a lasting and profound effect on all the arts in this century, none more so than the drama. The heyday of German expressionist drama was the period just after the First World War, but the legacy of playwrights like Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller, of designers like Leopold Jessner and Jürgen Fehling, and of directors such as the great Max Reinhardt (especially in his Berlin *Kammerspiele*) remains with us in staging and production techniques, in the structure and dramaturgical qualities of scripts, and in the socio-political themes and treatment of character in contemporary plays.[2] In Canada, however, very little critical or scholarly attention has been paid to either play texts or productions until quite recently; critics are still wrestling with the misconception that in Canada art is (even should be) realist. This critical mind-set characterizes much thinking, not only about the theatre, but also about fiction and the visual arts — despite the expressionist canvasses of Emily Carr, Max Borenstein, Maxwell Bates, and much contemporary painting, or such patently non-realist fictions as *Tay John*, *The Double Hook*, *Beautiful Losers*, *Under the Volcano*, and *Neige noire*, not to mention most recent work by Jack Hodgins, Robert Kroetsch, and Michael Ondaatje.

Given this situation, my purpose here is twofold. First, I want to explore the parameters of expressionism in the Canadian theatre by examining its historical contexts and by looking closely at two excellent plays which, I maintain, are best understood as expressionistic. Second, I hope to demonstrate that expressionism has played an important role in our theatre arts and thereby to dislodge a little our critical bias towards realism. Certainly, many Canadian plays use expressionist

techniques to one degree or another: for example, the set and apocalyptic ending of Michael Cook's *Jacob's Wake*, Timothy Findley's portrayal of social collapse through the intense subjectivity of madness in *Can You See Me Yet?* and the violence, suffering, paratactic structure and monologues of Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* or Michel Tremblay's *En pièces détachées* and *Albertine en cinq temps*. But the two texts I will concentrate on are George Ryga's famous *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967) and Robert Gurik's less well-known *Le Procès de Jean-Baptiste M.* (1972).[3]

Before moving on to specific analysis, however, it is necessary to outline briefly the nature of expressionism itself and the Canadian theatre context for these two plays. I should note as well that the Ryga and Gurik texts were not chosen haphazardly. Written within five years of each other, they are both "tribunal" plays that address social issues of the day and they are, moreover, representative of the *oeuvre* of each author, insofar as neither Ryga nor Gurik is interested in the *bête noire* of realism. Gurik speaks for both men when he says that "Le théâtre n'est théâtre que dans la mesure où il brise le paravent de la réalité apparente d'un milieu, d'une époque, pour révéler la vérité."[4]

Expressionist aesthetics begin with the assumption that reality, or truth, is subjectively known through what Wassily Kandinsky spoke of as spiritual "inner need" (*innere Notwendigkeit*) or Georg Kaiser called *die Vision*.[5] For the expressionist, art derives from and represents the emotional intensity, spiritual longings and sufferings, or ecstatic visions of the individual — whether the artist *him*self or the represented protagonist of a novel or play. In order to present such visions, be they visions of transformation (*Wandlung* and *Erlösung*) or nightmarish soul-states (the *Schrei*), the artist was obliged to develop an expressionist vocabulary in contradistinction to the so-called "banality of surfaces" privileged by realism, naturalism, and impressionism. An expressionist vocabulary is one which relies on distortion, abstraction, intensity, and parataxis to present the subject's inner vision, and each of these elements operates semiotically, in the media of painting, sculpture, graphics, cinema, dance, literature (prose and poetry), and theatre (in both the writing of the play and its production).

The non-representationality of expressionism, however, should not be reduced simplistically to one style or intention. By its very nature, that is the "expressive fallacy," it will be varied.[6] But these variations can be usefully organized around the fundamental expressionist tension between two extremes: empathy and abstraction.[7] Thus, the more empathetic the work, the more it will lean towards the representation of recognizable forms and invite viewer/reader/spectator identification, while the more abstract the work the less representational it will be and the more difficult it will be for an audience to recognize or identify with its subject; empathetic expressionism appeals directly to our deepest emotions, but abstracted expressionism has a greater intellectual, often satiric, appeal. In brief, what this tension

between empathy and abstraction means for the stage is that a play may call for sets, lighting, and acting style that are distorted for intense emotional impact and that represent the inner projections of the recognizably human hero, or it may require minimally abstract sets, extreme reduction of the characters to types and highly stylized acting in order to focus on larger truths about the world we live in and man's subjective relation to that world. Beyond empathetic expressionist drama lie increasingly realistic treatments of tragic suffering and individual struggle; beyond abstracted expressionism lies the theatre of the absurd or the minimalist universe of Beckett. Although few expressionist plays can easily be categorized as one type or the other, most fall somewhere along my imaginary line between these two poles, and all utilize qualities that exploit the tension between empathy and abstraction.

As the heritage of expressionism unfolds from Germany in the twenties to the present, a more empathetic expressionism can be traced from a playwright like Ernst Toller to Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, while abstracted expressionist theatre develops from the *Denkspiele* of Georg Kaiser to Elmer Rice in the United States. During the sixties, the new committed theatre of Peter Weiss and Rolf Hochhuth, of Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre in the United States and a large number of American Vietnam plays combined ideas developed earlier by Piscator and christened "documentary drama" with a variety of expressionist techniques. Many of these sixties' plays use the courtroom as their primary setting, in part because the setting is inherently dramatic (and has been since the time of Aeschylus), and in part because the tribunal constituted a perfect metaphor (as Kafka also knew) for a century on trial. Such a setting also enabled the text and the production to include (even co-opt) the audience/reader as either defendant or jury member.[8]

Whatever their own individual influences and sources might have been, Ryga's *Ecstasy* and Gurik's *Procès* are highly expressionistic tribunal plays which, each in its own way, addresses urgent contemporary problems in a style that mixes documentary detail and socio-political critique with intense, highly imaginative and experimental dramaturgy. Ryga's roots are notoriously difficult to locate because his formal education was slim and he adopted a sharp anti-intellectual stance in adult life. Christopher Innes goes so far as to suggest that he essentially forged a new dramatic form *ex nihilo*, but Ryga himself mentions enjoying Albee and Dostoevsky, and early drafts of *Ecstasy* suggest an acquaintance with O'Neill's first expressionist *tour de force*, *The Emperor Jones* (a point I shall return to).[9] Gurik is less shy of acknowledging his roots which include Kafka (Joseph K. rather obviously prefiguring Jean-Baptiste M.), Brecht, and the French playwright Armand Gatti.[10] Whether or not Elmer Rice's expressionist classic *The Adding Machine* (first performed in New York in 1923) was a direct influence on either Ryga or Gurik (more particularly Gurik) I cannot say. But in tracing the com-

bination of tribunal drama with expressionist presentation of individual suffering and socio-political critique, Rice's play should not be forgotten. It received a total of ninety-two productions between 1958 and 1963, and Rice went on to write other expressionistic plays such as *The Subway* (1924) and *Judgement Day* (1934).[11]

TURNING FROM THE EXPRESSIONIST LEGACY to the Canadian theatre situation, one finds little serious *theoretical* drama criticism in this country until the last decade. The first important example is Brian Parker's 1977 article "Is There a Canadian Drama?" and, to date, I know of no study that has picked up his argument and continued the theoretical investigation.[12] In this study, Parker discusses three plays which he believes mark the beginnings of genuinely first-rate writing for the theatre in Canada: Tremblay's *A toi pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* (1971), Reaney's *Colours in the Dark* (1967), and Ryga's *Ecstasy*. Briefly, Parker's argument is that these plays successfully combine what he calls an "international" or "spatial form" with "local subject matter" and that their "combination of intense particularity with a sense of arbitrary pattern is typically Canadian" (Parker 187). Although Parker notes the importance of Tennessee Williams to Tremblay and of Thornton Wilder to Reaney, and although he praises the "nonlinear, disjunctive" structures of these plays, together with their impressive use of monologues and intense emotional patterning, nowhere does he mention expressionism. And yet, it seems plausible that expressionism (both empathetic and abstracted) is what we have here. Furthermore, to describe these plays as expressionistic in this or that respect is, I would argue, more useful because more specific than to describe them loosely as having an "international" or a "spatial form." However, in talking about these playwrights in formal, rather than thematic, terms, Parker has taken the necessary first step towards the kind of analysis that Ryga and Gurik deserve.

Both *Ecstasy* and *Procès* take place in court: in *Ecstasy* the heroine, Rita Joe, has been charged with numerous counts of prostitution, theft, and so on; in *Procès* the hero, Jean-Baptiste M., has murdered three of his bosses after being fired from the Dutron company where he worked. While facing judge and jury, Rita Joe and Jean-Baptiste relive their past lives in memory flashbacks punctuated by raucous outbursts from those around them and chanted accusations from the officials. Both characters are victims of an unjust and inhuman system that grinds them down relentlessly — Rita Joe because she is native and female, Jean-Baptiste because he is "un monsieur-tout-le-monde" (*Procès* 9) and a French Canadian. Rita Joe is raped then murdered in the penultimate scene, together with her Indian boyfriend, Jaimie Paul, whose broken body is tossed by the white murderers onto the railway track before an advancing train. Jean-Baptiste is pronounced "coupable" of killing his three bosses, but his sentence is to be told that his act is

meaningless; "Au travail" shouts his second victim and the play closes with a crescendo of office noises and the mechanical chanting of the judges and witnesses as they enumerate the products made by Dutron:

> Plus fort
> Harder
> Faster
> Louder
> Tous ensemble
> . . .
> le fréon
> le delux
> le lacete
> le teflon [etc.] (*Procès* 90)

Insofar as there is a plot to speak of in either play, it is very simple indeed. Very little action, in the traditional sense of the word, takes place because most of what we see is either a projection of the central protagonists' troubled minds, memories, or feelings or a distorted, highly stylized and stereotyped presentation of society at large — church, school, and welfare system in *Ecstasy*, family and business in *Procès*. But as the endings of each play suggest, there are important differences in the handling of subject matter that need to be identified; where *Ecstasy* opens out into a quasi-tragic vision of its heroine, *Procès* moves steadily away from that possibility and towards a satiric, black comic *exposé* of its hero and his world.

Of the two acts that compose *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* the first is divided almost equally between the intense inner world of Rita, who stands before a Magistrate, and a distorted view of the court. Which one of a possible seven charges she is facing, what time, day, or year it is, and which Magistrate are all irrelevant because Rita's position it timeless and, in any case, the court cannot tell one Indian from another. "You . . . are Rita Joe?" the Magistrate asks. "I know your face . . . yet . . . it wasn't in this courtroom. Or was it?" (*Ecstasy* 23). Throughout the act, Ryga juxtaposes Rita's turbulent inner world with the grotesqueness of her actual surroundings. The implication is that this world is being seen both from her troubled perspective *and* as it really it. To create this powerful hallucinatory effect, Ryga has used his stage well. His notes call for a circular ramp that sweeps forward into the audience (thereby implicating us directly in the trial) with "Backstage, a mountain cycloarama" and "a darker maze curtain to suggest gloom and confusion, and a cityscape" in front of the cyclorama (*Ecstasy* 16). Both lighting and sound effects are calculated to distort what we see and hear and to heighten feelings of dread, threat, terror, confusion, or even, by contrast, of lyrical joy. Spots are used both to control playing space, especially when Rita is isolated from the others, and to suggest emotion; a cold, blue light, for example, is called for every time danger evokes fear. Important sound effects range from the omnipresent sound of the

train, which will become deafening in the final moments of Act Two, to cacophonous voice-overs and the "nightmare babble" of voices that accompanies her condemnation at the end of Act One. In an early draft of the play, Ryga called for a drum beat that would suggest Rita's heart during the rape scene; it would start regularly, speed up, become erratic, then stop when the men had killed her, much the way O'Neill used drums in his 1920 expressionist play *The Emperor Jones*. Ryga's use of the folk singer who is both Rita's alter ego and an ironic image of white liberal middle-class interest is more problematic, but she is nonetheless an obvious non-naturalistic device.

By far the most interesting and important feature of Ryga's expressionist dramaturgy here, however, is the fragmented and paratactic structure of the material. There are no scene divisions in either act so that the montage of disparate images flows together without any of the conventional, logical, linear, or temporal connections that are typical of the realistic play. This is what Parker was describing as the play's "spatial form," but it is a paratactic structure that is common in expressionist writing.[13] What ties these scenes together temporally is the metaphor of a life, what the Germans called the *Stationen* form, and what anchors them in space is the tribunal metaphor. Rita, then, is reliving her life in a sequence of flashbacks in the moments before her death. What the audience must judge in the process, however, is not the woman on trial but the society that condemns her to this pitiful life and violent death.

Although the majority of the characters in *Ecstasy* are types identified primarily by their functions — the Magistrate, the teacher, the priest, the murderers (who are also the witnesses), the Indian men, etc. — the three main Indian characters have more flesh and blood on their bones. Jaimie Paul, David Joe, the father, and Rita have more humanity than their white tormentors, and the audience is thereby forced to identify with their plight, their inner life, their vision of the truth. For some readers or audience members, this factor may be a problem. It could be argued that this identification is melodramatic, sentimental, or even an act of false consciousness in which the "expressive fallacy" betrays the very individuals it is intended to serve. However one views the strategy, it is this human element, this extra dimension of individuality and suffering, that creates the empathy experienced by the spectator that sharply distinguishes *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* from *Le Procès de Jean-Baptiste M.*

Le Procès opens quite spectacularly. The first thing an audience hears is a montage of office noises — typewriters, telephones, telex, bells, industrial machines, cafeteria dishes, and so on. This cacophony, so reminiscent of *Le ballet méchanique* or of Elmer Rice's techniques in *The Adding Machine*, comes to an abrupt halt at the tapping sound of a conductor's baton. The lights go out; there is a brief pause:

> puis une détonation assourdissante qui coïncide avec un "spot" sur le visage d'un homme affreusement blessé à la tête. (*Procès* 13)

This stylized act of shooting occurs twice more before the three victims identify themselves as bosses at the Dutron Company, but the entire dramatic sequence will recur at two more points in the first act of the play when Jean-Baptiste, who is being cruelly tormented by the juror-witnesses, explodes under the maddening pressure of their raucous assaults and seizes his imaginary rifle (imaginary only insofar as we are supposedly in a court where J.-B. is accused of murder) and repeats his original crimes in a type of hallucinatory outburst. This sequence of three murders will be repeated a fourth time towards the end of Act Two, at which point it signals the end of J.-B.'s testimony and brings the pathetic story of his little life full circle. The final pages of the play stand, therefore, outside this vicious circle, but because they also contain the court's verdict and J.-B.'s sentence they serve to remind us that we, like J.-B. are condemned to relive this sordid, futile sequence of events, *perhaps* in perpetuity.

The entire first act is devoted to J.-B.'s monologue before the court. He rehearses the events of his life — his birth, rejection by his domineering, castrating father, his failure at various jobs, his sex life, his previous criminal record — in a kind of merry-go-round manner, with jury members jumping up to play certain roles. Shifts from one moment in his life to another are signalled by little more than percussion sounds and the repeated commands of the court Crier:

> Messieurs, la cour!
> (*Percussions.*)
> La société contre Jean-Baptiste M.
> Pour avoir tiré
> par trois fois
> pour avoir privé
> 3 familles de leur support,
> pour avoir lésé
> une grande société,
> pour avoir dérangé
> l'ordre accepté,
> En ce jour de grâce
> 1972.
> Le procès continue,
> que chaque soit libre
> de dire ce qu'il sait,
> de dire ce qu'il pense,
> de faire ce qu'il doit
> pour que la justice triomphe. (*Procès* 21-22)

As this chant suggests, these court proceedings are a kind of nightmare distortion of reality, and the satirical effect is heightened still further by the presentational acting and constant interchange of roles: the actor who plays a juror at one point

is a witness at another; the actor who plays a murdered boss also plays a judge (and there are three of these judges who indulge in lengthy, stylized chants about the Dutron Corporation). To make matters still more anti-naturalistic, the character of J.-B. splits and multiplies at key points during his court monologue. For example, at the end of Act One, the irony of J.-B.'s co-option by the system he thought he was attacking is underscored when all the Jean-Baptiste M.'s chant the praises of Dutron and list its products in a screaming crescendo of trade names.

As SHOULD BE CLEAR BY NOW, Gurik's expressionism is considerably more abstract and satirical than Ryga's. It is impossible, finally, to feel much of anything for J.-B., in part because he has accepted so completely the terms of his exploiters and in part because of Gurik's almost comic handling of roles. At one point in the text, Gurik calls for masks for his judges (*Procès* 38), and it is not difficult to imagine how effective masks (a very popular device amongst expressionist playwrights from Kaiser to O'Neill) would be in creating a grotesque, yet comic effect on the stage . In many other ways as well *Le Procès* is a splendid example of an abstracted expressionist play: Gurik exploits a number of expressionist stage effects from sound, lighting, masks, and sets to stylized speech and multiple role acting; he uses the expressionist monologue to great effect to represent J.-B.'s extreme torment *and* to depict, by contrasting his futile passion with the mechanical 'world' around him, the increasing dehumanization of man (see *Le Procès* 65). The highly paratactic structure of Act One is the perfect vehicle for presenting the "stations" of his pathetic life and this parataxis is strengthened by the obsessive repetition of many speeches, sound effects, gestures (such as struggles with the rifle), and situations.

But perhaps the most interesting feature of Gurik's expressionism is his hero and the theme that is articulated through J.-B.'s behaviour. Certainly, this "monsieur-tout-le-monde" is in direct conflict with the paternalistic order of society which is stridently represented by his father, his bosses, and his apparent adviser and friend Robillard. Predictably, he runs afoul of the authoritarian system of capitalist mechanization and industrialization that reduces all workers to slaves. But contrary to Kaiser's *Gas II*, where the entire system is destroyed, or to Fritz Lang's film, *Metropolis*, where a sentimental reconciliation is achieved between workers and bosses, Gurik's J.-B., like Rice's Mr. Zero, simply fails; he fails in his attempt to commit suicide (unlike Kaiser's Cashier in *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*), he fails to make any impression on the system, to effect change or improve conditions, and he fails to win dignity or respect for his act.

Running through *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* like a refrain is Rita's cry that she's "scared," scared of white authority, of the city, of the general threat surrounding

her existence. She shifts back and forth between bewilderment and defiance, from asking forlornly "Why am I here? What've I done?" (*Ecstasy* 72) to making her own accusations:

> Go tell your God . . . when you see him [she shouts at the Priest] . . . Tell him about Rita Joe an' what they done to her! Tell him about yourself, too! . . . That you were not good enough for me, but that didn't stop you tryin'! Tell him that! (*Ecstasy* 83)

Her wants are, in fact, very simple — safety above all, respect, love, security, a place where she can have and raise her own babies.

J.-B.'s desires are not greatly different. He lists them in a speech that he first makes to the projected image of his threatening father and later repeats twice more in the play:

> Je les aurai tes culottes [de son père]. Moi aussi j'aurai une femme, des enfants, une maison, des meubles, une voiture. (*Procès* 21)

Like Jaimie Paul, he only wants to be a man, and he believes he has all the requisites:

> Tu voulais que j'devienne un homme? en bien j'en serai un! J'ai tout ce qui faut pour devenir heureux, je suis en santé, je suis assez intelligent, je sais lire, écrire, compter, je parle bien l'anglais. . . . (*Procès* 21)

The crucial distinction between these two plays arises from the different handling of expressionist vocabulary in each. Despite the many similarities between their two protagonists, Ryga shapes his material in order to involve us emotionally in Rita Joe's fate, while Gurik keeps us at an ironic distance from J.-B. And despite both writers' concern for documentary elements[14] and their unequivocal critique of an abusive legal and social system, neither offers an answer or much hope. But where Ryga insists on and manipulates our empathetic involvement in his play, Gurik intellectualizes our response through abstraction and satire. These differences, however, are more ones of degree than of kind because in both plays the audience/reader must judge the injustices of a system in which we all participate, either as helpless victims like Rita Joe and Jaimie Paul or as blind, co-opted victims like J.-B. And in both plays the central, tormented figure (albeit more fleshed-out in *Ecstasy* than in *Procès*) is at once our representative in the world and the lens through which we see that world.

This consideration of the "heroes" leads to a final observation about these plays. Unlike some plays in the German repertoire, where the hero is idealized as the carrier of the *Vision* for mankind's regeneration, in our plays, as in so many plays of the sixties and early seventies, such a hopeful vision is no longer tenable. It has become harder and harder to articulate convincing alternatives to the system within which we live, harder even to identify (as both Rita Joe and J.-B. realize) who is

responsible for our suffering and dehumanization. There is, however, one further way of accounting for the problematic endings of both plays, and that is to place them in the line proceeding from Kaiser's *Von Morgens bis Mitternachts*, Toller's *Masse Mensch*, O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, and Rice's *The Adding Machine* (not to mention Armand Gatti's *La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste G.* and Kafka's *Der Prozess*). Each of these expressionist works, with the exception of Gatti, was well known in North America, and in each the main protagonists come to ignominious, deeply ironic ends; their deaths like their lives change nothing.[15] Where these plays, and with them *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* and *Le Procès de Jean-Baptiste M.*, succeed is in their use of an expressionist vocabulary and dramaturgy to make powerful semiotic statements about human existence. In the last analysis, Ryga and Gurik are humanists who through the "international" form of *expressionism* hold the mirror up to our own inner confusions, guilts, and fears. The result is two superbly crafted works for the stage, in Canada or anywhere.

NOTES

[1] Rolf Hochhuth quoting Schiller in "Sidelights on History," appendix to *The Deputy*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 289.

[2] For discussion of these developments in the theatre see: Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in the German Theatre, 1900-1933* (Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), who describes the two tendencies of expressionist drama and stage design as "primitive" and "abstract"; J. L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice 3: Expressionism and Epic Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981); and John Willett, *Expressionism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970).

[3] All references to *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* are to the 1970 Talonbooks edition edited by Peter Hay, and all references to *Le Procès de Jean-Baptiste M.* are to the first French edition published by Leméac in 1972. Due to difficulties in obtaining reliable production information and photographs for the key productions of *Ecstasy* or the Quebec premiere and subsequent English-language productions of *Le Procès*, I have limited my discussion to the published texts.

[4] Quoted in Jean-Cléo Godin and Laurent Maillot, *Théâtre Québécois II* (Lasalle, Québec: Éditions Hurtubise, 1980), p. 787.

[5] See Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1914), trans. M. T. H. Sadler as *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover, 1977), p. 26, and Georg Kaiser's *Vision und Figur* (1918), quoted in *Georg Kaiser* by B. J. Kenworthy (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 35-37.

[6] In *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1985), Hal Foster discusses what he calls the "expressive fallacy" of expressionist and neo-expressionist art. He points out that the expressionist artist mistakenly believes that he or she is expressing an unmediated and uncoded self whereas "even as expressionism insists on the primary, originary, interior self, it reveals that this self is never anterior to its traces, its gestures. . . . they speak him rather more than he expresses them" (62). Many expressionist artists and theorists insisted that, because their art expresses an individual, subjective response to or perspective on reality, it can have no single definitive style, but the unresolvable tension created by the desire for

expressive anteriority in the face of rhetorical, generic, and psychological conventions and codes is a major stumbling-block for expressionist theory and practice.

[7] I have taken the terms "empathy" and "abstraction" from Wilhelm Worringer's important study *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (München: Piper Verlag, 1948), first published in 1908.

[8] The most famous plays in the tribunal mode are Peter Weiss's *Der Ermittlung* (1965), drawn from the Auschwitz trials, Heinar Kipphardt's *In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1964), Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Das Verhör von Habana* (1970), and Donald Freed's *The Inquest* (1970). Notable amongst the precursors for these plays is the work of Georg Büchner, both *Dantons Tod* and *Woyzeck* which were very popular during the twenties and through the sixties and seventies in North America. For discussion of the tribunal tradition see Clas Zilliacus, "Documentary Drama: Form and Content," *Comparative Drama*, VI, i (1972), 223-53, and C. W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), Part V, "The Theatre of Commitment." See also: William C. Reeve, "Büchner's *Woyzeck* on the English-Canadian Stage," and Jerry Wasserman, "Büchner in Canada: *Woyzeck* and the Development of English-Canadian Theatre" in *Theatre History in Canada*, 8, 2 (1987), 169-80 and 181-92. Wasserman discusses the likely influence of Büchner on Ryga and the parallels between *Woyzeck* and *Ecstasy* at length, see pp. 189-91.

[9] See Christopher Innes, *Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga* (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1985), p. 19. Innes describes Ryga's echoes of O'Neill on p. 48. For comments on Ryga's relationship to Brecht, see "An Interview with George Ryga" conducted by Jill Martinez in *Politics and Literature*, a special issue of *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 35/36 (1986), 106-20; and for a political reading of the play, see Gary Boire, "Wheels on Fire: The Train of Thought in George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*," *Canadian Literature*, 113-14 (1987), 62-74.

[10] In *Le fou et ses doubles* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1978), p. 145, Pierre Gobin notes the importance of Gatti for Gurik, but see also Gurik's comments in J.-C. Germain's "Robert Gurik: l'auteur qui n'a rien à enseigner," *Digeste Éclair* (November 1968), pp. 17-20. Gatti's 1962 play, *La Vie imaginaire de l'éboueur Auguste G.*, presents the hallucinated recollections and reimaginings of his life by the dying garbage-man, Auguste, who has been fatally wounded by the police during a strike. See *Gatti aujourd'hui* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970) by Gérard Gozlan and Jean-Louis Pays.

[11] Elmer Rice was second only to O'Neill during the first half of this century, and many would say that he wrote better expressionist plays than the master. Certainly, *The Adding Machine*, first produced in 1923, enjoyed considerable success and continued to be performed over the years. In *The Independance of Elmer Rice* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 146-47, Robert Hogan lists the number of Rice productions between 1958 and 1963. Unfortunately, he does not say where they took place, but in *Seven Plays by Elmer Rice* Canada is listed as one of the countries where *The Adding Machine* was performed. Although much more hypotactic in structure than Gurik's *Procès*, it nonetheless captures a similar satiric tone through its abstraction and circularity; the hero, Mr. Zero, also shoots his boss, but like Jean-Baptiste he ends up being recycled back into the same sort of world he thought he was resisting and escaping. Moreover, his fate is in large part his own fault; he is too stupid, too timorous and easily deceived by life to be able to see through the illusions that surround him. In this, too, he is like Jean-Baptiste.

[12] "Is There a Canadian Drama?" appeared in *The Canadian Imagination*, ed. David Staines (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 152-87. Recently there have been a number of very fine anthologies with good critical introductions and some monographs on individual playwrights. In 1987 Eugene Benson and Len Conolly published *English-Canadian Theatre* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press) and Conolly edited *Canadian Drama and the Critics* (Vancouver: Talonbooks). For studies of Quebec drama see Gobin and Godin and Maillot in nn. 4 and 10.

[13] See, for example, Ernst Toller's famous expressionist play, *Masse Mensch* (1919), in which more realistic tableaux alternate with lyrical, dream projections without any attempt at logical or spatio-temporal justification or connection.

[14] According to Innes (p. 41), Ryga intercut dramatic material with actual news reports, statistics, and government reports in the third draft of *Ecstasy*, and documentary elements continued to be very important to him, in *Sunrise on Sarah*, for example. Gurik is more coy in his use of documentary material. He does refer to contemporary taxi and airport limousine feuds in his play, and at the beginning of Act Two he has two spectators arrive at J.-B.'s trial with newspapers in which they are reading about his crimes — a nice meta-documentary touch.

[15] For a fuller discussion of the German expressionist's ambivalent attitude towards the "New Man," and hence towards the chief protagonist of his play, see B. J. Kenworthy, "Georg Kaiser: The Ambiguity of the Expressionist New Man" in *Georg Kaiser Symposium*, eds. Holger Pausch and Ernest Reinhold (Berlin: Agora Verlag, 1980), pp. 95-111.

BROWN'S POND

David Carpenter

Off Plymouth yesterday
a whale calf breached, tail
flukes raised in vast playfulness.
Alongside, freighter-slow,
its mother passed, callosities
for running lights
in foggy Massachusetts Bay.

On the mainland
tourists belittled the Rock,
crushed Salems beneath their feet,
complained and
complained.

Here at Brown's Pond
tree swallows flit,
splash, fish.

In these dark waters
sunfish climb ghostly
as coelacanths
out of the murk.

In these lush hills
people paint their clapboard
Cape Cod grey, decorate
with gingerbread, and dress
their doors in ribboned bonnets
or grapevine.

Here at Brown's Pond
sunbathers
naked and portly
drink from styrofoam,
lounge in lawnchairs, and think
themselves Thoreau.

We could be like them
— drunk at poolside,
drunk in paradise —
but not today, for today
we swim Brown's Pond like finbacks
— sea-bred, sea-bound —
submerge and roll and
spout
at the blue revolving sky.

LATER

Deborah Eibel

Children save up
For good books —
Then they buy the books,
On Saturday mornings.

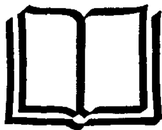
Once I went shopping
For second-hand books.
I walked out into the snow,
And there was the wedding party.

Into the church,
Another second marriage.
And I was caught between
The two good things
I wanted so much to do,
Read second-hand books
And marry.

In a small café
Near McGill University
I began to read aloud
To a man at my table.

Suddenly I knew that the books
Were much too difficult
For a slow learner,
And that some one at home
Would laugh —
Books will get you nowhere.

I panicked,
So that I had to go home
The long way.
Under the front steps
Of my old high school
I hid my books,
Where, since time immemorial,
Slow learners have hidden theirs —
All second-hand books —
In a safe place,
Until later.



THÉÂTRE DES FEMMES AU QUÉBEC, 1975-1985

Ghislaine Boyer

Introduction

> Prendre la parole est le début d'un processus d'affirmation. Prendre la parole signifie ne plus accepter de cacher sa colère, sa peur, ses espoirs. Nommer ce que l'on ressent comme femme au lieu de l'étouffer. Faire des préoccupations des femmes des sujets de discussion de tout le monde. Redire le monde au féminin.[1]

Cette revendication féministe a gagné peu à peu la scène culturelle et artistique québécoise et si la pionnière Marie Savard, dans sa pièce "Bien à moi" produite au Théâtre de Quat'Sous en 1970, lançait un cri dans le désert sur la folie et la solitude féminines, elle donnait du même coup le signal d'envoi pour une dramaturgie des femmes.

En 1971, déjà naissait le premier collectif de théâtre de rue féministe Mauve s'attachant à dénoncer l'image de la femme dans une société patriarcale mais c'est à partir de 1974 que plusieurs troupes féministes commencent à s'exprimer collectivement au théâtre.

C'est à Montréal que les "filles" du Grand Cirque Ordinaire (collectif mixte) présentent "Un prince, mon jour viendra" s'attaquant notamment aux stéréotypes féminins dans les contes de fée. La même année, le Théâtre des Cuisines, collectif marxiste-féministe, produit un spectacle choc sur l'avortement, "Nous aurons les enfants que nous voulons." En 1975 suit "Môman travaille pas, a trop d'ouvrage" qui aborde le travail ménager salarié et, plus tard en 1980, "As-tu vu? les maisons s'emportent!" qui illustre le passage du privé au politique, de l'individuel au collectif. Ce théâtre militant eut à son heure beaucoup d'écho auprès de la population féminine québécoise.

Dès lors le théâtre féministe s'affirme et deux productions du Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, théâtre officiel à large audience, s'inscriront comme temps forts de l'expression des femmes. En 1976, "La Nef des sorcières," suite de six monologues écrits par deux comédiennes et cinq écrivaines, mettait en scène de façon crue et virulente divers aspects de l'aliénation des femmes, leurs désirs d'appropriation de leur vie et de libération sexuelle, y compris le lesbianisme. Le tabou de l'inavouable était également transgressé dans "Les Fées ont soif" de Denise Boucher

en 1978, non sans un scandale public déclenché par la censure. L'auteure s'attaquait à l'archétype de la Vierge Marie présenté sous trois visages: la Vierge statufiée, Marie le mère de famille et Marie-Madeleine la prostituée, chacune refusant son carcan et s'en libérant pour enfin vivre.

Dans cette lancée, d'autres cellules féminines ou féministes se créent à Montréal: Trois et Sept le Numéro Magique Huit en 1977, l'organisation Ô en 1978, les femmes de l'Eskabel en 1979 et à Québec, La Commune à Marie (Centre d'Essai des Femmes de Québec) en 1977. Ces groupes exclusivement féminins auront en général une vie relativement brève même si certains réapparaîtront épisodiquement.

En 1979 naît le Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes. Il prendra de plus en plus d'importance grâce à ses productions assiudes, son lieu théâtral fixe, ses subventions gouvernementales mais aussi par l'élargissement de ses fonctions en organisant des Festivals de Créations de Femmes et les Lundis de l'Histoire des Femmes. Depuis 1985, tout en conservant ses options de départ, le T.E.F. et son nouvel espace GO se veut un lieu de rassemblement et de rencontre de femmes artistes, qu'elles soient peintres, sculpteures, photographes, poétesses ou auteures de théâtre. Les Folles Alliées, collectif de théâtre féministe créé à Québec en 1980 s'est fait remarquer par deux excellentes productions: "Enfin Duchesses" (1982) caricaturant le célèbre Carnaval de Québec et "Mademoiselle Autobody" (1985) dénonçant la pornographie.

A partir de 1979, parallèlement à ces collectifs vont surgir des spectacles de femme-solos qui viennent appuyer les thèmes déjà développés, la mise à jour de l'histoire d'une femme — souvent autobiographique — contribuant à l'Histoire des femmes et suscitant des solidarités par identification à des vécus similaires. Pour en nommer quelques-unes, Louisette Dussault (*Môman*) et Sonia "Chatouille" Côté (*La 9e Sainte Folie*) en 1979, Francine Tougas (*Histoire de Fantômes*) en 1980 et Jocelyne Goyette (*Ma p'tite vache a mal aux pattes*) en 1981.

A ce théâtre de collectifs et de "one-woman-show," plus souvent nommé "spectacles de femmes" se joint vers la fin des années 70 une génération de femmes auteures. Certes Anne Hébert, Françoise Loranger, Marie-Claire Blais et Antonine Maillet les avaient précédées dans un théâtre plus classique dans son contenu et sa forme, mais qui déjà mettait en scène des personnages de femmes aliénées.

Objet et methode

L'objet de cette communication est l'analyse des 24 pièces publiées de six femmes auteures représentatives de la nouvelle génération théâtrale. Il s'agit d'Elizabeth Bourget, Jeanne-Mance Delisle, Marie Laberge, Jovette Marchessault, Maryse Palletier, et Louise Roy. Ce sont des femmes qui ont entre 30 et 40 ans à l'exception d'une d'entre elles, proche de la cinquantaine. Elles ont une production suivie, elles se définissent professionnellement comme écrivains de théâtre et sont reconnues

comme telles par les critiques et les amateurs de théâtre. Il existe bien extendu d'autres femmes qui ont écrit pour le théâtre mais leur production ne rassemblait pas — du moins actuellement — l'ensemble des critères utilisés dans la sélection des auteures étudiées. Pour une raison similaire, les pièces des collectifs n'ont pas été retenues : trop peu d'entre elles ont été publiées, ce qui était indispensable pour une analyse de texte.

A l'exception d'une féministe lesbienne radicale, les auteures choisies ne se définissent pas idéologiquement comme féministes tout autant par refus de toute forme de dogmatisme que par crainte de l'étiquetage. Le théâtre didactique a-t-il atteint un point de saturation et une certaine forme de féminisme militant aussi. Mais comme le dit si bien Lorraine Camerlain : "Si entre 1974 et 1985, jamais la parole et le jeu dramatiques des femmes ne peuvent se réduire à un 'théâtre de femmes' uniforme et univoque, il reste cependant que l'inscription féministe s'y lit en filigrane, comme une question certaine."[2]

Traditionnellement la production théâtrale a été analysée dans son histoire et par le biais de l'analyse littéraire ou de la critique théâtrale. Celle-ci s'intéresse tout autant au thème de la pièce qu'à la mise en scène, à la scénographie et au jeu des acteurs.

Lucien Goldman dans ses essais sur Racine et Genet s'attachait essentiellement à l'idéologie des personnages. Jean Duvignaud de son côté a accordé plus d'importance à l'anticipation des valeurs et des comportements inédits des personnages porteurs d'une nouvelle vision du monde.

C'est donc l'univers féminin tel qu'exprimé par les 47 femmes-personnages mises en scène dans ces 24 pièces qui fait l'objet de cette analyse. A ces 47 femmes répondent 27 hommes. De cet ensemble de personnages, on a d'abord relevé les caractéristiques sociales comme toute enquête identifie sa population : espace, temps, âge, sexe, statut et milieu social.[3] Mais le centre de cette analyse, ce sont les personnages féminins, les valeurs de la société qui les a façonnées, les normes sociales qui les orientent. Ces normes, les femmes les subissent, les acceptent ou se révoltent. La plupart du temps, le microcosme où se déroule l'action est celui du couple et de la famille.

Echappent à cet univers les personnages d'une auteure qui se définit féministe lesbienne et qui met en scène des femmes auteures célèbres telles par exemple Gertrude Stein et Anaïs Nin et des couples lesbiens.

Cette prise de parole des femmes bien entendu ne fait que commencer et ne peut que continuer à s'affirmer. Elle a de façon spectaculaire envahi la scène théâtrale au Québec pendant dix ans. Continuera-t-elle dans cette voie ou s'exprimera-t-elle de préférence par d'autres modes tels que la nouvelle danse, la performance et bien entendu le cinéma? Ou encore par ces mises en espace sculpturales ou environnementales comme le "Dinner Party" de l'américaine Judy Chicago? En tout état de cause, cette explosion théâtrale dont il est ici question retenait l'attention.[4]

Caracteristiques sociales de la population

ESPACE ET TEMPS

Les actions se déroulent dans un cadre urbain: Montréal, Québec et leurs banlieues, ou bien dans des milieux ruraux: petits villages du Bas-du-Fleuve, Lac St-Jean, Abitibi, à quelques cinq cents kilomètres de Montréal à l'Est, au Nord et à l'Ouest. Cette distribution des lieux est assez typique de la distribution de la population du Québec et les auteures sont souvent originaires des lieux où elles situent leurs pièces. Il y a une exception à ce tableau dans la mesure où une des auteures met en scène des personnages célèbres de la littérature contemporaine: américains, français ou québécois. Dans ce cas, Paris, New-York ou Los Angeles sont aussi présents que Québec ou Montréal. D'autre part, d'autres pays apparaissent parfois à l'occasion de voyages mentionnés par les personnages. Au total, c'est un univers généralement limité au Québec, le reste du Canada étant singulièrement absent.

L'espace de jeu est presque toujours une cuisine ou le living d'un appartement ou d'une maison. Si on n'est pas à la campagne, on est dans les quartiers "populaires" de Montréal ou de Québec. Dans trois cas, l'action se déroule, à certains moments, dans un couvent, un camp militaire ou un hôpital. Dans les deux seules pièces à caractère "social," certains actes des pièces se déroulent sur les lieux de travail: usine fabricant du papier et conserverie.

Quatre des pièces se situent avant la guerre mettant en scène des situations de crise industrielle; plus de la moitié sont contemporaines des années 70 et 80; les autres se situent entre les années 40 et 70.

AGE ET SEXE

Age		*Sexe*	
– 20	10	H	F
20–29	32		
30–39	11	27	47
40–49	6		
50–59	8		
60 +	7		

La population est composée d'adultes dont près des deux tiers ont entre 20 et 40 ans. Mais ce qui la distinguerait de la population généralement portée à la scène, c'est la place numériquement plus importante accordée aux femmes par rapport aux hommes. C'est bien là une des visées essentielles de ces femmes auteures, par

opposition au répertoire théâtral existant presqu'exclusivement masculin: écrire des pièces où les femmes, libérées des classiques stéréotypes auxquels elles étaient confinées, occupent l'espace scénique.

STATUT CIVIL

	au début des pièces	*à la fin*
Célibataire	37	32
marié(e)	21	24
couple (vivant ensemble ou non)	11	3
séparé(e) ou divorcé(e)	0	6
veuve	5	5
(décédée)		4

La majorité des personnages se répartissent d'une façon presqu'égale entre les célibataires et ceux qui sont mariés ou vivent en couple. Au cours des pièces, les gens mariés, plus âgés le restent; les couples, plus jeunes, se défont.

MILIEU SOCIAL

Hommes	*Femmes*
Laveur d'auto	Ménagère (11)
Serveur de café	Servante
Chauffeur de taxi	Blanchisseuse
Bûcheron (2)	Serveuse
Handicapé (2)	Vendeuse (3)
Jardinier	Ouvrière
Ouvrier (3)	Sans emploi (4)
Chômeur (2)	
Sans emploi (2)	Secrétaire (4)
	Postière
Petit fonctionnaire (2)	Etalagiste
Agent de voyage	Institutrice (2)
Journaliste	Journaliste (2)
Chef de rayon	Infirmière (4)

Hommes	*Femmes*
Gérant d'un magasin	Chanteuse
	Danseuse
Garagiste	Commédienne
Epicier	
Restaurateur	Capitaine
	Psychologue (2)
Médecin	
Comptable retrairé	Epicière
Industriel	Commerce de transport
	Bourgeoise sans emploi
	Prostituée
	Non définie

Les emplois et professions des personnages les situent dans un univers "populaire," société de classe ouvrière et de classes moyennes, ce que la description des lieux de résidence laissait pressentir. Mais même dans les emplois manuels, on ne trouve que trois ouvriers et une ouvrière alors que cette catégorie représente environ 35% de la population active du Québec.[5]

La population décrite par les auteures effectue un travail qui ne se situe pas dans des entreprises de production. C'est au contraire le secteur des services qui est représenté, à juste titre si l'on considère qu'il représente le secteur de loin le plus important dans la population active québécoise. C'est aussi un univers professionnel peu syndiqué — à l'opposé du secteur de production manufacturière — il est moins perméable aux courants idéologiques que diffuse le syndicalisme. Ces pièces reflètent d'ailleurs cet état de choses, les débats idéologiques n'y ont pas de place et un seul de tous ces personnages, chômeur orienté vers le syndicalisme, évoque la notion de socialisme, et encore, cette pièce et situe dans le passé lors de la crise de 1929.

La bourgeoisie est absente de ces pièces. Ceux qui sont propriétaires le sont d'un garage, d'une petite épicerie ou d'un restaurant situés dans des quartiers populaires. Une seule exception, un entrepreneur qui possède une conserverie de tomates à Montréal. Il est significatif qu'il soit obligé de vendre son entreprise à un concurrent anglophone d'origine écossaise qui l'a poussé à la faillite. On sait en effet que dans l'histoire économique du Québec, ces faillites d'entreprises canadiennes-françaises recevant peu d'appui du réseau bancaire contrôlé par les canadiens-anglais, furent un phénomène fréquent lors de la grande crise. Seules les deux pièces relatant la crise de 1929 et les faillites de deux entreprises canadiennes-françaises mettent à jour des oppositions de classes.

La bourgeoisie des professions libérales est tout aussi absente. Pas d'avocat, de juge. On note seulement le passage tout-à-fait épisodique d'un médecin. On parle, sans le mettre en scène, d'un avocat qui a violé sa jeune servante. On assiste au discours d'un évêque lors de l'inauguration de la fabrique de papier au Lac St-Jean, qui tombera en faillite en 1929.

De même la société anglophone, dominante au Québec dans la bourgeoisie industrielle, commerciale et financière tout autant que dans les professions libérales, est absente de ces pièces. C'est sous le visage de personnages absents qu'on les évoque. Parmi tous ces couples mis en scène, on ne trouve pas de couple bi-ethnique, espèce rare en effet, au Québec. Il en est de même de la population des émigrants d'origine européenne à l'exception d'un serveur de restaurant italo-québécois alors qu'anglophones et émigrants représentent 20% de la population au Québec et beaucoup plus dans la métropole.

La population féminine prise à part ne se distingue pas par un statut social particulier. Certes, un cinquième d'entre elles sont des ménagères mais la grande majorité de ces femmes exercent un emploi qu'on qualifie généralement de féminin. Rien d'étonnant puisqu'au Québec, 45% des femmes exercent un emploi salarié dont 60% dans les services.

Ici aussi une exception notable, une femme entrepreneur, propriétaire d'une entreprise de transport. Autre exception, une seule femme bourgeoise, l'épouse du fabriquant de conserves. A noter cependant qu'à la différence des hommes mis en scène, un plus grand nombre de femmes exercent un emploi qui a exigé des études ou une formation spécialisée.

L'Univers feminin

UNE SOCIÉTÉ CLÉRICALE

Dans une société dont on sait le long passé de catholicisme traditionnel et hermétique, mais dont on connaît aussi la vigueur du courant moderniste depuis le début des années soixante, on peut s'attendre à trouver à la fois des traces évidentes de ce moralisme qui imprègne tous les actes de la vie, son conflit avec les nouvelles aspirations et son rejet par les nouvelles générations.

Chez les femmes de cinquante ans et plus, les valeurs chrétiennes puritaines les ont confinées au rôle d'épouses soumises, de mères dévouées, de ménagères parfaites toujours à l'écoute des autres, dans l'oubli de soi. Bien sûr entre cet idéal proposé par l'institution ecclésiastique — ses paroisses, ses écoles et ses hôpitaux omniprésents sur tout le territoire — et la vie quotidienne, les écarts privés étaient fréquents. Mais si elles n'avaient pas une vocation religieuse, c'était le devoir des femmes de se marier et d'avoir beaucoup d'enfants. Si le malheur voulait qu'on reste célibataire, on devait oeuvrer auprès des enfants comme institutrice, auprès des malades comme infirmière ou auprès des parents comme aide familiale.

La société civile accordait ses prescriptions légales à ces préceptes moraux. Jusqu'en 1964, on reste sous les dispositions du code civil Napoléon, modifié au Québec en 1886, dont l'optique concernant les femmes était la soumission totale au mari, c'est-à-dire qu'elles n'avaient aucune capacité légale comme le montre fort bien Diane Lamoureux.[6] La même auteure indique que jusqu'en 1969, le seul moyen d'obtenir un divorce était un bill — loi — privé du Parlement Fédéral, le Québec ne disposant d'aucune législation dans ce domaine. Inutile d'ajouter que l'institution religiouse du mariage était — et reste — indissoluble, mais il est moins connu que c'était le célébrant religieux qui établissait l'acte civil et non le maire.

Jusqu'en 1969, l'avortement est illégal et la contraception apparaît dans la seconde moitié des années soixante, mais il fallut encore quelques années pour que tous les médecins acceptent de la prescrire. Jusqu'à ces réformes récentes, on peut dire que la femme mariée aux yeux de la société légale n'avait aucune identité propre. Comme le dit très bien D. Lamoureux, elles ont le même statut légal que les enfants ou les fous.

Pas étonnant dès lors que chez ces femmes de cinquante ans, il n'y ait pas de révolte mais souvent de la soumission et, s'il y a révolte, elle reste silencieuse et impuissante. Mais à partir du moment où de nouveaux modèles de comportement franchissent ces barrières à travers de multiples canaux et à l'aide de mouvements sociaux, les vieux modèles se fissurent et s'effrondrent — du moins momentanément — pour faire place à des conduites d'affranchissement et de libération.

Concurrement, la taille des familles si nombreuses autrefois se réduit à trois puis à deux ou à un enfant. Ces filles et ces garçons reçoivent une instruction plus prolongée et laïcisée, ce qui ouvre aux femmes un marché de travail diversifié. L'ouverture aux professions permet en effet l'autonomie financière et la reconnaissance sociale.

Dans le théâtre écrit par ces jeunes auteures, on retrouve en même temps trace de ce passé et de ce présent surtout à partir de la fin des années soixante-dix. Ces portraits de femmes vont donc de la soumission à la révolte, de l'aliénation à la libération.

AGE, STATUT ET MILIEU SOCIAL

Dans la population de ces pièces, on trouve treize femmes de plus de 40 ans (43-67), trois de plus de trente ans (31-33), vingt-deux de 20 à 29 et neuf de 15 à 19 ans.

Parmi celles qui ont plus de 30 ans, 12/16 sont mariées, veuves ou divorcées. Au contraire, chez les 20-29, une seule est mariée, mais deux d'entre elles à la fin de la pièce, située vingt ans aprés, sont mariées. Ce qui est significatif pour cette tranche d'âge qui représente la moitié de la population, c'est de ne pas se marier et d'être le plus souvent célibataire ou de vivre en couple.

Ajoutons que chez les plus de 40 ans, une seule femme mère de cinq enfants s'est séparée de son mari alcoolique, violent et à tendances incestueuses. Une autre, célibataire de dix-huit ans au début de la pièce, s'est mariée très jeune, a eu quatre enfants et se retrouve divorcée à trente-huit ans. Au reste, si le divorce est absent chez les plus de 40 ans, il n'y a qu'un seul cas chez les moins de 40 ans. Les liens du mariage sont sacrés chez les premières, ces mêmes liens sont peu présents chez les secondes. Mais outre que les liens étaient sacrés, ces femmes de plus de 40 ans sont presqu'exclusivement des mères de famille sans emploi et sans autonomie financière. Alors que les 18-39 ans exercent un emploi, à l'exception de cinq d'entre elles. Trois d'entre elles seulement ont un, deux ou trois enfants. Par contraste au portrait-type de la femme mariée, mère de famille et ménagère celui des femmes célibataires, des couples non mariés et pour la moitié d'entre eux, déjà séparés. Cette surreprésentation des femmes célibataires et des femmes sans enfant s'écarte de la statistique actuelle de la population québécoise et correspond plus vraisemblablement à l'univers social de ces femmes auteures.

LA VIE PRIVÉE

Dans la société québécoise comme dans les pièces des femmes auteures qui souvent la reflètent, jusqu'aux années 70, la quasi-totalité des femmes n'envisagent l'amour qu'à travers le mariage et le modèle féminin dominant est celui de l'épouse et mère, longtemps perçu comme une vocation, non loin de la vocation religieuse.

> J'vois pas pantoute (du tout) l'intérêt qui y a à pas s'marier. Arrange ça comme tu voudras, le mot l'dit: on resse (reste) vieille fille: on se r'trouve pas d'mari pis (puis) on s'ent pas appelée par Dieu. Tu viendras pas m'faire accrère (accroire) qu'on choisit d'être rien, pis à personne: ni à Dieu ni à homme? [Mina, veuve, 58 ans] (LABERGE, *C'était avant la guerre*, 36)

Ne pas être religieuse ou épouse, c'est ne pas s'accomplir et vivre en marginale. Celles qui n'y sont pas parvenues, les "vieilles filles" expriment des regrets de n'avoir jamais été prises dans les bras d'un homme, jamais été embrassées.

> ... chus pas (je ne suis pas) capable de trouver ça aussi épeurant (effrayant) pis aussi déplaisant que c'que maman nous ne disait. [Eva, célibataire, 67 ans] (LABERGE, *Eva et Evelyne*, 74)

Les femmes qui se marient n'accomplissent pas seulement un devoir, elles ont aussi contes de fée en tête. Elles atendent tout de l'amour-mariage idéal.

> J'avais vingt ans, Honoré. J'voulais toute, pis j'pensais qu'un mari c'tait toute. J'avais tellement d'envies, tellement d'rêves que j'pensais que l'mariage me contenterait pis m'tranquiliserait. [Marianna, veuve, 29 ans] (LABERGE, *C'était avant la guerre ...*, 69)

Mais le mariage est toujours décevant. On n'y a pas trouvé l'amour tel qu'on se l'imaginait, on n'a jamais été aimée ou encore l'amour, c'est une affaire de cul.

Les enfants trop nombreux ont envahi l'espace matrimonial et le tavail ménager est un esclavage. Ce qui amène une veuve à conclure:

> Me r'marier, jamais! [Gilberte, veuve, 2 enfants, 48 ans] (BOURGET, *Bonne Fête Maman*, 43)

Une autre veuve dit encore:

> ... la mort de Batisse m'a faite plusse (plus) de bien que d'mal ... j'ai été ben (bien) soulagée pour moi-même ... [Marianna, blanchisseuse, veuve, 29 ans] (LABERGE, *C'était avant la guerre ...*, 69)

Presque tous les visages de l'amour-mariage que l'on découvre dans ces pièces sont sombres, tristes, amers et même misérables. Ces femmes n'éprouvent guère de joie dans une sexualité pauvre définie par l'homme pour satisfaire un besoin; passé la quarantaine et parfois la trentaine, certaines ne connaissent plus de rapports sexuels et sensuels, elles se sentent rejetées, diminuées.

Ignorance, brutalité, absence de tendresse et d'attention à leur égard sont les traits de la sexualité mise à jour par ces femmes à l'occasion de fortes discussions et même d'engueulades avec leurs maris. Pour ne citer qu'un des témoignages et non le moindre:

> Si je m'étais déshabillée, t'aurais par pris l'temps de me r'garder, tu m'aurais sauté au sexe tu-suite! (tout-de-suite) ... J'attendais les mots du coeur!
> T'es t'un ignorant, Tonio Morin! Tu parles de fourrer, d'emplir pis d'mettre mais t'as jamais su c'que c'était d'faire l'amour. [Madame Morin, mariée, 5 enfants, 48 ans] (DELISLE, *Un reel ben beau, beau triste*, 97)

On comprend que dans ces conditions, on passe de la vocation et du conte de fée à un enfer invivable, insupportable. De plus, les hommes peuvent avoir et ont des aventures extra-maritales alors que chez les femmes, c'est autre chose.

> Moi j'ai jamais compris çà, ... un homme qui a une aventure, c'est normal, c't'un homme. Mais une femme, elle, c't'une courailleuse (coureuse). [Estelle, mariée, 3 enfants, 54 years] (BOURGET, *Bonne Fête Maman*, 128)

Ce personnage sera la seule femme de sa génération à vivre une aventure d'un soir avec un jeune homme, collègue de travail, à qui elle dit:

> Dans l'fond l'mariage, ça devrait être un contrat renouvelable. T'sais? A tout' (tous) les cinq ans, à tout' les dix ans — comme un bail. [Estelle, mariée, 3 enfants, 54 ans] (BOURGET, *Bonne Fête Maman*, 130)

Si le mariage est un échec de la vie amoureuse, la maternité apporte-t-elle un épanouissement? Une mère dit à sa fille vivant actuellement une situation de malaise avec son mari:

> Y a rien de mieux pour assire (asseoir) un ménage. Ca fait des liens, ça, plus solides que n'importe quoi d'autre. [Martine, veuve, 2 enfants, 58 ans] (LABERGE, *Deux tangos ...*, 74)

Mais quand on est mère,

> On a pas le temps de penser, vous (le) saurez, quand on élève des enfants; y (il) faut toujours courir d'un bord pi (puis) de l'autre pour les moucher, pour les décrotter. [Maria, mariée, 2 enfants, 38 ans]
>
> Mais on les aime pareil (tout-de-même), c'est nos enfants! [Bernadette, mariée, 4 enfants, 38 ans] (PELLETIER, *A qui le p'tit coeur . . .*, 102)

En fait si la maternité peut parfois être une compensation à l'absence d'amour conjugal, elle est plus généralement perçue par ces femmes comme un devoir, un fardeau, un esclavage. Sans compter que lorsque les enfants quittent la maison familiale, ces femmes ressentent d'autant plus l'inutilité et l'insignifiance de leur vie.

> Pensez-vous qu'jaurais pas eu envie d'fère d'aut'chose (de faire autre chose) dans ma vie que d'torcher? . . . J'ai torché 4 enfants pis un mari . . . [Cécile, mariée, 4 enfants, 65 ans] (LABERGE, *Avec l'hiver qui s'en vient*, 83)

Ces amours déçues, ces mariages qu'il faut assumer tant bien que mal et ces enfants à supporter dans l'oubli de soi, cela fait un manège qui étourdit au jour le jour et enferme la femme dans une routine accaparante et monotone. Arrivées à la cinquantaine et même la quarantaine, ces femmes lucides présentent des bilans amers de leur vie.

> Dire que j'ai passé les meilleures années d'ma vie à constuire des châteaux d'sable pis à coudre du linge de poupée . . .
>
> Pour toi, j'suis pus (plus) rien qu'un meuble. Y'a l'poêle, le frigidaire, pis à côté, Estelle. En tout cas, si c'est pas ça qu'tu penses, c'est exactement comme ça qu'tu m'traites. [Estelle, mariée, 3 enfants, 54 ans] (BOURGET, *Bonne Fête Maman*, 45, 67)

Pour finir, on aboutit à l'absurde, à l'impasse et quelquefois sans les discerner clairement, à des comportements dépressifs et psychotiques.

Mais quand tout a basculé dans les années 60, quand la société québécoise s'est modernisée et quand les jeunes qui avaient grandi avec la "Révolution tranquille" sont arrivés à l'âge adulte, ont-ils inventé d'autres modes de relations hommes-femmes? Ont-ils imaginé l'amour autrement? Et le manège familial et ménager a-t-il arrêté sa ronde?

Les femmes de cette génération qui nous sont présentées par les auteures, celles qui ont entre 20 et 35 ans dans les années 1975-85, sont en majorité des célibataires, parfois vivant en couple, très rarement mariées. Du mariage, elles ne parlent même pas — ou si elles le font, c'est pour le rejeter — mais d'amour, de couple et de sexualité, c'est de cela qu'il est question dans ce théâtre. L'amour est descendu de son piédestal, ce n'est plus une vocation ni un conte de fée, mais on le cherche et recherche avidement: on espère "tomber" en amour, on l'est, on l'a déjà été, on le sera à nouveau.

Est-on plus heureuses que les épouses-mères du passé? Si les attentes sont moins hautes, on se fait moins mal en tombant mais cela n'est pas toujours évident, certaines chutes pouvant être vertigineuses et dangereuses. Les liens n'étant plus ni éternels ni sacrés, l'amour éteint ou disparu, on peut décider de rompe une relation et même espérer réussir une autre fois.

> Moi j'pense qu'on peut arrêter d'aimer. J'pense pas qu'c'est vrai ça, l'amour éternel. [Suzanne, infirmière, mariée, 33 ans, attend un enfant] (LABERGE, *Deux tangos*..., 138)

Les occasions de raviver une relation sont plus fréquentes: l'aménagement dans un nouvel appartement par exemple.

> J'aimerais çà qu'not' nouveau logement, ce soit l'début d'une nouvelle étape, d'une nouvelle vie pour nous aut' . . . , depuis deux semaines, j'ai juste le goût de r'tomber en amour avec toi! [Bernadette, étudiante en psychologie, vit en couple, 25 ans] (BOURGET, *Bernadette et Juliette* . . . , 26-27)

Pendant un congé de maladie pour dépression, on s'accroche avec l'espoir de retrouver un second souffle.

> J'veux pas t'perdre, Pierre, j'voudrais rester avec toi, mais en vie, pas à moitié morte avec toi, pas à moitié là. J'veux te r'trouver pis t'aimer comme avant. [Suzanne, mariée, 33 ans] (LABERGE, *Deux tangos* . . . , 99)

Les relations hommes-femmes se veulent plus égalitaires que celles des générations précédentes. Ces jeunes femmes ne sont plus soumises et résignées comme leurs aînées. Elles sont plus responsables et attentives à la qualité de leur relation amoureuse, plus libres dans leur choix. Elles expriment — sereinement ou violemment — leurs malaises de couple à leurs compagnons, parfois à leur ou à une amie. Ces femmes qui travaillent à l'extérieur sont nettement plus libres de choisir leur mode d'aimer mais la solitude est fréquente et il arrive parfois qu'on laisse perdurer une relation insatisfaisante par peur de se retrouver seule, même si dans son for intérieur, on conteste.

> Cinq ans de jouissance à la va-vite! [Geneviève, 25 ans, secrétaire, a un ami] (DELISLE, *Geneviève*, 161)

Même si ces femmes semblent plus libres et libérées sexuellement, leur sexualité reste souvent banale et frustrante, trop programmée pour elles, mais aussi pour leurs partenaires.

> C'est tellement organisé not'affaire qu'on n'a pas besoin de trouver d'mot pour ça, on l'prononce jamais, on n'en parle jamais. On parle d'aller s'coucher d'bonne heure! Puis, ça, ça veut dire les joies de la chair! [Suzanne, mariée, 33 ans] (LABERGE, *Deux tangos* . . . , 50)

Les aventures sont souvent objet de perturbations des couples et bien qu'en

théorie, on refuse les scènes de jalousie, il est difficile d'y échapper. Les choses ne sont pas plus simples quand une femme célibataire a un amant qui est marié.

> I' me gardait en stand by comme une hôtesse de l'air pis quand i' venait chez nous (chez moi), monsieur se sentait coupable, ça fait qu'i' me punissait. J'tais pas sitôt installée que c'était déjà fini. [Dolorès, étalagiste, 28 ans] (ROY, *Bachelor*, 37)

Les hommes trop souvent continuent à attendre de leurs compagnes le dévouement lié à l'image de l'épouse modèle. Les rôles ne sont pas encore réajustés et notamment les tâches ménagères non équitablement partagées.

> Ca faisait au moins deux semaines que t'avais pas fait' la vaisselle. Sais-tu combien d'temps ça m'a pris pour faire ta vaisselle?
> Not' (notre) vaisselle! Ca fait un mois qu'tu manges toujours ici! [Pierre et Juliette, célibataires, 25 ans] (BOURGET, *Bernadette et Juliette ou la vie c'est comme la vaisselle, c'est toujours à recommencer*, 66)

La quotidienneté, la routine, les préoccupations professionnelles de l'un et de l'autre, l'encombrement des soucis ménagers, les confrontations sexuelles, telles sont les données de vie de ces jeunes couples modernes. A cela s'ajoute un problème nouveau, la jalousie professionnelle des hommes vis-à-vis de leurs compagnes, en quête d'une formation universitaire ou d'une réussite de carrière, jalousie souvent accompagnée du sentiment d'être délaissé, négligé, oublié.

> Tu travailles, tu fais du théâtre, t'écris, tu fais un paquet d'affaires. Puis moi je suis là à tourner en rond, mais au moins tu ne sais pas tenir une maison, ça me rassure. [Pierre, comédien, célibataire, 25 ans] (BOURGET, *Bernadette et Juliette*, 67)

> . . . c'est une vraie femme, ta femme. Je suis bien sûr qu'elle prend soin de toi, de ta maison et de tes enfants.
> . . . Moi . . . j'aimerais pouvoir me reposer sur elle (sa compagne). Mais madame danse à présent, madame ne fait plus rien, ici. Rien, je te dis. On rentre ici, et c'est un vrai bordel. . . . Quand est-ce que tu vas rentrer chez toi et épousseter, Catherine? [Philippe, journaliste, 37 ans, vit en couple avec Catherine, danseuse, 27 ans] (PELLETIER, *Duo pour voix obstinées*, 96)

Chez ces jeunes femmes, allier leur vie amoureuse à une vie professionnelle leur apparaît souvent difficile sinon impossible et elles préfèrent renoncer à l'amour plutôt qu'à leurs aspirations de réussite professionnelle, non sans contradictions et déchirements. "C'est dur, l'émancipation, hein?" de dire Bernadette, étudiante en psychologie, vivant en couple, 25 ans.

Les femmes de cette génération n'ont pas d'enfant. Deux d'entre elles âgées de 29 et 33 ans sont enceintes et une prostituée de 25 ans élève seule son petit garçon. Avoir des enfants apparaît un phénomène marginal chez les personnages que ces auteures ont choisi de décrire. De plus, l'enfant ne s'insère plus automatiquement dans la famille mononucléaire classique. Les mères célibataires choisissent d'avoir un enfant dans des conditions de vie nouvelles contrairement aux "filles-

mères" d'autrefois. Ainsi, cette femme enceinte qui accepte une promotion l'obligeant à vivre loin de son compagnon et qui s'en accommode fort bien.

> C'est juste que pour tout-de-suite on a nos vies, ça nous fait peur d'aller rester ensemble . . . on va voyager . . . ça va faire un bébé qui aime les voyages . . . [Francine, journaliste, 29 ans] (BOURGET, *Bonne Fête Maman*, 161)

Il existe sans contredit un fort contraste entre les personnages féminins de 40 ans et plus et leurs "filles" symboliques ou réelles, celles de la génération des 20-35 ans des années 80 aux conceptions différentes: amour, mariage, enfants et surtout insertion sur le marché du travail, liberté et autonomie acquises chez le jeune génération. Toutefois les rapports hommes-femmes semblent être tout aussi complexes et la sexualité encore source de malaises et de frustrations, comme si, même à l'intérieur des attitudes nouvelles, resurgissaient fréquemment des vieux modèles de tensions et de conflits dont pourtant on se croyait dégagé.

Le portrait-type des femmes de la génération des 40 ans et plus est celui d'une épouse et mère de famille soumise et résignée. Pour autant n'existait-il pas des révoltes ou tout au moins des révoltées?

Certes plusieurs femmes de cette génération expriment des regrets, des malaises et des conflits sous forme de complaintes et quelquefois de colères. Pour que la révolte éclate et mène à l'action, ces femmes armées de patience et de résignation doivent être acculées à des situations extrêmes de violence.

C'est ainsi que Madame Morin, mariée à un alcoolique despotique et violent depuis plus de vingt ans, le fait emprisonner pour refus de pourvoir aux besoins de la famille, avec l'accord de ses trois filles qui lui révèlent le comportement pré-incestueux du père, approches et sollicitations envers sa fille aînée. A son retour de prison, suite à une féroce discussion où son mari la menace de viol, Madame Morin, un couteau à la main, le chasse.

> Sors Tonio Morin. Autrement j'te passe ça au travers du corps! . . . J'aurais dû t'tuer! J'aurais dû t'tuer! [Madame Morin, mariée, 5 enfants, 48 ans] (DELISLE, *Un reel ben beau, ben triste*, 98-99)

La révolte de Marianna, vivant à l'étroit dans ce Bas-du-Fleuve des années 30, se matérialise lorsque sa jeune amie, servante chez un bourgeois, subit l'aussaut sexuel de son "patron." Elle décide alors de partir avec sa protégée pour la ville.

> . . . j'veux pas continuer l'règne de l'ennuyance, l'règne du temps égrené entre la misère pis nos maris, pis les lavages, pis les silences, pis les chapelets . . . pis c'est pour ça que j'm'en vas. [Marianna, blanchisseuse, veuve, 29 ans] (LABERGE, *C'était avant la guerre . . .*, 116)

Trouve-t-on plus de révoltées dans la jeune génération de la société contemporaine? Pas vraiment. Soit parce qu'elles vivent plus que leurs aînées en conformité avec elles-mêmes, soit qu'elles aussi aient étouffé leur rage au coeur.

Le suicide de deux jeunes filles témoigne d'une révolte qu'on préfère retourner contre soi parce qu'on ne voit pas d'autre issue face à un besoin d'absolu confronté à la médiocrité de la vie des gens qui nous entourent.

> Laissez-moi donc m'enfuir
> Vous me terrorisez
> Vous m'étouffez trop l'âme
> Avec vos mains qui serrent
> Laissez-moi me préserver.
> [Jocelyne, célibataire, vendeuse, 21 ans]
>
> (LABERGE, *Jocelyne Trudelle trouvée morte dans ses larmes*, 78)

Le suicide de Jocelyne entraîne celui de sa meilleure amie Carole, célibataire et vendeuse également.

Un autre personnage, Christine, 21 ans, anorexique durant l'adolescence, est mariée à un marginal. Poussée à bout par son père, homme surprotecteur qui ne l'a jamais acceptée, elle se fait d'abord violence avant de laisser éclater la douleur qu'il lui cause. La terreur se juxtapose à la douleur et Christine, seule avec son père dans une chambre d'hôtel, le tue à coups de bouteille cassée en hurlant:

> Tu veux m'tuer! . . . Tu veux m'tuer! . . .
>
> (mots précédés quelques instants à peine par)
>
> J'veux pas m'tuer! . . . J'veux pas m'tuer! . . . [Christine, mariée, sans métier, 21 ans] (LABERGE, *L'homme gris*, 59)

Un autre meurtre fera l'objet d'une pièce, celui de Gérald "Ti-Fou," handicapé mental de 20 ans. Alors que sa soeur Pierrette — 18 ans — danse frénétiquement dans l'espoir d'avorter, "Ti-Fou," surexcité, l'étrangle en se masturbant contre elle. Elle ne pourra réaliser son rêve de vivre ailleurs que dans son milieu familial malsain. Le drame de sa mort est le point central de la pièce de DELISLE, *Un reel ben beau, ben triste*.

En fait, mis à part ces cas extrêmes, la violence quand elle s'exprime est plutôt verbale; la révolte souvent sous-jacente n'arrive pas à se manifester, sauf si elle prend la forme du rejet de l'univers masculin.

LA REVENDICATION LESBIENNE

L'analyse qui précède portait sur les personnages des pièces de cinq auteures s'attachant à décrire les rapports de couple en privilégiant l'angle de vue féminin. Elles inscrivent leurs pièces dans la société québécoise traditionnelle et contemporaine.

Il en est tout autrement de l'univers de J. Marchessault. Sa démarche théâtrale repose sur son engagement de féministe lesbienne radicale. Préoccupée de retracer l'histoire et la culture des femmes, trop longtemps occultées par la société patriar-

cale, elle met en scène dans ses pièces des romancières et des poétesses contemporaines. A la différence des autres femmes auteures, elle se singularise à nouveau en choisissant ses personnages en dehors de la société québécoise à une exception près. Le choix du français universel — en contraste avec le "joual," sorte de franglais populaire utilisé par les autres femmes auteures du Québec — de même que son langage souvent poétique, accentue sa singularité.

Dans *La saga des poules mouillées* où elle fait parler quatre romancières canadiennes-françaises, elle dénonce l'archaïsme de cette société, son paternalisme et son cléricalisme, étouffoirs des femmes et de leur création.

Dans *La terre est trop courte Violette Leduc*, elle met en scène l'écrivaine française — célèbre protégée de Simone de Beauvoir — et son amante Hermine. Elle dénonce à nouveau la censure exercée sur les oeuvres des femmes écrivains relatant des amours lesbiennes. La difficulté d'écrire, d'être publiée et reconnue, d'autant plus grande quand on est femme, est un thème omniprésent chez elle. Il est au coeur de la pièce mettant en scène la romancière *Anaïs Nin, dans la queue de la comète*. L'amour lesbien revient en force dans une pièce mettant en scène les amours célèbres d'Alice B. Toklas et de Gertrude Stein, de Natalie Barney et de Renée Vivien.

Pa sa présentation de personnages cosmopolites — femmes écrivains pour la plupart — transgressant la chronologie de l'histoire pour provoquer leurs rencontres imaginaires, l'auteure se veut porteuse d'un message universel.

Elle fait dire à la romancière Anne (Hébert) :

> Nous devons à la fois envahir la légende et le mythe et l'Histoire. [Anne, romancière québécoise] (MARCHESSAULT, *La saga des poules mouillées*, 171)

En cela et par la place qu'elle accorde au lesbianisme dans son théâtre, elle se démarque radicalement des autres auteures, elle annonce le courant le plus novateur du théâtre féminin.

Les trois courants du théâtre feminin

Dans le théâtre de femmes produit au Québec depuis la dernière décennie, on peut identifier trois courants qui parfois se chevauchent chronologiquement mais dont on peut discerner le temps fort pour chacun des trois.

Le premier courant qu'on qualifierait de prise de parole/spectacles est fortement influencé par le mouvement de libération des femmes. Théâtre militant, souvent conçu par des jeunes comédiennes se regroupant en cellules de production exclusivement féminines, il s'attache à dénoncer l'oppression de la femme dans la société patriarcale et à revendiquer le droit de parole sur la scène théâtrale.

Ce sont surtout des créations collectives qui, au moyen d'improvisations verbales et corporelles, proposent une série de tableaux sur des thèmes chers au féminisme. On y parle de la peur, de la solitude, de l'aliénation des femmes tout autant que des

injustices sociales et économiques. On y dénonce l'inceste, le viol et la violence, on y revendique l'avortement et plus globalement la réappropriation du corps et par là de l'identité des femmes.

Ces spectacles sont le plus souvent présentés dans des petites salles de théâtre ou dans lieux d'intervention, rejoignant un public féminin. Parfois joués à l'occasion de réjouissances collectives de femmes, ils prenaient la forme de "happenings" ou de "groupes de conscientisation" à la mode du temps. Elles empruntent tantôt le langage usuel, tantôt un langage poétique on encore un langage populaire, le "joual," très valorisé chez les écrivains québécois de cette période nationaliste.

C'est le théâtre de la révolte et du cri des femmes. De ce courant, seul le Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes existe toujours mais il a délaissé la création collective au profit du texte d'auteures.

Le second courant, le théâtre réaliste écrit, se détache de la création collective et de l'engagement féministe. Il est l'oeuvre de jeunes femmes auteures reprenant une forme plus traditionnelle d'écriture théâtrale. Elles construisent des pièces réalistes peignant, d'une palette sombre, les histoires de couple qui se font et se défont et des vies de femmes souvent prisonnières de leur condition.

Les personnages masculins toutefois mois nombreux que les personnages féminins, réapparaissent dans ces pièces contrairement à celles du courant précédent. Le thème des relations conjugales et des relations amoureuses, des rapports fille-mère et fille-père est au centre de la majorité de ces pièces. Ces auteures décrivent ce que les collectifs dénonçaient.

Leurs pièces sont jouées dans les salles de théâtre habituelles et de ce fait elles rejoignent un public plus large, non exclusivement féminin; elles reçoivent des subventions, des commandites. Leurs pièces sont publiées, jouées par des troupes amateures et étudiées notamment dans les collèges. Elles utilisent presqu'exclusivement le "joual," langage populaire des personnages qu'elles mettent en scène, québécois et québécoises de la société traditionnelle et contemporaine.

C'est le théâtre des femmes auteures dont les plus représentatives ont fait l'objet de cette analyse, les Bourget, Delisle, Laberge, Pelletier et Roy. Ce courant est appelé à se développer et à enrichir la production théâtrale québécoise dans son ensemble.

Le troisième courant, le plus récent, est le théâtre d'auteures féministe lesbien. Il se rattache au premier courant par son engagement militant, en étant toutefois moins didactique et plus structuré dans sa forme. On peut l'apparenter au second en ce qu'il est aussi un théâtre d'auteures. Il se veut plus annonciateur que revendicateur, plus symbolique et esthétique que réaliste, parfois épique. Il cherche à construire un univers qui renouvelle les modèles de femmes, empruntant à l'histoire et à la fiction. Leur action militante vise à promouvoir la culture féminine.

A l'exception de la plus ancienne dans ce courant, J. Marchessault — dont on a présenté la démarche — qui s'est assuré une large audience et dont les pièces sont

publiées, les autres peu nombreuses encore et apparues tout récemment se sont jusqu'ici produites sur la scène du Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes. Ce théâtre lesbien encore jeune tente de prendre la relève du féminisme radical et d'instaurer un art essentiellement féministe.

Le théâtre des collectifs s'est attaché à dénoncer l'aliénation des femmes et à promouvoir leur libération individuelle et collective; les "one-woman-show" ont souvent dépeint leur histoire de vie; les jeunes femmes auteures ont tracé des portraits réalistes de femmes d'hier et d'aujourd'hui; d'autres sont parties à la recherche des créatrices occultées dans le passé; d'autres enfin inventent des femmes mythiques et épiques.

Toutes ces paroles de femmes, chacune à leur manière, ont investi la scène théâtrale pour réhabiliter l'image de la femme. Elles ont sans contredit perçé le mur du silence, ouvert des brèches et inscrit un théâtre spécifique dans le paysage culturel québécois. Désormais il existe un théâtre féminin.

NOTES

[1] Le collectif Clio, *L'histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*, p. 500.

[2] L. Camerlain, *En de multiples scènes*, p. 73.

[3] Dans le cas de cinq pièces, les personnages n'ont pas été inclus dans ces statistiques, leur identification sociale étant impossible à déterminer.

[4] Voir à ce sujet l'article de Jane Moss, *Women's Theater in Quebec*, et la chronologie des 150 productions de théâtre féminin québécois depuis 1974 par Lorraine Camerlain dans son article *En de multiples scènes.*

[5] La pièce qui décrit l'ouverture d'une usine en 1902 et son rachat par une compagnie concurrente canadienne-anglaise en 1926 met en scène le monde ouvrier. Cependant les personnages non identifiés n'ont pu être comptabilisés.

[6] D. Lamoreux, *Fragments et collages, essai sur le féminisme québécois des années 70*, chapitre 2.

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BIRTH

Zoë Landale

1

This man is driving to Alberta, heart
silence-stretched. Hiatus.
Gas, dust-smell of a truck.
Anatomy gapes, records grey unroll of road
with the same flayed attention
as scarlet cruciform of autumn trees.
He drives. It uses up time.

To speak around what is important;
the dinosaur museum at Drumheller
rather than new bones of her absence
articulating her half of the clothes cupboard empty
Siamese gone, the corner of the bed he lies awake on.
The way one hand opens on cold air, drops as he says,
When she makes up her mind.
After work, he gets back to the apartment
at eight, thaws fish for dinner.
2 portions, the brown paper is marked;
his hands ache
until he has to run hot water on them.

2

Don't mind the blood,
a friend says. *It's healthy and normal.*
For nine months a woman's body prepares
for this. She tells me
of her suede shoes ruined in the delivery room,
gushes of brilliant wet life.
The smell of birth, she says.
Punch of air into new lungs.

To arrive at a warm destination and be held secure.
We come addressed to neither partners nor jobs;
puzzle   all our lives
if we have delivery instructions right.
What we fear:
burnish of cold air,
continuing on solitary
past all the safe harbours.

3

Past tense.
Wedged, the open door sets the furnace
humming, dampness swirls in from the river;
salmon tang   from monofilament nets
looped green over drying racks.
End of the season.

What we ache for, tie
lines we cast toward others   and miss.
Suspension of relief   feral-walking Siamese
sieved right through what you believed solid.
End of.
On dark-gleaming water, arc-lit freighters
ghost toward Annacis. We stand on
wide-planked docks
nets all around us. Hands empty
we learn to breathe   cold air.

SHE READS YOU A POEM ABOUT RAPE

Brian Burke

she reads you a poem about rape
over the phone
about nine-year-old boys
locked in freezers
& fifteen-year-old girls
arms hacked off
faces disfigured   a mother's
burden

she leaves you a note about your bare office walls
afraid to impose   she pins pictures
introducing herself
arranging her walls in a symmetry you admire
cartoons centred   posters tacked flat
corners even
the distance between each print measured

& now this photocopied poem
an angular sheet of paper spiked to your wall
tilting in the draft opening the office door
produces

when she comes to you on her couch
you witness her brilliant nudity collapse
as she buries her head in the cavity left in your chest
she cradles tight against your sheltering side
curls into a child again

she reads you a poem about rape
over the phone

over the phone

PERFORMANCE AND MEDIA

The Use of Image

Josette Féral

(Translated by Ron Birmingham)*

FROM ITS EARLIEST APPEARANCE in the 1950's around the time of Cage and Kaprow, to its most recent manifestations in the work of Laurie Anderson, Michel Lemieux, Monty Cantsin, and Rachel Rosenthal, the genre "performance" has undergone a significant evolution.[2] Originally a *mise en scène* of vulnerability in which the performer courted and submitted to the uncertainties of chance, today performance has increasingly come to rely upon the mastery of numerous and sophisticated technologies.[3]

Initially oriented towards the theatre and the public, performance branched out in the direction of the "show business" musical spectacle, thus attempting to define its own artistic territory and to establish itself as an independent art with its own laws, principles, tools, and techniques. During this initial phase, performance questioned the very process of creation. In a gesture of undisciplined self justification, performance turned in upon itself, scoffing at all rigorous attempts at self analysis. Today it has redirected its questions, experimenting in areas of form and material while searching for answers to the questions it has raised.[4] Such has been the evolution in performance recorded during the course of the past few years by artists such as Laurie Anderson and Michel Lemieux whose popularity bears witness to a concomitant evolution of the public's artistic temperament.

Our analysis will focus upon this evolution as it moves to embrace new and ever more numerous techniques. We shall question the reasons, the means, and the objectives of performance, showing how it can be understood as a theory of perception, and identifying perceptive strategies for both the performer and spectator.

Performance and Video

MONTY CANTSIN

Monty Cantsin and a girl friend are settled at a table in a fast-food restaurant located on a busy street in Montreal. Outside on the street, a camera looks in

* This article was first published in French in *40 ans de mise en scène: 1945-1985*, ed. Cl. Schumacher, Lochee Publications Ltd., Dundee, 1986, as proceedings of the Xth FIRT Congress in Glasgow.

through the large store front window of the restaurant, filming the scene. The image is blurred. Cantsin gets up and leaves the restaurant. The camera follows him, losing him briefly. He reappears in an apartment where the performance is to take place. In the room there are two television screens and a video camera set on a tripod; the camera will be used at the beginning of the performance. Monty Cantsin crosses the room, takes off his shoes. Facing the camera, he straps himself tightly to the wall, lifting his legs off the floor and folding them in front of him like a bonze. He appears to be levitating. A nurse approaches and takes enough blood from his arm to fill two test tubes. Drinking the blood, Cantsin drains one of the tubes, smashing the other across his temple. He begins to sing in a husky and chafing voice, decrying the violence and ugliness of the world. Violence against violence, he ignites the wall to which he is attached. Then, extinguishing the fire, he unties himself, crosses the room. There is a large round loaf of bread on a television just to his left. Hundreds of coins spew from the screen. Cantsin takes the loaf of bread and breaks it. Cathode screens light up. The colours and images are a blur. Slowly, he puts on his shoes, crosses the room, and leaves. He disappears for a few minutes, but reappears on the screens where the public sees him crossing the street and entering the very same restaurant where the sequence had begun a few minutes earlier. Thus ends both the performance and the video.

ELIZABETH CHITTY, *Demo Model*:

> The camera pans on a close-up of photos that appear to be of restaurant or cafeteria. Then moving back to widen its view, it captures two persons, one seated on a chair and the other lying on the ground. The former is reading the newspaper aloud, announcing a list of atrocities in a cutting monotone: violent death, murder, assassination. . . . The latter, unperturbed, is exercising, running through the daily work-out amidst various screens that project images of violence, blurred images whose lines are nearly imperceptible and whose colours wash into one another.
>
> The room is filled with equipment: film and video screens, motion picture and still cameras, and photocopying machines. The performer sits facing the public. She reads a book that she holds in her left hand. Her right hand operates a photocopying machine that spits out multiple copies of the text she is reading. The blue-tinged and violent flashes coming from the machine bounce off her with each successive copy, lighting and amplifying the sharp contours of her face. She stops, then closes the book.
>
> A performer who has put on a black raincoat and glasses, places herself against a white wall, assuming the poses of mannequin in what now appears to be a high fashion photography studio. A series of rapid flashes freezes her in different poses . . . flash . . . flash . . . flash, then black-out.

These are not recent examples, for each took place in the 1970's during the golden age of performance. However, they all share a certain number of characteristics, particularly the use of media (video screens, televisions, cameras) as an integral part of performance.[5]

Recourse to image and visual technology has increased over the years, and regardless of the form it takes (video screen, television, photographs, photocopiers . . .), has become an integral part of contemporary performance. Reproduction techniques have been given such an important role to play in performance that in many cases they have completely usurped performance space, giving birth to spectacle that has been conceived above all as image and has been realized exclusively for viewing on video. In such cases, artists have broken direct contact with the public, a contact which, in the early days, had been one of the fundamental requirements of performance.[6] This type of performance might best be referred to as "video performance" realized by "video artists" such as Elizabeth Chitty, Teri Chmilar, and Ken Feingold or, in a somewhat larger sense, by "media artists" such as the Levines, Tomiko Sasaki, and Tom Sherman.

These are somewhat radical manifestations of performance that for the purposes of the present study, we shall have to set aside as a distant class. However, most performance today has incorporated a certain amount of technology, with the result that technology has become an indispensable component of creative procedure. The omnipresence of technology in performance is perhaps the artist's response to what has become an image-oriented civilization, to society's indoctrination by the media, to a technological machine-dominated environment. It is assuredly the proof of performance's entrance into the realm of technology and of its sensitization to the times. It is also a confirmation that performance has joined the "era of technical reproduction," at the same time posing a certain number of conceptual problems as it brings back into question one of its founding principles: the refusal of "re-presentation."[7]

Performance Beyond Genre

DEFINITION

To attempt to define performance is a difficult enterprise.[8] Without any doubt, the very nature of performance defies definition. It is the artists that have individually established the precepts used to define the genre; it is the artists that continue to reinvent it within the context of each new performance. From the rituals of Hermann Nitzsch to the installations of Christo, from the concerts of Laurie Anderson to those of Meredith Monk, from the experiences of Chris Burden to those of Jochen Gerz, from the interventions of Terry Fox to those of Rachel Rosenthal, the distance is so great that any attempt to establish bridges or to identify constants would be utterly pretentious. However, over and above such diversity, a certain number of processes can be identified, methods and devices which govern the deployment of the various materials that performance uses and which give it its own particular dynamic properties. These processes, which we shall outline here, have been part of performance from its very inception; it is the theoretical descrip-

tion of them that has arrived late. Thus, they are not new to actual practice. Although the art of performance is alive and flourishing today, its tendency towards innovation has, on the other hand, diminished considerably. Nevertheless it remains that for those who are interested in the theatre, the art of performance is a very privileged vantage point from which to view the relationship between the performer and the theatrical environment, between the performer and technology.

Performance breaks the boundaries between genres and introduces a continuum between zones formerly judged to be irrevocably exclusive: art and life, greater and lesser art forms, between the sophisticated and more common genres. In the same way, it no longer makes a clear distinction betwen music and noise, poetry and prose, reality and image, movement and dance. Refusing both rupture and confinement, performance takes for granted that which the twentieth century affirms in its totality: that progression from one level to another within the same discipline is continuous, levels being analogically rather than digitally related. For example, performance affirms that walking and dancing belong to the same continuum of movement, there being only an imperceptible distinction betwen them (*e.g.*, the work of Pina Bausch), that the sound of the voice and the hammering of metal share fundamental musical components (*e.g.*, the work of Meredith Monk).

Thus, the very concept of the work of art is brought into question. By its transient nature, its structure, by the means that it deploys and the objectives it aims to attain, performance refutes the very notions of "masterpiece" and "work of art" in the traditional sense, substituting for them the concept of a transitory and fleeting work.

Although these concepts are not new, it seems useful to recall them here, for they constitute the foundation upon which performance was built at its inception. Nevertheless, their innovative value has dimmed due to the fact that they have today spread to all the arts, proving that certain initially radical reforms have now become an accepted part of cultural mores.

THE STAKES

Even more interesting, the stakes of the enterprise no longer reside in the aesthetic value of the finished product but in the immediate effect it has upon the public and upon the performer himself. In other words, the stakes reside essentially in the way in which the work becomes an integral part of the reality in which it takes place. As opposed to the museum piece, performance engages the public, inviting confrontation. Thus artists describe performance with concepts such as "new communication," "direct confrontation," and "theatre of life."[9]

The very *conditions of enunciation* take on an importance far greater than that of the work itself. As Jerome Rothenberg notes:

> There follows a new sense of function in art, in which the value of a work isn't inherent in its formal or aesthetic characteristics . . . its shape or its complexity or

> simplicity as an object . . . but in what it does, or what the artist or his surrogate does with it, how he performs it in a given context.[10]

This principle governs all performance; it is this principle that performance puts into action.

In performance, it is internal movement that counts, the energy that is released during the performance and that is elicited in the confrontation with the public. Thus, Michel Benamou notes that post-modern performance "is an energetic theatre, *i.e.*, a succession of intensities rather than symbolic actions based on the presence/absence syndrome."[11]

THE MANIPULATION OF BODY AND SPACE

A second characteristic of performance concerns the manipulation of the performer's body and the usage of the space which the body occupies, both fundamental principles indispensable to every act of performance. Body and space are the primary materials which the performing mind evacuates, segments, and then reoccupies according to parameters and perceptions known only to the performer.

The performer works with his body as the painter works with his canvas. As a primary material on which he experiments, the performer moulds his body, inscribing it in space, withdrawing it from space; he tenses it, relaxes it, isolates it, twists it, folds it, pushes it to the limits of endurance, of suffering, and even of repugnance. His body becomes both a tool with which to experience space, and an object upon which spatial experiments are conducted. During such experiments, the performer is both subject and object; moving between two extremes of a single process, he is both producer and product.

But if the artist works his body in performance, the performance itself also works the body in turn, transforming it, enveloping it, modelling it, moulding, projecting, breaking, absorbing, and reforming the body as it moves. Thus, the principal characteristic of performance is that it manipulates space, time, and the body of the performer. "It transforms," says Vito Acconci. Performance transforms; it is transformation in process.

Representation is not an essential element of performance. Rather, it is the mechanisms authorized and put into motion by performance that become the key aspects of the genre. In this sense, performance has no external referent outside the process that it generates and records. Performance is above all operation and mechanism, a process initiated by the subject in view of his own dissolution in the "otherness" of material, machine, sound, and image. When the experience succeeds, the boundaries that separate subject and medium become permeable, porous, permitting us to transgress the normal limits they would otherwise define.

Such dissolution is an integral part of the "death pulsion" of the subject. In performance, the subject is more often involved in an act of dissolution than in an act of confirmation and absolute mastery. But this dissolution is staged, pro-

grammed, controlled by a technological apparatus. Although this apparatus frees the performer and facilitates mastery, it nonetheless imposes its own limit, limits that are directly linked to the level of technical sophistication to which the performer must involuntarily submit.

Absolute mastery on the one hand, constraint on the other; it is between these two poles that the game of performance is played. Caught between them, the performer is mind and matter, producer and consumer, object and subject of his desire, trapped in a process that he alone has set in motion. The auditory, visual, and perceptive conditions that accompany his performance impose the limits within which he operates, define the limits that he will ultimately transgress as he as subject, is absorbed by the performing act.

LIVE EXPERIMENTATION: THE "MEDIUM" IS THE MESSAGE

Most certainly, "performance" implies the escape from representational theatre. Performance represents only itself; its content plane is bounded by its own processes. Situated within process itself, its "signifieds" must be decoded; they must be constructed. Thus, it is possible to say that performance has only the meaning it elicits. Refusing to become part of a metaphysics of representation, performance eliminates the sign as the bearer of meaning.

Far from registering that which is to be signified, performance calls forth flux, zones of desire, and imaginary spaces. Its interaction with reality is neither descriptive, pedagogical, didactic, nor even aesthetic, but rather interventional. Completely outside the representational mode that governs the actor on stage, the performer implicates himself in process; he takes human, political, and biological risks, placing himself inside the mechanisms that propel his performance. He is the process.[12] It is this sort of implication that Les Levine brought to light in *Space Walk* (1969):

> The camera is on a dolly . . . [the dolly] holds the camera nice and steady but it also makes it mobile. So I'm walking around the room with the camera, with my eye to the camera, looking at everything that is in the room. . . . It takes about half an hour to do that. What I'm talking about in that situation is being lost in the space. About being completely lost in the space that I'm in. Not any psychological version of space, just that particular space. Of not understanding what it means to me that the wall and floor meet at that particular point. And what relationship to my mind and to my body has that got? That I could sense that space in any other way that I might understand what it means to me. . . . There is no way out of being lost.
>
> I was interested in the idea too, of the difference between being in something and looking at it: like the difference between being in a movie in the space where the movie is being made and sitting in the audience watching the movie, you're seeing a picture and your experience is related to that two-dimensionality, of whether you think it's an interesting or boring picture.[13]

The media technology that the performer brings to the stage and the objects with which he surrounds himself favour a greater flexibility in performance strategy, thereby enhancing the performer's play. They become extensions of his body, hurling it into time and space, transforming it into a multi-dimensional object of ubiquitous nature, making it something quite different from that which it would normally be. They can multiply the performer or reduce him to infinity; they can cut him up into pieces or reassemble him according to plans known only to the imagination.

Yet, although these objects greatly diversify the usage to which the body of the artist may be put, they also impose restrictions of their own, restrictions determined by the nature of the object involved. It is a give and take situation in which total freedom is denied the artist who must finally submit to limits imposed by the technology he uses.

Thus, although essentially an instrument of liberation, the medium used limits the performer to that which can be achieved within the scope of its own possibilities. As the performer interacts with the medium, the medium reveals its limitations at the same time modifying both the performer and the vision he has of the world. Speaking about film in 1930, Benjamin noted the following: "That which characterizes film is not only the way in which man presents himself to the camera, but also the way in which he sees, thanks to the camera, the world that surrounds the camera"; and he added, "A look at the psychology of performance shows us that the camera can play a test role."[14] Benjamin's observations may be applied integrally, for there is not one example of performance in which this double perspective is not in play.

Far from telling us about the world, media in performance tell us more about the subject's perception of the world. The technology used in performance conveys an occult message concerning the artist's vision of the reality which surrounds him. Performance is thus the vehicle for this message.

Performance as the Theorization of Perception

The third, and without doubt the most important, characteristic of performance is the relationship of the artist to his public. The performer alone set the conditions of this relationship, determining its form, and often, in so doing, instituting the perceptive strategies which constitute an essential if not fundamental part of performance art.

THE ORGANIZATION OF PERCEPTIVE STRATEGIES

The performer questions the perceptive mechanisms *of his public*, while at the same time trying to bring the spontaneity of these mechanisms into play (reactions of rejection, disgust, or boredom; interest in colour and movement; sensitivity to

heat and odours, etc.) and to organize new *perceptive strategies* that lie outside of the realm of ordinary perceptive experience. For the most part, it is a question eliciting perceptive rather than emotional reactions, the latter being better situated within the realm of the purely theatrical.

There are numerous means that can be used to institute perceptive strategies: repetition, multiplication, decomposition, parcelling out, atomization, immobilization, etc. However varied they may be, their action works on the "signifieds" of signs, on their content. The immediate corollary to the breaking up of a sign and to the accompanying dispersion of its meaning, is the modification of the spectator's habitual ways of perceiving images that are placed before him.

The spectator is suddenly tormented, bombarded by images which outrage him and at the same time do violence to him both directly and indirectly. Images are multiplied to infinity by a camera that records and retransmits them in an almost obsessional manner. They appear either in a state of inertia where they eventually break up under the weight of their immobility, or in a state of perpetual repetition where they finally explode due to the effect of multiplicity. In all cases, it is not only the treatment of the image that is modified, but also — and especially — the perception that the public has of the image.[15]

As the performer addresses the spectator, he uses his body to speak, all the while preparing the ground for what is to be an experiment in perception. While the performer questions his own limits, he also questions those of the spectator's faculties of attention, empathy, and rejection. One must recognize that reactions to performance are more violent than reactions to other forms of art; they elicit discontent, block communication, invite boredom and sometimes anguish, more rarely empathy, and very often a curiosity that is quickly exhausted often leaving the artist caught up in his own experimentation.

Chris Burden's *Prelude to 220, or 110* (F-Space, Santa Ana, California, October 1971) is a case in point.

> The gallery was flooded with 12 inches of water. Three other people and I waded through the water and climbed onto 14-foot ladders, one ladder per person. After everyone was positioned, I dropped a 220 electric line into the water. The piece lasted from midnight until dawn, about six hours. There was no audience except for the participants.
>
> The piece was an experiment in what would happen. It was a kind of artificial "men in a life raft" situation. The thing I was attempting to set up was a hyped-up situation with high danger, which would keep them awake, confessing, and talking, but it didn't, really. After about two and a half hours, everybody got really sleepy. They would kind of lean on their ladders by hooking their arms around, and go to sleep. It was surprising that anyone could sleep, but we all did intermittently. There was a circuit breaker outside the building and my wife came in at six in the morning and turned it off and opened the door. I think everyone enjoyed it in a weird sort of way. I think they had some of the feelings that I had, you know? They felt kind of elated, like they had really done something.[16]

THE MEDIA

Because visual and auditory media possess elements that frame, channel, and determine the spectator's perception, they are often the driving force that makes the manipulation of perception possible. They permit experimentation; they are *catalyzers* authorizing the changes in perception that are to take place.

Different media (telephotography, photography, film, video, television) act on the performer's body and the space which surrounds it like lenses designed to enlarge the infinitely small, to reduce the infinitely large, and to focus the spectator's attention on limited physical spaces arbitrarily selected by a performer who transforms them into imaginary spaces, passage zones in the ebb and flow of his own phantasms. Media highlight the body of the performer, fragmented and yet whole, a body perceived and portrayed as a *place of desire*, of displacement and fluctuation, a body that becomes, through performance, an integral part of the performance art in all its guises.

The performer draws these manifestations to the surface more or less violently, offering them as spectacle for "others" to view either live or in delay. They are mediated by different forms of technology so that they might be submitted to a collective verification in which image operates as memory, as a screen, and as a mirror of the stage.

The screen appears as a second stage capable of effecting transformations that would be impossible in reality: condensation, displacement, superposition. Such transformations are similar to those that occur in dreams, for they are motivated by a logic whose casual relations are not immediately grasped in the superficial glance of the unschooled observer. In order to understand them, it is necessary to study them closely, to analyse them, to single out certain aspects, to grasp their rhythms. Reading such a palimpsest is not everyone's cup of tea. Some may prefer to experience performance "at the surface" where visual and auditory impressions are programmed within the framework of the performance.

Thus, media play a fundamental role not only in selecting and synchronizing the spectator's zones of observation and listening, but in creating rhythms and raising them to a perceptible level. In so doing, the media operate both to liberate and to restrain the spectator. As an instrument of liberation, media allow the spectator to escape direct action (for example, beating in *Marat/Sade*, produced by Carbone 14); as an instrument of restriction, they limit the spectator's view, forcing him to observe exactly that which the performer wants. In this way, performance imposes the negative theology that Benjamin speaks about; it imposes distancing, guardian against the temptation of shamanism, metaphysics, and ritual.

Although removed from the performance itself, ritual sometimes reappears in the content of images (see the performances of Monty Cantsin today, or those practiced earlier by Hermann Nitzsch). In cases where performance incorporates such

a process of ritualization, the use of cameras and video screens introduces a distancing effect, permitting the spectator to escape the charm and/or revulsion that would normally be experienced were the ritual taking place live on stage. Erecting a screen between spectator and performer and bringing mediated "representation" back into play, image empowers observation devoid of emotional involvement.

DECIPHERING

"Reproduction techniques allow us to analyse realities which heretofore were lost unawares in the ocean of perceived movement," said Benjamin.[17] Performance helps in this analytical or "deciphering" task in which the participation of the spectator is a founding element.

By the very way in which it functions, performance image calls the spectator's attention to the mechanisms by which the image is reproduced (*reproductibility*), downplaying the actual content of the image itself. The image is never used to illustrate a "signified" as such. In this sense we can say that performance doesn't mean, but rather makes us feel. It not only precludes discourse, it also confounds the image's normal semantic charge, if indeed it had one to begin with. Often in counterpoint with respect to other visual and auditory elements of the performance (text, word, gesture), the image is caught in a network of processes initiated by the performance; it is in this network that meaning is lost. In short, image is no longer the vehicle of knowledge or of an ideology. On the contrary, by its very functioning, performance image attempts to eradicate all forms of knowledge and all conventions upon which such knowledge is based, particularly aesthetic conventions. In performance, image is purposely displaced; its usage is governed by neither genre nor school; performance image becomes an art in no man's land. In so doing, it provokes the spectator, renewing his perception of the ordinary, forcing him to react in extraordinary ways. Thus, in the final analysis, performance image is an integral part of the social dimension of art.[18]

Writing on the subject of film in 1935, Benjamin stated that "Tactile receptivity is less a function of attentiveness than it is of familiarization. . . . To a great extent, such familiarization also determines visual receptivity," and, he added, "visual image transforms each spectator into an expert, . . . whose attitude requires no effort."[19] These comments are applicable to performance. By using media and image, the performer draws the spectator into a game of rapprochement and distancing, transforming him quite unawares into an expert.

Familiarization does not mean alienation. Provided that the performance offers the spectator both the image and its source, that is the representation and the object represented, and provided that such images are never completely intact but always fragmented, they can be read only in the content of that which takes place in the world outside the screen and the stage.[20]

It seems evident that such images never stand for that which they represent, but for that which they say about the processes of representation, reproduction, and doubling. In fact, the screen tries to capture the evanescent nature of movement, of impulsion, of desire, of perception. That which is affirmed is the impulse of a performing subject who pursues an object that he can never catch, an object whose immutable characteristics escape his grasp, an object that he can at best capture only in movement.

This process can not rely solely upon the video screen. The screen points out its manipulator as well as the model it manipulates. Thus, it indicates distance and proximity, often putting both reality and its image simultaneously on stage, transforming reality into still life and image into dynamic reality in a movement where borders between reality and image intersect. Image no longer only represents, it is caught in the game of presence and absence, production and product, movement and fixedness, reproduction and authenticity, *i.e.*, in the domain of performance itself.

Conclusion

THE PARADOX OF PERFORMANCE: EVANESCENCE AND REPRODUCTIBILITY

Nevertheless, recourse to technological image in today's performance has uncovered a paradox: image and the various media that create it appear as a process that legitimates the reality of the stage. Performance both observes and is observed, and thus becomes inseparably linked to duration, to the "before" and the "after." Once more a linearly oriented spectacle, performance quite paradoxically returns to the very kind of representation that it had once sought to escape, the sole difference being that its mode of representation originates in the use of image.

Indeed, performance originates in a game of reproduction through image, a game in which image is used to baffle, multiplied to infinity, scattered to the point of distintegration, thus assuring the mobility of all the elements of the spectacle, becoming at once both object and subject, observer and observed, framer and framed.

The spectator is bombarded by these various elements in such a way that he finds it "impossible to fix the gaze." His attention moves from one image to the other, from one sound to the other, becoming decentred, often experiencing only an impression of synesthesia. In one glance, the spectator perceives both the work of art and his own mode of perceiving the work of art. Immediately, performance refers him back to himself and to his own mode of perception. In this process, performance is dissociated from its own origin; it succeeds by instituting perceptive strategies defined by the media through which it passes.[21]

Initially founded in an act of vulnerability, today performance asserts itself through an act of mastery in which theatricality is blurred. Performance has suc-

ceeded in distancing itself from theatre and has entered through the front door into the era of technology, revealing as it goes the mechanisms of the art of image.

NOTES

[1] The term "media" is here understood in its largest sense to include all technological processes mediating the representation of the subject to himself.

[2] Laurie Anderson is an American performer, Michel Lemieux from Quebec. Monty Cantsin, of Hungarian origin, resides now in Quebec.

[3] In her interview for *The Art of Performance* (New York: Dutton, 1984), Laurie Anderson recalls that measuring the technological devices at her disposal has brought great pleasure "because tools will teach you things. I want to control the technology I use, and not just set them on automatic" (285).

[4] Cf. the experiments of Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Terry Fox, Marina Abramovic/ Ulay, Denis Oppenheim, Gina Pane, Yvonne Rainer.

[5] These performances share yet another common trait; they were all preserved on video cassette in order to be rented out by the agents of the artists involved. Ironically, the video tapes function as a kind of historical memory. As records of the performance, they date it with the sort of past with which performance had attempted to sever all ties.

[6] In these particular cases, the experience of the audience is essentially visual, mediated by audio-visual equipment and experienced in the two dimensional reality of the screen.

[7] The allusion is to Walter Benjamin's "L'oeuvre d'art à l'ère de sa reproductibilité technique," in *Essais 2* (1935-1940).

[8] The first theoretical reflection on performance came from M. Benamou and C. Caramello who addressed the problem of definition in 1976 at a conference organized by the Center for 20th Century Studies at Madison, Wisconsin (Cf. *Performance in Post-Modern Culture*, Coda Press, 1977). Roselee Goldberg has written a very serious and detailed history of performance, tracing its roots back to early surrealistic examples (Cf. *Performance: Live Art, 1909 to the Present*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979). More recently, G. Battcock and R. Nickas have compiled an anthology that includes several theoretical articles written by performers, as well as interviews with various practitioners (Cf. *The Art of Performance*, New York: Dutton, 1984). Outside these few serious and well-documented publications, efforts to define the theory of performance are rare and scattered, appearing here and there in various testimonies of artists and in the innumerable pamphlets that circulate describing the performances of specific artists. A theoretical work offering a global view of performance and of performance related questions is still very much in need.

[9] Terry Fox refutes those who pretend that performance is an integral part of the history of art, insisting instead upon the notions: "tentative new communication," "direct confrontation," and "the theatre of life." Cf. *The Art of Performance*, p. 205.

[10] J. Rothenberg, "New Models, New Visions: Some Notes Toward a Poetics of Performance," *Performance in Post-Modern Culture*, p. 14.

[11] "Presence and Play" in *Performance in Post-Modern Culture*, p. 6.

[12] However, as Vito Acconci reminds us, in becoming an integral part of the piece, the artist must offer more to the spectator than simply himself. (Cf. *The Art of Performance*, p. 195). He must act, use, and manipulate objects. The presence on stage

of various objects and technical apparati is incumbent upon the purely practical characteristics necessitated by the form's specular character.

[13] Lee Levine, "Artistic," in *The Art of Performance*, pp. 245, 248.

[14] Benjamin, p. 115.

[15] I am thinking here of that which a certain theatrical practice, inspired by Foreman and by contemporary art in general, affirms about the spectator, *i.e.*, that the spectator observes in two distinct modes: in the first mode he follows the spectacle and its unfolding, while in the second and more removed mode, he watches himself in the act of observing. This double mode is made possible by the use of media which can show one (the art form) and the other (the spectator), successively and simultaneously, and in so doing, disturbing the spectator, compensating for any insufficiences he might have, and forcing him to a new awareness.

[16] Chris Burden and Jan Butterfield, "Through the Night Softly," in *The Art of Performance*, p. 229.

[17] Benjamin, *Poésie et révolution*, p. 199.

[18] Cf. Rachel Rosenthal and Françoise Sullivan.

[19] Benjamin, *Poésie et révolution*, pp. 122-23.

[20] Nonetheless, as a result of the frequent use of media with its concomitant repetition of images, the spectator is bombarded with meanings to such an extent that he is dumbfounded by the very question of meaning. In this state he can not possibly react to a degree of semantic stimulation greater than that with which he can normally deal. In a similar way, slowing down the image often to the point of freezing it, creates a hypnotic effect, numbing the spectator, thereby displacing all ordinary reaction.

[21] Benjamin, *Poésie et révolution*, pp. 122-23.

DIVORCE

Deborah Eibel

What went wrong
With the children?

In lovely houses
All over Brooklyn
The children
Broke up marriages.

"What is it like," they asked
To be an anonymous virtuoso
In the New York Philharmonic?"

When the fathers moved out,
The mothers repeated
The question.

"What is it like
To be an anonymous virtuoso?"

And the fathers missed the children
And the lovely houses.

THE MAN IN THE BOOT

Eric Trethewey

It's almost as if, dipping our faces
beneath the surface, we could see
clear to bottom where things shimmer,
then compose themselves into steady light:
the slender shapes, say, of two shiny fish
in the cove, white bellies up.

There, where it is summer still, a man
at dusk, leaning over a gunwale,
tries to pick up starfish on the blade
of his oar. And a small boy with him,
face in the water almost, peers along
the oar's bent image at hues eddying

down below. They nearly settle
into clear-edged shapes, always waver
back to color again. He might just as well
interrogate the echoing knock of wood
on wood or the weedy smell of the sea
for what lies on the bottom.

Everything is a fathom under, at least:
even an old boot, turned upside down
at roadside, that the boy saw on his way
to the store once that summer, has a man
in it, buried headfirst beneath gravel,
holding his breath, still waiting to be saved.

ALIENATION AND IDENTITY

The Plays of Margaret Hollingsworth

Dorothy Parker

A NOTABLE ASPECT OF CANADIAN DRAMA is the strikingly large percentage of ranking dramatists who are women, and in this constellation Margaret Hollingsworth is a very bright star, sharing with many of the other women writers an interest in feminism and the female experience, but adding to this a particular concern for the manifold problems of the immigrant and outsider, and the isolated mind in general. These two themes recur in all of her plays, growing in complexity and profundity from her early work to the most recent; and correspondingly, what starts as an essentially realist style — overlaid from the beginning, however, with telling incongruities and grotesqueries — becomes increasingly subjective and surreal. "I can compare it to Magic Realism. . . . That's the way I see life. I see it in a very surreal way, but rooted in practical reality."[1]

In many ways the artistic development of Margaret Hollingsworth corresponds to the creative modes described by André Breton in his Surrealist Manifesto.[2] Breton believed in the free association of words and images, holding that unexpected juxtapositions could create new hybrids having the power to reflect, or even to evoke pure psychological states. Form for the surrealist referred less to the technical aspects of a work of art than to an approach to and affirmation of a particular consciousness in which the mind's capacity to synthesize its own reality is central. For Hollingsworth, too, surrealism has meant freedom to design a world of her own imagination. As play has succeeded play, she has transcended the literal and narrative limitations of realism by increasingly complex psychological exploration. Time has acquired new flexibility in her drama; space has been endowed with more subjective meaning; and language has begun to express the irrational qualities of the mind. Not surprisingly, much of Hollingsworth's university training has been in psychology.

Related to Hollingsworth's interest in psychology is her concern for the problems of women. Nearly all of her plays take a female point of view, but because her approach is psychological rather than philosophical, this view is always ideologically neutral. She concentrates on women's needs and experience, and is interested in a "female" approach to problems, which takes the form of explorations rather

than answers or solutions. And, unlike doctrinaire feminists, she is less concerned with women relating to each other in a corporate experience, than in women discovering and realizing themselves individually. In fact, Hollingsworth nearly always focuses on the isolated person. This relates her concern with women to her preoccupation with the immigrant, the lonely outsider in an alien land, plagued by feelings of dislocation and loss of identity. Such feelings are compounded, of course, when the immigrants are women, aliens by both nationality and gender. And in her most recent work this overlaps further into concern for the mental isolation of being a writer.

The shapes and settings of Hollingsworth's plays reflect these feelings. The early plays have claustophobic settings — small rooms, shacks, lonely farmhouses — situated in a huge, featureless land. These sometimes symbolize an emotional "safe place," at other times a stifling environment.

> I finally pinned down my sense of smallness in a vast outside and the sense of the outside always impinging and my having to make a small space that can be mine.[3]

A change comes about with Hollingsworth's fifth published play, *Ever Loving*, in which three immigrant women learn how to cope with the terrors of a strange, new land, but it is their ability to cope rather than their terror that is reflected in an opening out of space in the play and in its extreme fluidity of time and space. And this more confidently subjective form is central to most of her recent work, particularly *War Babies* which is in many ways a consumation of all Hollingsworth's earlier technical, stylistic, and thematic explorations.

HOLLINGSWORTH'S TWO EARLY one-act plays — *Bushed* exhaustion and irrelevance of men living in an environment which is itself an (1973) and *Operators* (1974) — are carved-out moments set in space, moments selected not for their strangeness or qualities of crisis, but for their very typicalness. Both plays reveal a Pinteresque darkness of vision overlaid with pathos and humour. Even their titles have the same laconic brevity as Pinter's. *Bushed* is a pun on the anachronism; while *Operators*, which suggests mechanical functionaries, contrasts ironically with the poignant humanity of the three women in the play, who are struggling to reach out and communicate with each other. As in Pinter's work, anonymous rooms have a psychic life of their own, so the constricted space in *Bushed* and *Operators* has power to affect the audience emotionally. In Hollingsworth's plays, however, it is our awareness of the vast empty space outside that gives her small rooms their ominous, and peculiarly Canadian, character. The threat that surrounds the shed provides an environment for the eruption of violence in *Operators*. In *Bushed*, on the other hand, Hollingsworth uses the same

device for comic purposes where the incongruity of a laundromat in a decimated forest forms the basic absurdity of the play.

Technically, *Bushed* has admirable shapeliness and economy. It starts with Lehto, a Finnish immigrant, sitting in the laundromat in the late afternoon, rolling a cigarette, pocketing it while he talks to his Ukrainian friend Kuzac, waiting for the arrival of the elderly female laundry attendant, then lighting his cigarette and leaving as she locks up and the play ends. In between these two minimal gestures, the life stories and characters of the two men are revealed in Pinter-like dialogue which runs along parallel tracks that only occasionally intersect. Hollingsworth even incorporates some Pinteresque word play to point the fact that English is not the native tongue of either man, a fact which further emphasizes their isolation, not merely from the women washing clothes in the background but even from each other. Black humour is also here, but without the threateningly sinister quality found in Pinter's plays. Lehto's plan to rape the laundry attendant is patently absurd and merely emphasizes the pathos of his faded vitality. This is comically emblematized by the women, who interrupt the sexual boasting of the two old men by getting between them to fold their sheets, which billow out and then snap into tight folds as the women grunt and strain with effort.

Where *Bushed* focuses on two male immigrants living in a harsh environment, *Operators* is centred on the problems of three women enduring life in a similarly isolated community, a factory in the north of Ontario. They are further cut off by gender from the rest of the workers, relegated to a floor in the factory by themselves, spending their breaks in a garden shed, and feeling themselves aliens in the company for which they do hard, boring, ill-paid work. Hollingsworth deals with none of these factors specifically, however. They are merely part of the texture of the women's lives as they struggle with the anxieties of family life, their immigrant status, loneliness, and the lack of proper communication with each other.

As in many of Pinter's plays, their relationship is seen to be based on power: not the usual social pecking order founded on status or wealth, but a more subtle treatment of power derived from psychological manipulation — hence the title "Operators." Christmas, the eldest of the three women, gains ascendancy over Sara from the aura of mystery she cultivates, and by knowing things about her friend's private life — that her son is on probation, that her husband is "just a Pole." When Jerri, younger and an ex-hippie, appears, this *status quo* is undermined by the sheer casualness with which Jerri volunteers information about her most intimate experiences. Her openness saps Christmas's reticence and authority, until Christmas explodes into a violence which frightens all three into a new level of self-revelation and acceptance. Jerri admits her penchant for destroying and running away; Sara confesses that her son beat a parking lot attendant nearly to death; Christmas admits poignantly in the last moments of the play that she too is "only a Pole" and for the first time reveals her real name.

However, the conclusion of *Operators* strikes a note of ambiguity that has become the hallmark of Hollingsworth's endings. The audience senses that the few moments of insight into their own characters that the women experience will be erased ultimately by their continuing need for external validation in an environment that nullifies them. As Hollingsworth comments: "To be an individual in this place is perhaps the loneliest experience a person can have — it is no wonder that they turn to each other, to their families, and to their children for compensations — anything rather than turn inward."[4]

In both the plays that followed, *Alli Alli Oh* in 1979, and its companion piece, *Islands*, written five years later, the same close psychological scrutiny and basic plotlessness appear, along with a similar concentration on the isolation of women in a remote environment. Hollingsworth intensifies the isolation socially by making one of her characters, Muriel, gay, and the other, Alli, mentally ill. Hollingsworth's focus in *Alli Alli Oh,* however, is neither lesbianism nor mental illness, but the more widely feminist concern of a woman's struggle to find out who she is and what she can do. Like the women in *Operators* who turn to each other "for compensation," Alli turns at the beginning of the play to Muriel for the answers to her sense of emptiness. In one of her soliloquies she says:

> I wasn't a clown, or a ballerina, or a wife or a dinner dispenser. I was alone with someone. But I couldn't tell who she was in relation to me. I didn't know whether I could function. . . .[5]

As with most women, Alli identifies her selfhood and her value as a person with her social functions — her marital, maternal, and domestic services — and when she fails in these, or when they cease to be meaningful, she becomes a nonperson in her own eyes. She despises the sexual and reproductive aspects of her body which she identifies with animals she dislikes: "Bitches, sows. Cows. This female steaminess" (2); whereas Alli's lover, Muriel, is closer in character and personality to Karl, Alli's veternarian husband. Muriel and Karl love and care for animals because they do not identify with them; both are efficient, hard-working, and down-to-earth; and both are admirably patient, if a bit obtuse, about Alli's suffering and outrageous behaviour. Karl put it down to menopause and Muriel calls it being "in a snit." Despite liberated ideas of equality, Muriel tries constantly to pull Alli outside to the barn where the "real" — meaning male — work of the farm goes on. She wants Alli to feel comfortable with animals and not be afraid of the dark, and unintentionally patronizes her by using "we" to share the blame for Alli's ineptitude. Like Karl, Muriel is helping to birth calves, and it is this displaced "male" control over female biology that Alli resists more than Muriel's claims as lover and "husband." Hollingsworth is pointing out that women's relationships, even with other women, are influenced by social function and can be meaningful only when each individual knows and values herself first.

Alli's protest over the vacuum of her inner life is feeble, expressing itself in irritability and childish jokes, and finally her frail hope for an identity in relation to someone else evaporates. She retreats to the mental hospital, "cowed," as the play puns, by timidity, fear, and training.

As *Alli Alli Oh* is Alli's play, *Islands* is Muriel's, with Alli appearing halfway through, just as irritating and destructive as before. The gay theme which is only a minor note in the earlier play, becomes more significant in *Islands* though it is still not the main issue. It is Muriel's lesbianism that gives her strength and definition as an individual, unlike her mother or Alli who only know themselves as subordinates in a male/female relationship. Yet ironically, it is Alli who forces this honesty upon Muriel. Until Alli brings the subject into the open, Muriel's subterfuges are no better than her mother's pretence not to know of her husband's sexual infidelity and involvement in illicit cock fighting. Muriel's strength consciously to choose an unconventional life — as a lesbian and as a farmer — give her the strength to resist the demands of both her mother and Alli and to create her life alone.

Except for Alli's monologues in *Alli Alli Oh*, both these plays are largely realistic in style, set in contemporary time and in familiar space. Only Alli's reminiscences addressed directly to the audience cut across the ordinary dialogue, but even these have a realistic dimension in that, in a way, they are like a mental patient's talking to herself. At one point, when Alli is making animal noises as part of the bitter parody of her earlier life, Muriel actually hears her; and in *Islands* Muriel tells her astonished mother that she "always thought of [Alli's flights] as meditating" (134), suggesting that she has heard many of the monologues. Other soliloquies must be unheard, however, as when Alli tells the audience how revolting she finds Muriel's mode of chewing while Muriel, oblivious, eats in front of her. This overlaying of dialogue with monologue is the verbal equivalent of the "'Gestalt switch' which flickers between two different readings of an image . . . like 'Rubin's Vase.'"[6] The banality of Muriel's and Alli's domestic talk is a foil to Alli's florid soliloquies describing the desperate, insane behaviour which led her to being institutionalized, and this tension between the two levels of language is central to the play's meaning. While Muriel's pedestrian statements relate the pragmatic concerns of their life together, Alli's pyrotechnics encapsulate its subjective and emotional truth. Hollingsworth has said:

> Language is my starting point . . . I've always been interested in making language . . . I think it's got to be elastic, that's all. It becomes something else. It takes the place of music, becomes pure sound or it can become purely visual.[7]

Alli's monologues with their double function are the first evidence of Hollingsworth's stretching of language, but it is not until *Apple of the Eye* six years later that speech attains the elasticity of the "purely visual."

HAVING EXPLORED THE DISLOCATION and insecurity of immigrants in her one-act plays *Bushed* and *Operators*, and the problems of women's identity in *Alli Alli Oh* and *Islands*, in 1980 Hollingsworth's first full-length production, *Mother Country*, appeared using both these themes. The treatment of immigrants, however, is given an entirely new slant in this play. Because they are English, the "immigrants" have the prestige of first settlers, irrespective of when they actually arrived. It is their customs and traditions that underlie the social standards of the new land. Ironically, it is they who feel secure in their sense of continuity, while native Canadians have only a timid sense of national identity and strong feelings of inferiority to the Mother Country. Hollingsworth said in an interview:

> This is the first thing that struck me when I came to Canada, people asking what is a Canadian — who are we? That dribbling question over and over again. . . .[8]

Such a question is, of course, connected with the mind-set of colonialism, its love-hate relationship with the Mother Country. In the play, the mother, Janet, embodies many of the attributes of England that enrage "colonials": imperiousness and arrogance, implacable certainty of rightness, and dismissiveness. At the same time, her three daughters all sense their mother's genuine superiority over them. With such a mother it is impossible for the three girls to survive; to be themselves they need to "kill" her off. Their struggle to do so in the play is an allegory of the Canadian fight for a national identity as well as an insight into the relationship between mother and daughters as women needing to be themselves.

Janet's absurd house, designed as a captain's cabin[9] with portholes kept claustrophobically shut, points symbolically to the meaning of the play. Clearly Janet is the captain; her ship is the island over which she has absolute command. She manipulates the lives of her daughters, her neighbours Maurice and Thea, and even her ex-husband Rory three thousand miles away, with her unassailable conviction of knowing better than anyone else what is for everyone's good. Surrounding the house is a sea of chrysanthemums, their blossoms carefully preserved from the depradations of weather by little red plastic bags which her youngest daughter Fran describes as the "red tide," a fatal pollution of sea water, which refers also to the colour with which English "possessions" have traditionally been indicated on maps. Janet says that the island reminds her of England, and while Janet's notion of England includes only its positive aspects, Hollingsworth simultaneously implies all the pejorative meanings of insularity, parochialism, and snobbery.

The play's action reflects the same centripetal impulse as the setting, focusing on a reunion party to celebrate both Janet's birthday and her retirement. By the end, this birthday marks a new life for her daughters and also the emancipation of her neighbour Maurice; while the retirement, in turn, reflects Janet's extinction

as a power. It is she who supplies the word "anachronism" for Maurice's cross-word in the first act, and in the last she finally accepts from him a present that is also a farewell.

Appropriately, the metaphor of death permeates the whole play. Janet's proposal to call the house *Lusitania*, in memory of the passenger ship torpedoed by the Germans in World War I, foreshadows her own ship's final demise. It was Janet who inculcated Sally, her eldest daughter, with her superstition of May Blossom as a portent of death, and despite her vitality, Janet shivers when Maurice identifies her daughters as doppelgängers. Finally, the chrysanthemums which Janet has so carefully preserved are viciously hacked down, "murdered" in the last moments of the play by Sharon, her ex-husband's young fiancée. Where Fran could only "pick" Janet's chrysanthemums by mockingly disguising a featherduster with a red plastic bag, the American Sharon is able to abolish the "red tide" completely.

To arrive at the culminating paradox of "death" and "birth," Hollingsworth has organized the action around two different kinds of displacement: photographs, and games and play acting based on those photographs. Using pictures of the young Janet as a guide, her daughters dress up in their mother's old clothes, taken from an attic trunk. By impersonating Janet, they become simulacra of their mother, what they all long to be (but fail to achieve) on the one hand, yet hate the idea of being on the other. This mimicry releases the women briefly. Just as George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* can only communicate through the medium of games, so here the daughters reveal the truths about themselves they are otherwise afraid to utter while dressed up as their mother and speaking confidently in her voice.

Imitating Janet fails to destroy her, however: she is still Mother (and Mother Country); and her daughters' confessions come out of their belief in Janet's omniscient knowledge of all their "wickedest thoughts and deeds."[10] When the play within the play concludes, the three sisters gather around the full-length mirror looking at the triple image of themselves as Janet and realize that she has blotted them out. Although they are now "depersonalized" (30), they have not become Janets, only a "raw resemblance" (36), just as Canada is but a raw resemblance of England. Maurice identifies the mirrored images of Janet as doppelgängers presaging death, however, and impels a disquieted Janet to break the spell and unknowingly sweep on even closer to "death" by substituting a second displacement, the game which formulates the mode of death itself — Murder in the Dark. In this game Janet's death is inescapable as all the women playing it are images of Janet. As the first act ends, the "murder" of Sally/Janet, although incomplete, is shown to be inevitable.

The murder must not, however, be self-murder. Although Janet tears up the old photographs of herself on which her daughters have patterned their disguises and later leaves her clothes folded on the beach as though she had died by drowning,

neither "suicide" sets her daughters free. Liberation for Fran, Doreen, and Sally will come only when they can liberate themselves.

The ambiguity surrounding Janet's apparent death is one of the play's richest aspects. It is possible to see Janet as an unmitigated tyrant: Hollingsworth herself said in an interview that she saw Janet as a "monster";[11] but there are also indications that Janet may desire her daughters' emancipation as much as they do. She openly confesses her desire to keep contact with her daughters, but insists also that she always wanted them to be free to do what they wished. Only Sally, the most intuitive of the three, recognizes that Janet really wants them "to be like [Sharon Grebnik]," an energetic and independent woman.

Janet's "suicide" reinforces this interpretation. Although her beach robe is folded, she points out contemptuously that since her shoes were not there also, she was obviously not swimming but walking along the beach, a fact that they should have "detected." Seen in this way, the "suicide" is an extension of the game, Murder in the Dark. With the murder game Janet points the way to the emancipation which her daughters could not achieve through imitative play-acting. When Janet is assumed dead, instead of grieving, Fran, Doreen, and Sally toast their new freedom in her medicinal brandy, working out their plans for the future as they drink. Their liberation complete, Janet's return makes no difference.

In the final moments of the last act, Janet accepts the birthday/retirement present from Maurice that she refused at the opening of the play. "To Janet," reads the inscription, "to mark the end of a long career." The colonials have been liberated, but not completely. As usual, Hollingsworth's conclusion has an element of ambiguity. Fran's despairing confession earlier is her realization of how much like her mother she really is, and Janet, though deserted and powerless, has the last word in the play. Referring to the devastated chrysanthemums, she says significantly:

> As long as we have our roots all the weed-eaters in the world won't dislodge us. (80)

Stylistically, *Mother Country* incorporates more surrealistic elements than any of Hollingsworth's previous plays. The strongly symbolic implications of the setting contrast with colloquial flatness in the dialogue to produce the incongruity basic to surrealistic style. Chiefly, though, it is Hollingsworth's unabashed use of the fiancée Sharon as a *deus ex machina* and her bizarrely literal exit in a helicopter, spiriting her away like a chariot from heaven, that shows how much more surrealistic Hollingsworth's technique has become.

The most obvious result of this new imaginative freedom of Hollingsworth's is the liberation of her next play, *Ever Loving*, from claustrophobic settings and temporal plot lines, in ways that mirror an advance in theme as well as technique. In *Ever Loving*, sequences are broken up so that place and time move radically

backwards and forwards in a totally non-representational set that evokes the bewildering spatial expanse of emptiness and fragmentation that European immigrants to Canada have to confront. The action covers the development of three wartime marriages from 1938 to 1970 when Diana, an upper-class English girl, and Ruth, a working-class Scot, with their Canadian husbands, have a reunion in a Niagara Falls restaurant in which Luce and her ex-husband Chuck happen to be entertainers. The parallelism of the Diana/Ruth plots is broken up by the fact that Luce does not come over with the other two brides but arrives earlier from Italy, and her only contact with the others before the final restaurant encounter is a brief scene on the Halifax station platform when Diana and Ruth are taking the train westwards and Luce is longing to escape like them — though even in this the women do not actually meet.

The structure of *Ever Loving* is much more complex than merely switching from one couple to another as they progress through the years. The plot takes a highly imaginative form of disjunction, moving so rapidly backwards and forwards with flashbacks within flashbacks that we never know what direction the next scene will take. Moreover, authentic flashbacks are varied by bizarre "fantasy" sequences in which various characters conjure up what they would like to have happen and imagine a future which is different from what actually occurs or — given the disjunctive time scheme — has sometimes already occurred.

The effect of this fluid use of space/time is to create "rhythms" that Hollingsworth says are all important to the intuitive energy of her work,[12] and which relate further to the clever use of music in the play. Twenty-nine different pop songs are played or sung during the performance, immediately identifying the period of each scene along with changes in costume, and helping to modulate easily from one scene to another. Music is also used to establish the mood of a particular scene, not only directly but also indirectly, as Ann Saddlemyer points out, by playing off the romantic promise of the music with the reality we are witnessing on stage.[13]

The play opens with Chuck singing "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden" and ends ironically with "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." As Ruth and Diana set off through the barren countryside, Chuck plays "Sentimental Journey" in the background. This is repeated in scene 12 while Dave and Paul wait with great trepidation at the railroad station for the wives they hardly know, and again as Diana fantasizes about the grey flannels and elegant cravat she imagines Paul will be wearing when he meets her train in Lethbridge.

Related to the complex use of music is the variety of English spoken, revealing both regional and class differences in accents and idiom, while passages of Italian and lines of Ukrainian and German further enrich the text. This "orchestra of voices," as Ann Saddlemyer calls it,[14] is especially complex in long over-lay passages in which two or even three speakers are talking simultaneously, like contrapuntal music, and the effect again is mostly one of ironic contrast.

The play's theme is the problems of adjustment experienced by war brides brought to an alien culture and harsh land. The three husbands all come originally from immigrant families (Ukrainian, Italian, Irish) who have settled in Canada and become part of the Canadian mosaic. The war displaces them to Europe, however, where they are insecure and alien, so that even Chuck feels out of place in Italy, his romanticized ancestral land. Thus marrying represents for them a certain kind of security and survival in this new environment. When their wives come to Canada, however, the roles reverse. Their need for security amidst so much that is frightening is probably the reason that both Ruth and Diana stay in their marriages despite disappointments and the misrepresentations their men have made. All three husbands have in different ways "promised a rose garden," and each young wife has translated the promises into daydreams. Only Luce leaves her husband to create a life of her own when she sees that Chuck has more talk than action or talent, but, ironically, in the end she and Chuck find more satisfaction in their professional relationship than the other couples do in domesticity.

At the end of *Ever Loving*, the sense of alienation and isolation of immigrants is replaced by a feeling of belonging. The ethnic backgrounds of the three husbands are demonstrably less important to them than their Canadian identity, and two of the three wives, though adapting with difficulty, find richer lives in their new home. But Hollingsworth never lets her audience off with a facile happy ending. With her customary double look at things, she combines the final moment of success and love with a barely suppressed act of violence between Ruth and Dave, whose daughter has decided to leave for Scotland, reversing her mother's experience, and the play concludes with Chuck singing "Over the Rainbow," a sweet song of longing that also recognizes that promises are evanescent and dreams ultimately delusive.

Ever Loving is the last of five plays dealing with the immigrant theme, which Hollingsworth has examined from all sides. She has explored the experience of vulnerable ethnic minorities, and dealt with the contradictions of colonialism, and has treated Canada as a land of terrifying size and emptiness, as a doomed refuge, and finally as home. As her immigrant characters became more comfortably Canadian, Hollingsworth's plays have become correspondingly more spacious and fluid, almost as if her confidence in her technique has been the result of her own greater sense of belonging. And with the structural loosening, her imaginative world seems also to have been released as can be seen in the three most clearly surrealist plays that follow: *Diving*, *Apple in the Eye*, and *War Babies*.

WITH THE TWO MINI-DRAMAS that precede the full-length *War Babies*, surreal effects take over completely. In each play the characters are pared down to a sole woman and a "voice off," and the plots are honed to a single

emotional crisis and a few symbols. Although the influence of both Albee and Beckett is evident, these miniatures have Hollingsworth's own flavour, particularly in their focus on women and in the surrealistic use of imagery.

In both *Diving* (1983) and *Apple in the Eye* (1983), the action and all the symbols are so economical that, in *Diving*, Hollingsworth manages to depict the whole life cycle and social evolution of women in four pages, using spawning salmon as her basic symbol. *Apple in the Eye*, only twelve pages long, also concerns women's lives but is, as the title suggests, more complex and ambiguous. Apples have traditional associations with evil, women, and forbidden knowledge. And women are the "apple of [a man's] eye." By altering the preposition, however, from "of" to "in" the meaning shifts to suggest phrases like "fire in your eye," "a mote in your eye," and "mud in your eye," hinting at ambiguities in the text that follows. The play brings in references to Rembrandt's painting of Saskia, Seurat's "Sunday in the Park," Weiss's play about Marat-Sade, artificial intelligence, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, and a quarry of other references and minutiae that give this little drama the collage effect of some surrealist paintings.

On the "story" level the play deals with Martin and Gemma's typical Sunday, spent entirely in bed, she doing crosswords, making breakfast and fetching tea, and he listening to the football game through ear-plugs and reading science fiction. Gemma's monologue during this process is reminiscent of Alli's and takes the play into realms of the subconscious with her hilarious fantasy about sexual intercourse. Alli's speeches, however, were only a pale shadow of the surrealist transformation that Gemma's language shows. The image of the apple rolls through Gemma's soliloquy, splitting into halves with Gemma identifying the halves with the hemispheres of her brain, with the visible parts of her eyes, with Saskia's buttocks — all female symbols yoked together with the ingenuity of a metaphysical poet. The golden spider bites both the apple and Marat (Martin) lying in his bath (bed), spread out like an "oyster-coloured" behemoth. As with all surrealistic art, the comic is tinctured with the sinister. Here the very vitality of Gemma's imagination seems rotten ripe. Like Alli's it is deranged. This is certainly the clue to *Apple in the Eye*, where analysis of the seemingly random symbols and images illuminates a frightening but coherent psychological portrait embedded in the text. What Hollingsworth was attempting to do with the character of Alli, she achieves fully in Gemma.

In *War Babies*, which followed in 1984, the protagonist Esme, though very different from the other two women, shares common psychical anxieties and doubts, now greatly expanded in a full-length play. Like *Alli Alli Oh* and *Apple in the Eye*, *War Babies* examines male-female relationships, but the two-act format allows far greater complexity and depth. As in *Ever Loving*, the dimensions of time and place are very fluid, but where the earlier play is confined to the conscious world of action, memory, and limited daydreaming, now Hollingsworth shifts back and

forth between that conscious world and the realms of imagination and dream. With her knowledge of psychology, Hollingsworth is aware that these two worlds are not always discrete. In *War Babies* the edges between the conscious and subconscious are often blurred, resulting in an enriched perception of reality but also sometimes in confusion.

A further widening of Hollingsworth's technique lies in her expansion of the play-acting and games device from *Mother Country* into a full scale play-within-the-play (hereafter referred to as the PWP) composed by Esme during a late pregnancy about which she is ambivalent. Hollingsworth adapts pop art as a formal device in *War Babies*; rather in the way that Lichtenstein uses the comic strip, the PWP employs soap opera. At first glance it has a cool, hard-edged, low-information appearance typical of comics and soap opera, but behind its varied reflections retreat infinitely dilating metaphors (gun, jail, doll, etc.) for psychological possibility, creating alternative readings like the deliberate confusions and non-sequiturs of surrealism.

Hollingsworth's two plays, nested together with Chinese boxes, show her perception of how the subconscious works. The containing play reveals the anxieties of Esme's impending motherhood, her fear of losing selfhood and independence, and her resentment that Colin's male role in society as a war correspondent is so much clearer and freer than her own identity. The PWP dramatizes the recurrent female terror of being abandoned, "left in this God-forsaken place," along with an atavistic anger that Esme dares not articulate, disguised so that the bizarre events of the PWP are largely symbolic. Even disguised, however, some feelings are so acutely painful that at one point while writing her play about Esme^2 and Colin^2, Esme buries her face in her hands to shut out the vision of them.

Where Hollingsworth's technique is successful Esme shifts from one paradigm to the other by a turn of the head, passing quickly between real life and fantasy. Thus, the two plays float in our minds together, simultaneously arousing different responses to the "real" and to the artifact, but also occasionally merging when a few small items from Esme's absurd and illogical fantasy slide into her everyday reality. For example, at one point in the frame play, Esme bemuses her friends Barb and Jack by asking them about the peacocks which exist only in the PWP and later she remarks to her estranged son Craig, who is a student of creative writing, that she thought he was the policeman from her PWP. The mingling here of two kinds of reality is reminiscent of Alli's monologues in *Alli Alli Oh* by the intercontamination of realism and surrealism. Hollingsworth is warning the audience not to reduce either play to over-simple formulations.

The play centres around babies — three in all. Craig, Esme's first child whom she abandoned when he was three, gave her claustrophobia, a terrifying sense of being imprisoned. In the PWP, from her unborn child, she invents a surrogate for Craig named Matthew, whom she imagines gives her agoraphobia, terror of open

spaces and going out. Clinically these phobias are at opposite poles, of course, yet imaginatively they are curiously related. The transfer from one phobia to the other has come about because of a third child in between — a Sudanese boy whom Colin killed while covering a story for his newspaper in the frame play. This is translated in the PWP into the revulsion and horror Esme[2] feels for war in the untenable world outside. She identifies and condemns war as male aggression, and it is actually this complex of feelings rather than the baby she is expecting that causes her agoraphobia.

In the frame play Esme also condemns war as anti-creative, but at the same time recognizes the element of danger, risk, and even violence in every creative act, artistic as well as biological. As an artist, she too is aggressive, even militant. Both her domestic life with Colin and the "soap opera" she is writing are structured on marital war games: the PWP contains an armed robbery, and in the frame play Esme and Colin continually compete in witty but savage one-upmanship "war games." The title of the play sums up part of the dilemma Esme faces: war *vs.* babies; agoraphobia *vs.* claustrophobia.

In the frame play, Esme has left her macho first husband, Jack, for Colin, a liberal husband of fifteen years who recognizes that their careers are of equal importance and is not "proprietorial," a relationship they laughingly call a "balance of power." All this is altered, however, when Esme gets pregnant. Having experienced the same freedom as Colin, Esme now feels trapped by her biology, and even though Colin attends pre-natal classes with her and agrees to be present at the delivery, she resents his ability to make a choice. Although the play takes Esme's point of view about this, her view is also shown to be frequently illogical and perverse.

A basic contradiction of women's liberation is revealed by her perversity. She claims to want an androgynous relationship with Colin, a role-less domestic life, but is unclear both as to how this can be achieved with a baby and whether it will please her if she gets it. Culture, if not biology, has conditioned women to covet the bravest and strongest, the richest and most successful mates. When Esme claims she wants a man who will stay home and be an ordinary house husband, Colin points out what she also knows to be true — that she would be bored if he were not an adventurer worthy of her pride and interest. Colin says:

> You . . . you're suffocating me, you know that? Years, years I've spent trying to be . . . I dunno, trying to be some kind of Rhett Butler to please you — don't laugh! . . . So what *am* I supposed to be. Some androgynous flunky? Is that it? . . . Why don't you make up your mind what you want? (207)

The dilemma is at the heart of many contemporary relationships, and the war games that Colin and Esme play are symptomatic of it. Even the fact that all the battles are mock heroic enhances their central darkness. The opening scene with the knitting contest is entirely a war game, played with the lights off, as "ignorant armies clash by night." The battles continue with puns and vicious, though laugh-

ing, word play in a series of "rounds," and the first act ends with a ridiculous food war. Esme and Colin laugh as they pun and throw french fries and pieces of chicken at each other as the culmination of Colin's grim relevation that he is going back to cover the war in Lebanon after promising to stay home until the baby is born. Although Esme has not responded verbally to the news, the hostility of the "chicken war" is clear. Even the parts of the chicken — backs, legs, breasts — the female parts most involved in birth — are demeaned by this comic but vicious fight.

The most sinister use of laughter occurs in the pre-natal class where Colin and Esme are compelled to sing "I love to go a-wandering" while Colin pinches her to simulate labour pains. As if the title of the song were not ironical enough for such a couple, the chorus compounds the irony by its repetition of the nonsense word, "Valderee" (translated roughly as "valley of laughter") which degenerated into the false laughter of "Valderah-ha-ha-ha-ha." The nurse sadistically urges Colin to pinch harder and harder until, horrified, he runs out for a cigarette, a macho act disguising vulnerability, as is revealed by Esme's telling the nurse that he does not smoke. This same violence is again only just resisted later when Colin, provoked beyond endurance, raises a chair and barely avoids striking Esme with it.

The violence of the frame play is disguised by games and only erupts sporadically into the open. In the PWP which Esme is writing, however, she can make things happen the way she wants, and just as play acting liberates the three daughters in *Mother Country*, so Esme expresses her frustration and subconscious desires in the PWP by emasculating Colin^2. Esme's feeling of imprisonment in pregnancy, with the new baby as her jailer, results in a fantasy of Colin^2 in jail, with Craig, her first child, as the jailer. She wants him to "know what it feels like to be me" (181), that is to share female physical and psychical elements, in short, to be pregnant. Consequently she writes him into the PWP cuddling a gun against his stomach as he lies in bed, Esme^2 having changed positions with him in the world. Esme^2 escapes from the agoraphobic limitation of female spaces (bed, kitchen) and invades male space (banks) to perform aggressive action (robbery) with a gun (penis) in order to get self-renewal or transcendence, which is symbolized by the new white silk suit she buys with part of her loot. Simultaneously Colin^2 retreats to bed, where he takes on a female physiological and psychological definition by cradling the gun he has received from Esme^2 in his "womb," the gun now symbolizing the baby.

At this point Esme^2 can leave the house, achieving the male transcendence she desires, but such a resolution is too simple for Esme the playwright. Like Simone de Beauvoir's woman who is "shut up in immanence," she

> endeavours to hold man in the prison also; thus the prison will be confused with the world, and woman will no longer suffer from being confined there: mother, wife, sweet heart are the jailers. Society, being codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior: she can do away with this inferiority only by destroying the male's superior-

> ity. She sets about mutilating, dominating man, she contradicts him, she denies his truth and his values. But in doing this she is only defending herself; it was neither a changeless essence nor a mistaken choice that doomed her to immanence, to inferiority. They were imposed upon her. All oppression creates a state of war.[15]

In *War Babies* Esme starts with the same transcendence as Colin but, by wishing to have a child, she begins to lose it; she is trapped by the necessity of putting the well-being of the child before her own, which extends not only to requiring the presence of a father, but to insisting upon his non-presence in places dangerous to him and threatening to life in general — the wars which it is Colin's job to report on. This motivation is complicated, however, not merely by envy of his freedom, but also by a feeling that such independence is synonymous with all aggression and is therefore antipathetic to life. Children are killed in order to get a "story," as Colin killed a boy in the Sudan. This knowledge is underlined by her own guilt for having abandoned Craig in order to achieve male independence.

For both Esme and Colin, however, the crimes of the past are wiped out by the birth of the new baby (the fourth child of the play), Colin's literally by receiving the still blood-smeared infant in his arms, the blood seeming somehow to redress for him the spilled blood of the Sudanese boy. And Esme's guilt is mitigated by her reconciliation with Craig. This final transformation is not entirely a triumph, however. As Craig lays his hand on Esme's now empty abdomen, she describes it as a hollow cave which gave forth a stone, a remark with forboding implications. And the new baby is ominously to be named Cassandra, the doomed oracle whose prophecies of disaster were understood too late. Thus although the play ends in a happy celebration of birth and reunion, the balance of power has been profoundly altered and one senses that the future for Esme and Colin will continue to be as embattled as the past.

Thus, *War Babies* ends on the same note of ambiguity we have found in nearly all of Hollingsworth's previous plays. A seemingly happy resolution is riddled with ominous portent in what Hollingsworth called "that double thing that I do,"[16] a technique in keeping with the surrealist vision which finds disorder in the recesses of the human sensibility and has no confidence in the ultimate triumph of good. Two factors — this disbelief in a providential, linear order, and her interest in depth psychology — have conditioned the development of Hollingsworth's powers as a dramatist from the start.

OUT OF THE LONELINESS AND DESPAIR, the rate, the feelings of futility and alienation of immigrants and women, and most recently of writers, Hollingsworth extracts fantastic, absurd, sardonic elements that reveal a dangerously ambiguous psychic world beneath mundane "reality." Her early realistic

plays move formally from beginning to end, but once she abandons temporal co-ordinates, the artistic transaction with the audience can go any direction and include anything. And this liberation, linked with her interest in depth psychology, seems to have stimulated a naturally surrealist predisposition.

As early as *Bushed*, we see the direction of her artistic development in the way she uses the vigorous mime of laundry women to operate like a descant, contrasting and commenting on the feeble duet of the two men in the foreground. By *Alli Alli Oh* the antic side of Holingsworth's imagination takes even greater prominence, as Alli's surrealistic monologues are superimposed on the realistic elements of the play until these latter begin to recede into the background. In *Mother Country* it is the setting and the use of absurd plot devices that the extravagance of Hollingsworth's imagination bursts out. Only after *Ever Loving*, however, in which she first abandons sequential plotting and depends upon the internal rhythm of imagery and music for unity, is she able to give fullest expression to her vision. In her two most surreal works, *Diving* and *Apple in the Eye*, space replaces time; the meaning of the plays lies in the relationship of apparently incongruous images, the juxtaposition of which in different ways produces complex and contradictory patterns of meaning for the audience.

It is this technique which Hollingsworth expands in *War Babies*, where it is both the play's greatest strength but also, in the last analysis, its weakness. The exuberance and density of imagery in *Apple in the Eye* is successful partly because of the shortness of the play, but the same profusion expended to five times the length leads ultimately to confusion. In an interview Hollingsworth made a statement about *Operators* which could even better apply to *War Babies*:

> I have tried to write a play of shades and tones requiring a subtle production and special attention to rhythm and balance. . . . I have deliberately diffused the focus. Rather than concentration, I have attempted to convey multiplicity. This is dangerous ground to tread in the theatre and perhaps it is better tackled in the novel.[17]

The major themes of *War Babies* — relations between the sexes, parenthood, war, the isolation of the artist — are huge for any single play. Instead of treating them with the economy and discipline of her earlier plays, she amplifies them by adding details at oblique angles — the poetry reading scene, the story of Matthew and the hampster, the enigmatic doll which arbitrarily appears from time to time — so that the play suffers from engorgement. The brilliant realization of the surrealist style in *Apple in the Eye* has passed in *War Babies* into the self-consciousness of a style past its fullest expression, a kind of surrealist mannerism. The nine plays from *Bushed* to *War Babies* form a continuum of development of which *War Babies* is certainly the most complex and interesting, but also because of the nature of its faults, a kind of culmination and dead-end. Perhaps it is a corner signalling the need for a new direction in Hollingsworth's playwriting, the invention of a new genre, as she has herself suggested.

This is the next stage, where you let the audience and wait for what effect the audience has on you and the performer in order to make the next step. It's very hard to write. What I'm doing is structuring. It's almost for me like dance, choreographing with an idea I came up with.... It's an energy thing... that really excites me.[18]

NOTES

[1] Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman, *The Work: Conversations with English Canadian Playwrights* (Toronto: Coach House, 1982), p. 92.

[2] Malcolm Haslem, *The Real World of Surrealism* (New York: Rizzoli, 1978), p. 7. Magic Realism may be identified as native American surrealism. It is a meticulously rendered naturalistic style carrying an unusual intensity of mood despite its hard, clear, detached technique. One of the chief features of Magic Realism is the juxtaposition of incongruous objects which produces a sense of dislocation, but which can also be haunting and/or melancholy.

[3] Wallace and Zimmerman, pp. 93-94.

[4] Margaret Hollingsworth, *Operators*, in *West Coast Plays*, ed. Connie Brissenden (New Play Centre: Fineglow, 1975).

[5] Margaret Hollingsworth, *Alli Alli Oh* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1972), p. 19. All further references are to this edition.

[6] Haslem, p. 286. "Rubin's Vase" is a visual illusion which appears at first glance to be a black vase on a white ground but at second glance appears to be two white profiles facing each other across a negative black space.

[7] *What* interview with Jason Sherman (Spring 1986), n.p.

[8] Wallace and Zimmerman, p. 97.

[9] The similarity of this setting to Shaw's in *Heartbreak House* suggests that Hollingsworth was trying to effect the same relation to "ship of state" and "man as an island" that Shaw was trying to create.

[10] Margaret Hollingsworth, *Mother Country*, in *Willful Acts: Five Plays*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Toronto: Coach House, 1985), p. 33. All further references are to this edition.

[11] Wallace and Zimmerman, p. 98.

[12] *What*, n.p.

[13] Hollingsworth, *Willful Acts*, p. 12.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1953), p. 797.

[16] Wallace and Zimmerman, p. 95.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *What*, n.p.

THE DIAMOND

Anne Swannell

For Phyllis Webb

An expletive ball winging off a sullen bat
high into the linguistic sky,

a lunge into the stands, the triumphant
hands-high retrieval of a ball the fans

are deprived of. The glottal stop
of a ball too fast to hit,

one we never see again, so far up does it go,
one that crashes into home plate just before we do,

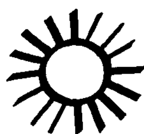
the splitting of a bat, a vertical shattering;
splinters powerless in their separate shards

and wooden, dangerous. These things happen
and happen again in slow motion —

the perfect pitches, runs completed, fouls,
our batting averages recorded in the dark,

these conversations joined, completed, lost:
the endless innings.

Repeatedly, we turn our sweaty caps peak backward,
adjust the angle, look unperturbed.



OBFUSCATION WITH MIRRORS

Anne Swannell

1.

We obfuscate everything with mirrors
which draw us in, simplify,
yet complicate beyond belief
these terrible contingencies,
these shattered wholes, our lives.

These shattered wholes, our lives,
these terrible contingencies,
complicate beyond belief,
draw us in, obfuscate with mirrors,
yet, simultaneously, simplify.

2.

On the way back through,
we rearrange ourselves, compose
a smile — a winning smile — which glues, clues
observers in: this is real, this enemy,
this mask we recognize, clasp
like a friend once lost, now ours.

like a friend once lost, now ours,
this mask we recognize.
Its winning smile clues, glues
observers in: this is real, this enemy
we obfuscate with mirrors.

"CAUSE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I WANT"

The Anatomy of Love in the Plays of Judith Thompson

George Toles

DEE: Lionel, have some more brandy.
(*to Mack*) What are you thinking?

MACK: I was thinking . . . about my father having his heart attack at the top of the stairs . . . sorry, but it's true, that's what I was thinking, I mean seeing in my brain.

MERCY: He had it at the top of the stairs?

MACK: Yeah. The dog was at the bottom of the stairs and, she went berserk, you know, she was . . . the mother was in the kitchen, talking on the phone to the aunt, and she . . . the dog wouldn't let her near him, she wouldn't let the ambulance attendants . . . they had to . . . shoot her with one of those sleeping potions, then she had a stroke two days later. You'd go into the house and there was my mother passed out on the couch with a bottle of scotch and this paralyzed dog. . . . She still can't bark without slurring, really! She's got this slurred bark like when stroke victims talk outa the side of their mouth? (*does bark*)

DEE: She's a sweet dog. Golden Labrador.

—Judith Thompson, *I Am Yours*

IN A JUDITH THOMPSON PLAY, the question "What are you thinking?" is never an occasion for reticence. Perhaps the most distinctive, and consistent, quality of her characters is their lack of a public, social self that monitors and limits the exposure of the private self. Thompson often establishes, as in the scene from which I've quoted, a familiar social context (friends gathered for after-dinner conversation) whose properties are generally understood, and then shows one character after another doing violence to decorum as images from their unconscious force their way into speech. Mercy, one of the central characters in *I Am Yours* (1987), asks near the beginning of the play, "Did you ever wake up, well not quite wake up and you can't remember where you are?" All of Thompson's

characters know this experience. It is, in fact, the inalterable rhythm of their precarious life in the social realm. They do not, as a rule, wilfully cast off the constraints of their defined social roles, in the manner of the most intriguing figures in farce. It is more a matter of their *forgetting* themselves, temporarily losing sight of where they are in relation to others and losing hold of whatever sense and order they normally depend on. The effect of this forgetting is beautifully rendered in John Ashbery's poem, "New Ways of Knowing": "waking up / In the middle of a dream with one's mouth full / Of unknown words. . . ." And then, in Thompson's vision, being compelled to speak those words and take on their emotions as an absolute pre-condition for having memory restored. One cannot reclaim one's place in the world of others until this alien voice has done what it can to bring its own dreadful imperatives to light.

Since there is no one in a Thompson play who is not subject to this kind of seizure, it is possible to be possessed in the presence of others without shocking them. Indeed, at least the *form* of most wild utterance is tolerantly absorbed by those who listen to it: its meaning is seldom fathomed even by the speaker, but this lack of comprehension is typically not a source of distress. In the scene segment with which I began, Mack precedes his entry into the dream space of obsessive speech with an apology to Dee for being honest about what he is thinking. "I mean seeing in my brain." This brief, reflex concern with a code of correct behaviour seems very odd in a play where, from the outset, everyone seems equally driven to "go too far" in their speech and actions. In fact, Mack's friends are plainly more struck by his use of the word "sorry" than by the account of his father's (and dog's) heart attack that follows it. Moments after Mack has finished speaking, some brandy gets spilled, and everyone in the group, in a kind of imitative frenzy, cries out "SORRY! Sorry, I'm sorry." They seem to be experimenting, in the protective anonymity of a chorus, with the hypnotic *sound* of remorse, trying to bring the emotion closer as their voices rise, in a situation where there is no necessity to name (or even think about) the acts for which each of them most requires forgiveness. Mercy is openly disturbed by the repetition and asks why everyone is saying sorry. "You'd think we'd all committed a . . ." The unspoken word, sin, which refers both to real and equally tormenting imagined crimes is the core of the group's inner life, and the motive force of the constant invasion of their thoughts by "waking dreams."

The members of the group see violent agitation and loss of control as regular features of the social landscape. Such proclivities are understood to be *shared*, rather than a shameful and isolating mark of individual mental imbalance. Since circumspection plays so little part in Thompson's public realm, extremes of every sort are accommodated in the flow of the dialogue, and it is only the truly monstrous transgression that can close communication off. The startling spectacle of unfettered instinct running riot in scene after scene is movingly combined, as

in the episode I just described, with a vestigial group memory of the traditional function of "limits" and the idea of moral accountability. The characters dream of a structure secure enough to hold them in check, and, at a deeper level, of a power comparable to grace which will deliver them from the "thing" that possesses them.

The comedy which is so prominent in Thompson's work dwells, in large part, on the borderline of madness. It generates an intoxicating aura of false freedom which, in turn, masks a process of enslavement. One would be wrong to conclude that the laughter Thompson's plays invite issues from a perspective rooted in caricature or from a heartless glibness about genuine suffering. Nor does Thompson take her licence for inventing comic horrors from the always aesthetically defensible (but too often complacent) despair at being "alive in times like these." There is in her plays no poisonous embrace of vileness as the only condition left for us, with the implicit assumption that the artist is courageous for daring to say so. The nearest modern analogue for Thompson's form of comedy is the fiction of Flannery O'Connor, whose grotesque heroes are always moving, whether they realize it or not, towards "life and death" encounters with evil and grace. Hazel Motes, the preacher in O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, whose inability to rid himself of Christ's haunting image "in the back of his mind" leads him ultimately to blind himself, wrap his chest with barbed wire, and wear shoes filled with rocks and broken glass, could be seen as the prototype for Thompson's equally regressive and deranged seekers after truth. (Mrs. Flood, to Hazel: "There's no reason for it. People have quit doing it." "They ain't quit doing it as long as I'm doing it," he said.) "Freakishness," in Thompson's work as in O'Connor's, is treated as an emblem of our displacement from a condition in which sin, the redemptive value of suffering, and a love distinct from human love are realities — a "light" to see things by. Thompson's comic tone chiefly differs from O'Connor's in its closer alliance with emotion, which O'Connor generally distrusts because of its tendency to palliate the harsh truths that comedy exposes. Given this difference, it is perhaps not surprising that O'Connor's subject matter is always concerned with the mystery of faith, while Thompson is much more interested in the mystery of love.

O'Connor has declared, in her essay "The Grotesque in Southern Fiction," that "when the grotesque is used in a legitimate way, the intellectual and moral judgments implicit in it will have the ascendency over feeling."[1] Violence, to the extent that it is in harmony with O'Connor's comic instincts, is a blunt-edged, summary joke on human vanity. It is a calm "pronouncing of judgment" at the moment when the "very ground" of a character's soul has revealed itself, when the "spiritual lines of motion" are as clearly and sharply drawn as in a "child's drawing." There is a certain degree of "suffering with" in O'Connor's comic observation, but her involvement with her characters is never so strong that she cannot effect a clean break from them as they are lost, beaten, or murdered in their final ordeals. What makes her comic perspective somewhat forbidding is its sudden refusal of flexible

response. A door seems to shut, and her initial amused patience with human frailty is on the instant replaced by a severity that accepts no excuses, that appears almost to delight in the righteous scourging of weakness.

Thompson, like O'Connor, manages to keep her concern with spiritual reality available to comedy by focusing primarily on characters who do not know how to *think* ethically. The surrealist behaviour of her characters is meant to erupt on stage with an unreasoning urgency severed from any effort of the moral will; "life" which Hegel has termed "the kind that does not yet know itself." Even such "pure of heart" figures as Theresa in *The Crackwalker* (1980) and Pony in *White Biting Dog* (1984) maintain what I would call their passive rectitude in a region below conscious reflection. Their goodness dwells apart from their actions, and cannot be defined by reference to them. The rational mind has almost no access to this sort of spontaneous benevolence. It is clearly not the result of a steadily renewed choice to do good rather than evil. Their innocence, strangely combined with promiscuity and simple-mindedness in Theresa's case and an intensifying neurosis in Pony's, can best be understood as a gift for goodness, a grace that preserves the soul from infection, in spite of the frequent deep confusion of their conduct. No pattern of life that ethical conduct might enforce clearly emerges for Thompson's characters. Her comedy, however allied to a spiritual vision, is far less didactic than O'Connor's.

O'Connor's characters typically imagine themselves to be "good country people," and take comfort from the fact that their superiority to the "white trash," "niggers," criminals, and "ugly" folk around them "justifies" them in the eyes of God. O'Connor's dialogue draws much of its astringent humour from the incongruity of the vain and selfish person's assumptions that he is pious; his ostentatious self-approval condemns him every time he speaks, and tightens the noose around his neck. There will always come a moment of "abysmal life-giving knowledge" for this self-deceiver: the sky will open, as it does for Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation," so he can be pierced with the realization of what it means to be human, which comes down to the question "How am I a hog and me both?" Catholic dogma provides a lens for correcting the distortions in O'Connor's characters' hilariously awful pronouncements. But perhaps there is a hidden tendency to pride in the author's always possessing the correcting lens. It would appear that O'Connor herself is never in doubt, however mired in perplexity her characters may be, about what God is looking for. O'Connor claims that the fiction writer "cannot be an adequate observer [of the world] unless he is free from uncertainty about what he sees." But in an adjoining sentence she asserts that "Christian dogma is about the only thing left in the world that surely guards and respects mystery."[2] Any Christian writer would do well, I think, to ponder the implications of this second statement, but I don't feel that she is under any obligation to reconcile it with the arguably opposing requirements of the one preceding it. While it is reasonable to affirm that "open and free

observation is founded [for the Christian artist] on our ultimate faith that the universe is meaningful," does the artist not limit the presence of mystery in nature and severely qualify her own acceptance of it if she always has a secure perspective on what she sees, one that *needs* to be free of uncertainty?

IN THE COURSE OF A 1987 interview in Toronto (July 23), Thompson was attempting to locate a passage in *White Biting Dog* to illustrate a point she was making when her attention was caught by the stage direction in Act One that instructs Cape to "gag" at the sound of his mother's love-making. Thompson had apparently forgotten the image, and laughed with a quality of delighted discovery, as though she had come up with the idea at that very moment. Then she exclaimed, "Isn't that amazing? . . . That's just what he'd do." I have the impression that Thompson's comic sense operates in much the same way when she is writing. Her characters come to life in the act of making a full confession to her ("These were my *real* thoughts about that. . . . This is what I actually felt then, though it's a little hard to believe it. . . . How could I have done that? Well, there's no denying it. That's what I did"). For Thompson, "open and full observation" requires characters who hold no part of themselves in reserve, and who lack the good sense to defend themselves against almost certain misunderstanding. Thompson attends to their chronicles of misfortune with a kind of sympathetic wonder. This attitude does not exclude exuberant amusement at the impossible lengths to which they'll go in their dangerous, daft pursuit of a love "sufficient to their need." Ruth, the wisest character in Janet Kauffman's *Collaborators*, offers the young girl who narrates the novel two experiential truths that comprise the "soul of the action" in each of Thompson's plays: "As far as love goes, Andrea Doria, we are primitives, always primitives"; and, "I don't want to be in the middle. In the middle, everybody's lost."[3] In all likelihood, one will be lost at the extremes as well, but a more complete and accurate expression of identity may be attainable there.

Thompson does not ever sentimentalize or idealize her characters' displays of "authenticity." In the first place, they achieve their emotional honesty without much effort. It is not an existential decision, earned by a difficult repudiation of inherited social and moral values. In the second place, the full acknowledgement of their status as desperate human creatures is not their spiritual endpoint. It is rather the point where they begin a long, pre-ethical phase in the vale of soul-making. Before we can think ethically, Paul Ricoeur writes:

> We must discover that place where the autonomy of our will is rooted in a dependence and an obedience that is no longer infected with accusation, prohibition, and condemnation. This pre-ethical situation is that of "hearkening" [l'ecoute]. In

> hearkening there is revealed a mode of being which is not yet a mode of doing and which thus avoids the alternative of subjection and revolt. Heraclitus said: "Do not attach importance to my words, but heed the logos." When word says something, when it reveals not only something about the meaning of beings but something about Being itself, as is the case with the poet, we are then confronted with what could be called the occurrence of word: something is said of which I am neither the source or the master. Word is not at my disposition as are the instruments of work . . . or the goods of consumption. In the occurrence of word I do not have anything at my command; I do not impose myself; I am no longer the master; I am led beyond the feelings of anxiety and concern. This situation or nonmastery is the origin of both obedience and freedom.[4]

Thompson's characters talk themselves out and enact their compulsions to the point of self-emptying exhaustion, in order that a space for hearing may finally be cleared within them. *White Biting Dog*, for example, builds in its last scene to a moment of unearthly silence when Cape and his mother, Lomia, sit apprehensive and motionless, as if prepared to listen for a voice other than their own for the first time. They have reached a juncture where it is possible for them to relinquish their posture of mastery. The obsessive, increasingly baroque enactments of the inner child's unfulfilled needs define the "substance" of the self's imagined autonomy, Thompson implies. The obedience to one's own desires (that is to say, the fixed, narrowly repetitive scenarios drafted by the unconscious) is demonstrably marked by the "overpowering ghost" of a child that the self can never leave behind. Each act that this self considers in its own "freedom" may well be inspired or prohibited by that implacable child, whose power vastly exceeds the shaping power of culture. What one's appetite chooses with the greatest insistence is that which the pre-ethical, "child-formed" self has least strength to refuse. Such choice does not lead to the actualization of a new being; it is a subjection to the will of our own past. Thompson treats this condemnation to repeat as a parody of the higher obedience to the life of grace. (Ricoeur describes the latter condition as an "obedience beyond fear," and a "consent beyond desire.") The name of God is hardly ever spoken by Thompson's characters, reminding me of Wittgenstein's injunction not to refer to those things that exceed the limits of one's discourse: "Whereof we cannot speak, we must remain silent." The action of Thompson's plays is the prelude to hearkening, in which the mortal counterfeits of love must be granted absolute primitive sovereignty before they can be recognized and (perhaps) overcome. The formation of a soul, in Thompson's world, depends on a moment of pristine clarity when one's whole being assents, for the first time *knowing* what ethical choice involves, either to good or to evil.

Of Thompson's three plays, *White Biting Dog* dramatizes the progression to the moment of choice most explicitly. In *The Crackwalker*,

which from the time of its first production has been wrongly identified as a naturalistic play, the pressure of environment is such a palpable influence on the characters that the mental damage they exhibit and the brutal acts they engage in might appear to be wholly the consequence of poverty, ignorance, and heredity. The climax of *The Crackwalker* involves a father's killing an ailing infant son, born retarded, whom he has come to regard as the sole remaining proof of his own identity ("that boy in there he's my son, he's my son and without my son I'm nothing get it? NOTH-THIN . . . And I wouldn't *WANT* to be nothin, understand?"[5]). His wife, the slow-witted innocent Theresa, places the dead baby in a shopping bag and walks off with the intention of burying it. She alternately remembers and forgets what she has been told about being dead, as she speaks to the baby in the bag. ("It's okay, Danny, don't you be cryin now, you with baby Jesus sittin in the cloud and the Virgin lookin like me she with ya . . . Danny? You still live? You breathin if I breathin into ya? S'okay, I your Mum! [tries to breathe into baby] Danny? You dead, eh? You not live. You never comin back, eh" [56].) Alan, Danny's father, has killed him after a long, terrible struggle with the "ugly" images and thoughts that he can't "beat out of [his] head" (37). Danny is his last, dim image of himself surviving in the world beyond his psychosis. His strangling of Danny is a symbolic suicide, a helpless surrender to the dread of his own vanishing. Danny has been a "good" picture ("like lambs in a field") that he has tried to superimpose over the sickening obsessions that "burn holes" in his mind, as a form of protection. But all the pictures that Alan has constructed since childhood to hold evil at bay have eventually transformed themselves into what he is most afraid of. Danny has been his most solid picture, actually anchored in the real world, and he lavishes on this graspable image all the remnants of tenderness walled up behind his myriad fears. When he ultimately chokes Danny, he speaks words of love to him; there is no will to murder, only a hopelessly confused attempt to save what has already been lost.

Where is the point of spiritual departure in the frighteningly bleak circumstances of *The Crackwalker*? Where is there a recognition of (or a "hearkening" to) a voice that is not "in thrall," which it may be possible to obey? I would argue that there are two such points. Sandy, a character I have not yet referred to who has been distractedly involved with Theresa and Alan throughout the play, has a final monologue in which she moves impressively beyond the crude categories of her former "knowing." She demonstrates a willingness not to pass judgment on either of Danny's parents (in fact, claims continuing friendship with both of them) and decides that the child's death is a mystery that she would do well to leave alone. The spiteful gossip, Bonnie Cain, whose version of events Sandy has always been quick to accept in the past, is dismissed as a "fuckin hound dog" whose voice Sandy succeeds in silencing at the baby's funeral. ("*She* didn't say nothin more.") At the end of her monologue, Sandy refers for the second time to the "Christmas wreath"

of flowers placed around the baby's neck in the coffin to hide the "strangle marks." Sandy declares she has seen the marks under the wreath. "The flowers never hid it they just made ya look harder, ya know? They just made ya look harder" (60). The repetition of this final phrase suggests, with a beautifully delicate obliqueness, that Sandy's perception has arrived at the threshold of a deeper dimension: a seeing/listening that is prepared to "dive and reappear in new places."

The other moment in *The Crackwalker* when the visible and invisible seem to converge is in Theresa's brief final scene, which concludes the play. Sandy, immediately prior to Theresa's appearance, has expressed concern that her fate will be to "go back down the Lido, start blowin off old queers again for five bucks" (60). But she has also acknowledged the compelling enigma of this fool-saint's nature. ("Jeez y'know I don't know what goes on inside that girl but it ain't what's goin on inside the rest of us.") Theresa's last gesture on stage is to fend off the advances of a lecherous "old buzzard," a decision she justifies by noting that he doesn't know who she looks like. Much earlier in the play, when Alan proposed marriage to her, he told her with utter conviction that she looks like the "madonna lady you know them pictures they got up in classrooms when you're a kid?" Theresa replied that she knew about her, that she loved the Virgin Mercy and often asked her for "stuff." When Theresa later expresses doubt that she really looks like "that Madonna," Alan assures her that there's a perfect resemblance, and she believes him. As I noted previously, Alan has no success in planting "good pictures" in his own mind; all of them give way to the awful thoughts that possess him. However, the "picture" that he offers Theresa in the clear "first light" of his love for her is an image that survives his own descent into madness. Theresa's final line in the play (delivered after her refusal of the man who has propositioned her) is "You don't even know who I lookin like." The words are spoken, with slight variation, twice, in order to echo the repetition of the word "look" at the end of Sandy's monologue. Theresa lacks Sandy's power or desire to press beyond the surface of things. But her memory of Alan's fleeting response to her as Madonna furnishes her with a strong, literal image of value in which she can forever see herself. Her brief lines following the stranger's disappearance may, in effect, be saying: "I have no right to ask you to respect me. After all, I've done a lot of bad things. But if you knew *anything*, you'd be able to recognize the person I look like, and respect *that*. And if you can't see who I look like, then I don't want to be with you." The "picture" formed from what was least confused in Alan's love for her may not prove sufficient to prevent Theresa's destruction. But it has made her, through the mediation of a "felt" image of the good, visible to herself as one who "belongs to" another, and thus, paradoxically, Theresa becomes *free* to say no to those who claim authority over her.

I Am Yours, Thompson's third play, explores the phenomenon of demonic possession in a psychological force-field that seems modelled on the collective unconscious. The play begins with a dream in which a small boy (Toilane) ap-

proaches a house that he is certain is his own, only to be confronted at the door by a strange woman who calmly insists, against his increasingly loud protest, that his house is *hers*, that he does not live there, that he must live somewhere else. As he turns from the door, lost, a second dream involving two young sisters breaks in upon his. One of the sisters, Dee, is certain that she hears the scratching sound of an invisible animal inside her school. The sound fills her with dread and she refuses to enter, despite the reassurance and irritated urging of her older sister, Mercy. At this point, the boy becomes a participant in the sisters' dream, confirming Dee's fear that there *is* a scratching sound, since he can hear it as well. It suddenly grows dark, though the children are sure that it is still morning. Mercy, as the eldest in the group, does everything in her power to explain the terrifying situation rationally, then as a final measure urges her companions to concentrate on the "friendly" violets clustered in the grass, while they all take the "giant steps" associated with adults to a place of safety. As all defences fail and they surrender completely to their fears, the three children awaken "with a terrible start" in what Thompson calls their "separate adult spaces."

This remarkable opening scene prepares us for the collective dream quality of the play's entire action. The dream experience so dominates the "waking sense" of the "separate adult space" that it soon establishes itself as the primary reality. There is no separate, individualized space in which one can take refuge either from the "spell" of a private dream or the abrupt in-flowing of the dreams of others (equivalent to the child Toilane's discovery that *his* house has been mysteriously taken over by a stranger). The reason for the interlocking nature of the dream visions in the play has to do with the central mystery of Dee's demonic possession. The figures surrounding Dee are all projections of some aspect of Dee's "memory drowned" core experience, which brought into being and steadily nurtured the "great, hidden beast" that now borders her life at every point, waiting (she feels certain) to devour her. *Ich Bin Dein* (German for "I Am Yours") is the repeating phrase that serves as the primary clue to the beast's identity, as well as to the source of its power. The phrase operates as the formula of an evil spell or curse that somehow binds all of the figures in the play together. Dee's sister Mercy's recurrent dream includes a medallion with these words inscribed on it. She seems always on the verge of deciphering their meaning when she is distracted by a stabbing recollection of betrayal and hurt. The translation that she and, by extension, each of the other characters is looking for can only occur beneath the ever-intruding personal sphere, at the level of what Friedrich Schelling has termed the "non-personal soul"; without that translation no spiritual integration can be achieved, and love will have no clear channel through which to flow.

When Dee, quite early in the play, opens herself to possession by "the beast," her long-standing dread of it is immediately transformed into the ecstatic freedom of merging with a stronger entity, and taking on its power. She feels a greater degree

of self-possession than she has ever known before. Her first act of "freedom" is to betray her husband, Mack, in a sexual liaison with Toilane, who is now the superintendent of the apartment building in which she lives. Having driven Mack away with a vicious repudiation that seems largely unwilled, she persuades him to come back after learning that she is pregnant with Toilane's child. She tells Mack that the child is his, while secretly making plans to give the child up for adoption as soon as it is born, so that neither Mack nor the child's father (who desires to raise it) will ever be permitted to see it. With each advance in perfidy, she becomes less agitated; possession transfigures her into a radiantly single-minded presence, secure to a degree she has never been about the rightness of her own conduct. She is like the serenely frenzied Agave in Euripedes' *The Bacchae*, who displays the head of a "lion" she has killed on a pointed stake, blind to the fact that it is actually the severed head of her son Pentheus that she holds. Dee has a final recognition scene comparable to that of Agave, in which she is obliged once again to *see* herself in her actions. The awakening takes place in a hospital room after she has delivered her child. It is as though the "diabolic influx" that has subjugated her is expelled in the act of giving birth. She has lost the strong sense of shelter, of internal support that the inhabiting evil has given her. She remembers what it is to suffer, and to feel remorse. Having asked Mack's forgiveness, she has a vision of his face, and that of her sister, catching on fire; she cries out in panic as the fire spreads to their hands and hair. It is in the midst of this hallucination of her loved ones burning that Dee stands up and asks to talk to her mother. The "spiritual lines" of the play converge on this point in the action. As the faces of those she identifies with the reality of love are eradicated, feature by feature, Dee becomes conscious of a face *behind* theirs slowly taking form, the face she has refused to know as the face of the animal divinity she has "invited" inside her — her mother's face.

THROUGHOUT THE PLAY Dee's sister Mercy has regularly proclaimed the goodness of their mother, who made Mercy the centre of her life. She talks about her mother's "sandal" under a lawn chair that has become almost a sacred relic for her father after her death: something never to be moved. Only one of *Dee's* memories of her mother is reported in the play, and we learn that the experience caused her to shake for an entire night in Mack's arms. On the occasion of Mack's first meeting with her mother, Dee had mentioned in her mother's presence how scared she had been on the highway as they were coming to see her (unaware that it was the anticipated introduction that intensified her normally high level of anxiety). "In front of all of us," Mack recalls to her, "your mother turned to you and said, "Why? Why do YOU want to live so much?" In the initial phase of her possession, before losing herself altogether, Dee tells Mercy of a recur-

ring nightmare of violent sexual release. Mercy, whose intuitions about her sister (if never about herself) have a clairvoyant accuracy, asks, without taking in the import of her words, without perhaps even hearing herself saying them: "How horrible could it be, were you devouring Mummy's brains and spitting out her teeth. . . ."

Dee's profound fear of her mother's "inhuman" strength and her complete repression of a hatred for her that "cannot be justified" become entangled with the still arduous internal struggle to find some way of giving her mother a form of love — or submission — that will appease her. Dee needs some unspoken word or resolving gesture from her mother in order to make the love her mother could not accept into something fit to be offered to someone else. The mother's death has by no means put an end to their relationship, only moved it to a deeper level now that the possibility of acceptance by the *living* mother has been taken away. The pressure of Dee's conscious need for "atonement" combined with the complex of negative feelings that she cannot acknowledge, combine to spawn the "beast" that invades her. The logic of her possession (what the beast *wants*) is first to give Dee control of her relationships with others, then to enable her to "free" herself of the relationships, so that she can finally join her mother in a condition resembling death.

Mercy has a speech midway through the second act describing the two sisters in their mother's hospital room on the day she died, "holding her head and trying to help her breathe, and then the breath getting lighter and lighter until we'd all stop breathing." Mercy describes her own emergence from the hospital after "Mummy died"; she is released into a landscape of snow where "huge icy trees" were "just . . . showing themselves . . . showing. And I was so startled . . . to hear my own breath . . . keep . . . on. . . ." By implication, Dee has elected to remain in "that dark hospital room," desperately prolonging the attempt to help her dead mother breathe, even if it means supplying her with all of her own "air," or building, in the powerful phrase of Henry James, Sr., "a literal nest of hell [for her] within [the child's] own entrails." When Dee suspects that she is pregnant, she executes a painting in a semi-trance, with a "yellow circle" (of energy, light, the life-force) enclosing a black circle (the dead mother slowly expanding inside the embryo, seeking to supplant it in the womb). Hence the idea of the child, from the very first, is hopelessly confused with the traumatically buried image of the mother struggling to breathe. Dee's original plan is to abort the foetus, but when she 'hears' the life inside her ("a breathing, a kind of breathing, a tone of voice, a step . . . [but also] a shudder of cold, your hand being squeezed, your eyes looking at me. Oh! you . . . are . . . you are") she is certain that the unborn child has communicated with her, and that she has no choice but to save it. No sooner, however, has Dee's maternal instinct been awakened, than she feels equally compelled to make arrangements to give her child away. "It could have his face!" she explains to Mercy, referring to Toilane, the child's father. "I couldn't even smile at it if it had his face! I could

never touch it, never . . . nurse . . . it." Dee's actual dread, of course, is not of the confrontation with Toilane's face. By a massive act of dream-displacement that extends throughout her period of possession, Dee responds to every face she knows as though it were a mask worn by her mother. Her monstrous behaviour to others is a furious acting out of her inaccessible feelings for the presence behind them, whom she cannot succeed in identifying.

The hidden face finally becomes clear in the hospital room when Dee wakes up after childbirth. Dee stands up and announces her need to speak to her mother. Mercy, assuming that she is still hallucinating, gently reminds her that "Mummy's dead, she's dead." Dee is at last able to *know* this emotionally and accept it. What she wants to tell her, in death, is that she's sorry. Her voice builds in intensity as she repeats the words "I'm sorry" until she is wailing from the centre of her being. The words are no longer unfocused, as they were in the party scene I discussed earlier. They are discharged towards an image that has finally attained clear definition, as someone necessarily Other: "I am sorry that my love for you could never go anywhere" is perhaps the first recognition her deep cry brings forth. "I am sorry that I hated you, for I'm beginning to know and accept this hatred as a large part of what you were to me. I am sorry you could not forgive me for not being the child you thought you wanted or needed. I am sorry that I cannot be yours in death, if I am ever to learn to live as myself." This purging action, which embraces both the forgiveness of the mother and self-forgiveness (made possible only when the former, in its immense difficulty, has been achieved) is the play's single point of entry for the "non-personal" reality of grace. A point discovered, as so often in Thompson, on the far side of madness. But grace, whatever protection and healing it may bring to the sufferer who receives it, does not deliver her from confusion or the rending pain of loss. Our final image of Dee reveals her gazing at a row of cribs in the hospital nursery, certain that she has identified her child, who is actually in a hotel room in another city, being held by her "bewildered and lost" father. Dee softly assures the "wrong" infant that she is loved, and tells it what mother love will mean: "I want you forever because I love you." Love that is avowed in these terms is love already beginning to betray its worthiest impulses, "I am yours," the play's haunting title proclaims, but it has been the burden of the action to show us how these familiar words of self-surrender generally mean just the opposite, concealing a hard unyielding claim that "you are mine." In the constant revision of "yours" to "mine," of sacrificial giving to compulsive clutching, the would-be "lover" involuntarily pursues her own "perfected image" in the guise of another, "in whose existence [her] own experience is confirmed and amplified."[6]

Mercy's approach to love, like Dee's, is founded on the belief that it is reasonable to want to be "the centre of someone's life." When a person makes you his "centre," Mercy suggests, he is doing you a "kindness." In Mercy's reading of her past her

mother has performed that kindness, but for all her "generosity" she could not compensate Mercy for her father's decision to ignore her. She feels that he chose Dee at an early age for "partnership" in an exclusive "company of love" where there could never be an opening for her. ("My DAD . . . thought I was kinda a dud you know? I even heard him introduce her [Dee] as his 'favourite daughter' once, and they had this special club and stuff. . . . He gave her a medallion with 'Ich Bin Dein' German for . . . but RAYMOND thought I WAS AMAZING.") Mercy has made her one truth the lacerating (but after long nurturing, indispensable) idea that because of Dee, she will always be invisible to men ("all the boys always looked straight at you, straight through me"). She was originally Dee's childhood protector, then somehow fell behind her younger sister, and feels she was permanently eclipsed by her. Mercy's natural tenderness and powers of imaginative sympathy have gradually given way to a wholly negative self-absorption. Her experiences with men, with one exception, have involved "false offers" of herself, a parody of the freedom she remembers having experienced with her first lover, the father-surrogate Raymond. She submits to the role she believes defined her irrevocably in adolescence, that of "whoredog" victim. She is attracted chiefly to men she can't have, and makes herself available to them with a show of such pathetic, groping need that she insures either their contemptuous exploitation or humiliating refusal of her. In one of the most striking paradoxes of *I Am Yours*, she discloses that she is so afraid of her sister *because* she loves her. When Mercy abandons Dee in a crisis, as she does repeatedly throughout the play, she draws on her mother's "strength" to abandon her. Mercy must *belong* to her mother, as she sees it, because Dee was chosen first by her father to belong to him. Both sisters feel stifled wearing the rigid emotional apparel of the chosen/choosing parent (I am yours, but I wish I weren't). Their imprisonment only deepens, however, as they come to conceive growth as a switching of one parent's wardrobe for the other's. ("I will become mother, and then be free" is, in its barest formulation, the logic of Dee's possession, or, in Mercy's case: "I will take father away from Dee, in the form of Mack or whomever she is in love with now. Once I have father, then I will be his and he will be mine, and I will be free.")

Toilane is yet another child yearning to break away from a parent (his mother, Pegs) whose "love" is a monstrous enclosure. Ironically, he intends to make his escape through Dee, whom he decides he loves at first sight. He finds himself drawn to her just at the point that she relinquishes all sense of personal identity, and disappears inside the demon embodiment of *her* mother's spirit. After Toilane and Dee make love, he tells her of the vision that came to him as he entered her: "I pictured in my mind this face lookin up at me . . . this face." The face swiftly merges with that of the omnipotent Pegs, who takes over his love affair as soon as he loses control of it, in an effort to secure her son's "rights." Pegs even goes so far as to preside over Dee's labour, sitting beside her as she struggles to give birth

and assuming the office of her parent. While Dee suffers the agony of her contractions, Pegs's voice drones on interminably at her side, objectifying the mother image that Dee must recognize before she can expel the 'evil' that has taken hold of her. Pegs's recital concludes, fittingly, with a grotesque recognition scene from her own high school reunion. "'But Marjorie, here I am, I'm Peggy! Didn't you see me?' Well then SHE turned three shades of red and she SAID, 'Well yes, I did, but I wouldn't have known you . . . your FACE!' My face, had got so . . . it's true I guess, I don't look nothing like my wedding pictures."

LET US RETURN ONCE MORE to the excerpt from the play with which the essay began. Mack's story of his father's heart attack can serve as a concluding illustration of how identities metamorphose in the child's memory as he attempts to summon the parent who is "gone" yet still inside him. The father having his fatal attack at the top of the stairs is immediately displaced from the centre of Mack's tale by the stronger memory image of the dog who guarded him and refused to let anyone come near. The dog also becomes confused with Mack's mother. Both are female, and there is a marked ambiguity of pronoun reference as Mack tries to account for his mother's "failure" to know what the dog knew instantly, that his father was in danger ("she went berserk, you know, she was . . . the mother was in the kitchen, talking on the phone to the aunt, and she . . . the dog wouldn't let her near him"). The dog not only takes on the emotional response that Mack might see as "rightfully" belonging to the oblivious wife on the phone, but also reacts to her as if she were an enemy of the man who needs help, as much a stranger to his suffering as the "ambulance attendants" who arrive later. The father's fatal seizure is "relived" by the dog, who within two days of her master's death has a stroke of her own. In some sense, the father's death, because of this *imitation* of his heart failure, remains stalled just short of completion. He is not quite dead as long as his 'condition' is carried forward by his "paralyzed" but still surviving dog. The mother, for her part, is likewise imitated by the dog as she collapses in a daily alcoholic stupor on the couch, with the ailing animal stretched out alongside her. Thus, the Labrador with the "slurred bark" seems to contain whatever is left of Mack's parents. She is the mysterious emblem of what Mack must continue to take from them for his own life; Mack barks at the end of his story as if to acknowledge the fact.

Cape Race, the central character of Thompson's second (and finest) play, *White Biting Dog*, begins his on-stage existence in a situation that closely parallels that of Mack's story. Standing on a bridge contemplating suicide, Cape is confronted by a white dog with the power to speak to him. The dog tells him that he is "jumping to hell" and that he can only save himself by saving his father, who appears to be

in the last stage of an incurable illness. Cape eventually learns (or, rather, thinks he learns) what he must do to save his father after meeting a young psychic named Pony, whom he regards as an unconscious emissary of the prophetic apparition. He believes he must persuade his mother to return to his father's house "for good" and agree to be his wife again. (She left her husband many years ago, and now lives with a "boy" named Pascal, who is even younger than her son.) The plot of *White Biting Dog*, however much it defies literal sense, has a beautiful simplicity of design, in notable contrast to the Byzantine intricacy of *I Am Yours*. As with all great plots, the mere process of recounting it seems to put one in touch with a mystery of experience that is at some deep level known to us, but whose truth lies just out of reach. The stories that get retold endlessly are those that appear to "live completely" within the action of their plots, yet manage to withhold (each time we hear them) something that is required to bring them fully to rest in our minds. The pattern seems to correspond to a pattern inside us; the plot invites us to see through it to a perhaps hidden "law" of our being that we may obey without comprehending. This law might be a prohibition or a fixed accusation or, as in the case of *White Biting Dog*, an impossible but inescapable task to perform.

The meaning of a drama, Thompson believes, should never be formulated for an audience in terms of a theme or idea that is already clear to them. When this happens, the intellect too easily safeguards the emotions against contact with that area in oneself that is still fluid and volatile. Thompson always aims her plays at the fault lines in our internal defence system, the places where the self has no "prepared responses." Unreality is the cost of the imagination settling for what can be seen and, with minor adjustments, stabilized. "Arrangements or structures reveal themselves, as Marx would have it, principally at the moment and in the act of breakdown."[7] The plot of *White Biting Dog* is a structure that our feelings, however disposed to resist, *know* something about. Before we have had an opportunity to analyse this structure enough to gain some distance from it, it begins to "heave and buckle," threatening collapse. Thompson repeatedly dislocates the audience, as she propels the spectator, with no transitional scenes and few abatements of intensity, from troubling comedy, to nightmare panic, to breakdown, and back again. Every thought or impulse that arises in a scene immediately splits into its opposite, Pirandello-fashion, so that emotion and comedy both end up having the same source and the same value. An amusing declaration always modulates into raw feeling just at the point we enter comfortably into laughter. ("LOMIA: It's because I *love* being inside of my six layers of skin; it's de-licious in here — everytime I breathe I sort of — breathe out *seeds, seeds.* I feel — I inside I feel like . . . like . . . sewage."[8]) Conversely, feeling continually betrays itself, and drops unceremoniously into the comic. ("CAPE: Pony, Pony do you feel it? PONY: (breathlessly) I don't really like to say these things out loud. CAPE: (kisses her) Oh. Oh oh. That was — almost — good" [43].) Cape's emotion is no sooner acknowledged than

it begins to disbelieve in itself. He instinctively turns against the person who has "tricked" him into a direct, uncalculated response.

One rationale for Thompson's characteristic rhythm of dislocation and her startling, surrealistic collisions of conscious and unconscious data is the necessity of keeping the thematic "machinery" of her plays invisible. She attempts to induce in us a prolonged sensation of psychic unsupportedness. We never quite know where we are in her plays, but it feels important that we should continue our efforts to find out. Thompson recently revised the final lines of *White Biting Dog* because she found them too sharply pointed. The original dialogue suddenly made explicit reference to the place where the moral consciousness of her characters had arrived by the play's end (in other words, bringing to light what they should *learn* from their experience). Thompson became convinced that he space of mystery, which all authentic experience inhabits, was falsified by the decision to impose clarity.

The "impossible task" paradigm that provides the basic plot situation for *White Biting Dog* derives, I think, from the comomn belief of young children that they must be the protector of their parents when they come into conflict, that it is up to them to "save" the marriage, to somehow bridge the gulf of enmity that has opened between the mother and father. (The child often assumes that he is the cause of the conflict.) Cape is essentially reliving this archetypal scenario as an adult, without understanding his assigned role any better than he did as a child. (He is of couse, by implication, *still* that child.) The external challenge that was "botched" by the guilty, fearful young boy rephrases itself, in the adult psyche, as an *internal* challenge which must be met if Cape is to find his soul and restore himself to life. The central mystery of the play seems to emanate from the words "to save." What does the command to save one's father mean, when that father is on the verge of death and is clearly prepared to die? And what does it mean to save oneself? Cape finds a narcissistic solace in the romantic idea of his imminent suicide. Death of self, however (like death *to* self, its spiritual double) requires a form of courage, or at least decisiveness, that Cape does not possess. Cape seizes on the literal sense of the dog's message to him, and believes he is pursuing a noble objective as he lures his father back into a tenuous half-life with false assurances of his mother's renewed love for him. These assurances have far more to do with Cape's relationship with his mother and his own unacknowledged desires, than with his father's present need. The *real* task that the white dog has given him, whose directive he cannot hear through the ceaseless, drumming din of his fraudulent personality, is to bring his father and mother together inside himself, and to save some portion of his father's goodness, which he has not begun to understand, from dying *there*. Cape's conception of self, like Dee's, grows out of an unrecognized identification with his mother as destroyer. He allies himself, confusedly, with her "strength" in her long-ago decision to "abandon" his father. Before the dog commanded that he save his father, Cape had abandoned him as well. He attempts to clear the way for a

parental reconciliation by setting out to eliminate his mother's current lover, Pascal, a young man close to his own age. With an increasingly crazed confidence in his own rectitude, he seduces Pascal with the hope of "breaking him down." Through the act of sodomy, he imagines he is asserting his superior strength (superior to mother and Pascal, at once); what is actually being asserted is his greater fitness to take on the role of his mother's lover, a role to which the primitive child in him still lays claim. He moves backwards in the order of attachments to the original maternal bond, which he has neither actualized nor found any substitute for. Cape expresses most trenchantly what this bond means to him in the extraordinary encounter with her that concludes the first act. He kisses Lomia on the mouth, a stage direction informs us, as if he were "inhaling" her, after which she notes, with a mixture of bafflement and surprise, "We — we — touched tongues" (56). Cape then holds her tightly as he tries to articulate how he always feels in her presence. "I want to take you by the hair (does so) and then and then bash and bash and bash and bash and bash your head against the wall until you —" (56). Before he can complete either his threat or his half-fathomed thought, Glidden, his father, knocks on he door, re-establishing the interdict that prohibits Cape from usurping dad's place in the torture chamber of this marriage. Glidden, who may well be suffering one of his mild hallucinations, has decided, child-fashion, to play a prank on his wife and son. Thus, he appears in the doorway on all fours, with a large bone in his mouth. Not losing sight of his obligation to be an authority figure as well, he offers (for their approval) a passable impersonation of Winston Churchill rallying the troops in Australia.

The only character in *White Biting Dog* standing somewhat apart from the closed circle of Cape's familial obsessions is Pony, the psychic, who initially resembles the eccentric "helping figures" in fairy tales. She is potentially the agent of self-integration and spiritual awakening for Cape, if he can be led to accept the uncorrupted love that she freely offers him. For the first half of the play, Pony possesses the remarkable ability to "listen past" the malign intent of his cunning, manipulative role-playing; she is in touch, as no one has ever been, with the helpless confusion and not quite strangled softness beneath his self-hatred. Moreover, she is comically as "starvin' to talk" as Pegs is in *I Am Yours*, so that Cape, with all his mental agility and shiftiness, is hard pressed to keep up with her. When Pony is not giving to others (and if she has any self-concept at all, it is that of "giver"), she lives enclosed in a kind of innocent reverie, which by some fortunate spiritual dispensation, is fragilely preserved from neurosis. Cape sees her as an agent of the white dog, having the power to help him accomplish the "impossible task" of saving his father from death. Pony's power, whose purpose he misconstrues, is all in the yielding. She is the white dog transformed from an immovable judge to a figure of mercy and atonement. Pony opens herself unreservedly to Cape, in an authentic gift of love. Because she holds "nothing back," she leaves herself deeply vulnerable

to rejection. She has no capacity to defend herself emotionally against Cape's betrayal, when it comes. Nor does she know how to separate herself from him, and, in effect, return to the "old Pony" once it becomes clear that he has no further use for her. Pony's "mission," which she fulfils without comprehending, is to lead Cape to an acceptance of love that is *not* founded on control.

Cape's first moment of ethical choice in the play comes when he takes Pony to the bedroom, and decides to make love to her. He is fully cognizant of the *reality* of her innocence. He also knows that there is a fundamental difference between what she is offering him and what he has previously been able to recognize in his relationships with others (especially other women). Finally, Cape may dimly apprehend that this is his last chance to surrender the mask that hides him not only from the world but from himself, rendering his entire being one great falsehood. Pony cannot be made into an extension or "reflector" of his mother (however much he would like to *find* his mother in her). She reveals to him no aspect of Lomia's nature, against which he might retaliate and which he could justify punishing. Rather, in her unselfconscious embodiment of the strength that dwells in vulnerability and sacrifice, she affords a basis of reconciliation with his father-image, which he renounced as pure "weakness" in early childhood. (Before the white dog's command to "save" him, Glidden was merely the impotent non-entity whom Cape occasionally visited for supper. Only in the process of dying has he become visible to his son as a man with an inner life, though Cape knows nothing about its contents.)

Cape's ethical choice, with respect to Pony, is not to "let her in" when he makes love to her. In the guise of tenderness (and in a darkness that is his private darkness writ large), he uses her body as a receptacle for the hatred that he has been unable to finish pouring out upon his mother. During her last monologue, at the end of the play, Pony describes, in spiritual terms, what transpired with Cape:

> I was invaded, Dad, Dad, *filled*, by the worst evil . . . you ever imagined — I guess it happened when I fell in love, on account of I had to open my mouth so wide to let the love in that the evil came in, too . . . and living with it was just like being skinned alive. (107)

By entrusting her whole being to Cape, she has quite literally *lost* herself in love. Initially confused by what has been done to her, she mistakenly identifies Cape's demon as the proof of his feeling for her, and embraces it as her own. A "marriage" of some sort *has* taken place, as she repeatedly reminds herself. As a result of her attempt to enter into Cape's will to destroy Pascal, she suffers a psychic collapse. In her panic at not recognizing herself, she realizes that she no longer recognizes Cape either, though she is now imprisoned in his "world." When she is made to see that Cape wants to be rid of her once his family rescue mission is accomplished, she appeals one last time to the *voice* of her psychic power. It was this voice, she believes, which brought her into Cape's life, in addition to being the force that

shielded the "old Pony," somehow protecting her innocence. The voice grants her permission to take on herself the full weight of the sins that Cape has committed against her and Pascal, in the latter case with murder in his heart. (The truth of what Cape has done to Pony, while bearing the "likeness of love," is first imaged for her in his seduction of Pascal, which she witnesses.)

The cost of Pony's decision to translate the evil that Cape has wilfully imparted to her into a force of regeneration (so that he will not *yet* have damned himself to a place "beyond the interchanges of love") is an immense final yielding.[9] She must lay down her life for him, an extreme instance of the Christian idea of "voluntary suffering in another's place." Charles Williams terms such a decision an act of "substituted love." It can be persuasively argued that Pony's suicide is much more the consequence of mental disintegration than of a rational decision to "expiate" Cape's transgressions. Unable to cope with the agony of feeling that she is either two separate people, or no one at all, and believing that there is no way back to a self that she understands, and could claim as her own, she flees to suicide. It is the only available means of restoring psychic unity. Thompson fully acknowledges the operation of these forces in Pony's final scenes. At the same time, however, she insists that the ethical choice Pony makes as she is compelled towards death is meaningful and spiritually efficacious. It opens into the dimension of grace, and produces an atmosphere in the space occupied by Cape and Lomia that the mother and son can feel, and that is conducive to "hearkening."

I CANNOT CONCLUDE THIS critical investigation without strongly re-emphasizing my earlier observation that Judith Thompson is not, in any usual sense of the word, a didactic writer. She would be properly horrified at the thought of being found dogmatic about the appropriate distribution of suffering. None of her characters has earned by their worthy or dishonourable conduct the "loads" that they carry around with them. And Thompson does not wish us to have the confidence to make a final judgment of any of them. When I saw the Tarragon Theatre production of *White Biting Dog* in 1984, which remains one of the most vivid and powerful theatrical experiences I have had in Canada, I was forcibly struck by the persistent quality of "objective sympathy" in her presentation of all of her characters; it is the form of sympathy I associate with Chekhov. Thompson strives for (and frequently achieves) what Alan Williamson has described as the highest transaction of personal poetry. "We feel a kind of tragic awe at entering into the inner language of a life, which is also its net of destiny; in that conjunction we come close to the essential causes of human things. But we also learn a method or discipline of possible escape from the limitations of selfhood, and from the necessity of judging and being judged by others. Or, at the very least we learn, in William

Blake's terms, to judge 'states' and not 'individuals,' by seeing how different states are built up out of the same basic human materials. (It is at this level that a deeper, earned universality rewards the reader [viewer] who has refrained from demanding a shallow one.)"[10]

One not sympathetic to Thompson's work might wish to argue that her relentless concentration on extreme behaviour (her characters seem always to be hovering near psychosis) makes her range far too narrow for the creation of a large-spirited, humanly various drama. Such a critic might also dismiss what I have tried to characterize as her religious vision as a sado-masochistic simulacrum of spirituality. If the readings I have offered have not been adequate to modify these objections, I rather doubt that a fuller attention to specifically theatrical gifts (her unparalleled grasp of rhythms and sound pattern, for example) would make my high regard for Thompson's work more intelligible. In my judgment, her three plays give ample evidence of a powerful, utterly distinctive, fiercely independent theatrical voice. She may well be Canada's best playwright.

NOTES

[1] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, selected and ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981), p. 43.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[3] Janet Kauffman, *Collaborators* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), p. 51.

[4] Paul Ricoeur, "Religion, Atheism, and Faith" in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 449-50.

[5] Judith Thompson, *The Crackwalker* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1981), p. 52. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[6] John Updike, "More Love in the Western World" in *Assorted Prose* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1965), p. 299.

[7] Richard Poirier, *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987), p. 186.

[8] Judith Thompson, *White Biting Dog* (Toronto: Playwrights Union of Canada, 1986), p. 68. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[9] The phrase is Charles Williams's.

[10] Alan Williamson, *Introspection and Contemporary Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), p. 13.

books in review

PLAYMAKING

JOHN KRIZANC, *Prague*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

DAVID FRENCH, *Jitters*. Talonbooks, $8.95.

ROBERT WALLACE, ed., *Quebec Voices: Three Plays*. Coach House, $14.95.

JOHN KRIZANC'S *Prague* premiered in 1984 at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, and in 1986 it was staged at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal. This edition incorporates the revisions made since the Toronto premiere. It also includes Urjo Kareda's valuable Introduction to the play's evolution and useful background notes on Czech political history since World War II. Krizanc explores the relation between politics, identity, and art in a totalitarian state. The year is 1983 and the setting is a stage where the Bread and Dreams Theatre Company of Prague is rehearsing *Magnificat*, a disguised allegory of the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. By staging the subversive play for an audience which is to include Russian dignitaries, the author and artistic director Vladimir Rozek is prepared to sacrifice the company and his craft in order to atone for his betrayal of his dissident father. Prior to his father's death, Vladimir's strategy of survival was to compromise all principles for the sake of art: "if I hadn't renounced my father we wouldn't have a company, it's as simple as that." Vladimir's struggle foregrounds the play's central question, namely whether it is the artist's ethical imperative to be the conscience of society. It is to Krizanc's credit that the play never resorts to facile answers. Although Vladimir is a sympathetic character, his transformation from a writer of politically correct plays to a bold defender of the principles of the defunct Charter 77, the "non-political" group of playwrights, intellectuals, and workers to which his father belonged, occurs too late to be politically effective, and his script is never performed as he intended.

A more predictable line of action exposes the contradictions at the heart of totalitarian rule. Krizanc's harshest indictment is against the pseudo-aesthetics of "socialist realism," which extols mimes and clowns while maligning artists such as Franz Kafka for their lack of "optimism." However, Krizanc carefully balances the political theme with broad humour and compassion for all of his characters. Major Zrak, the aging police investigator for whom "culture is a great impediment" and foreign values counterfeit, listens to Frank Sinatra and seeks the autographs of party hacks. The Major, however, suffers from obvious melancholia and his maxims are as hollow as his eyes. Lenka, a clown in the troupe who plots to immigrate to the West, once worked in an illegal burlesque club whose status has been pending since one of the party secretaries caught crabs there. Lenka is the play's most spirited character, her brazen earthiness and passionate nature underscoring the insipidness of the world around her.

Krizanc has carefully balanced the inextricable link between role, script, and audience with the larger political and ethical contexts of playmaking. *Jitters* also takes the theatre as its subject, although the scope of French's comedy is not as wide-ranging. This new edition includes substantial changes made since the play was first staged in 1979. Again, the setting is a dress rehearsal for a play-within-a-play ("The Care and Treatment of Roses"), and again the theatre is a metaphor of misrule. However, whereas *Prague* is concerned with "lofty" issues such as the subordination of the self to the state and the politics of performance, *Jitters* focuses on the meaner aspects of production — the petty rivalries between ac-

tors, the unending crises induced by pre-performance blues, the impossible demands of actors upon directors and props managers, and the smugness of reviewers. The chaos surrounding rehearsal and opening night blurs all distinctions between reality and performance, attesting to the social appropriation of the text.

In *Quebec Voices* Robert Wallace brings together in English translation three recent texts which have added new dimensions to experimental theatre in Quebec: Normand Chaurette's *Provincetown Players, July 1919* (first published in French in 1981); René Gingras's *Breaks* (1983); and René-Daniel Dubois's *Don't Blame the Bedouins* (1984). All three works challenge the spatial and verbal structures of realist drama, locating meaning in the rhythms and sounds of language. *Provincetown Playhouse, July 1919* examines the nature of theatre through a bizarre plot which consists of an extended monologue by Charles Charles, aged thirty-eight, an inmate of a Chicago psychiatric hospital who during the past nineteen years has been performing a play about his life at age nineteen. The traditional double-plot structure is replaced by a perpetual simultaneity of action between past and present, and conventional dialogue by sensuous, disjointed sound patterns which retain their original intensity through William Boulet's commendable translation. At the heart of the play is a disturbing irony: at the same time that Charles Charles verbalizes his madness, his inner self remains concealed not only from the audience but also from the playwright who feeds on the illusion of the psychologically well-made play. *Don't Blame the Bedouins*, skilfully translated by Barbara Kerslake, also displaces traditional forms of plot and dialogue in a poignant allegory of the fragmentation of North American society. Dubois blends sounds from French, Italian, German, Russian, English, and Chinese with various discourses such as folk tales, poetry, and encyclopedia entries. The three central characters, Michaela (a soprano), Weulf (an athlete), and Flip (a student), represent the three principal ways of perceiving the world: through art, through the body, and through knowledge. The three characters eventually merge into the Beast, an entity which incorporates "The Truth. Friendship. Power. Solitude. Death." The Beast challenges the debilitating power structures of the modern world represented by military trains and surveillance helicopters, but the play ends with no clear victory for either side. In subject matter and plot *Breaks* is the more conventional play. It is both a modern *psychomachia* in which the central figure, a young composer named Pete, struggles with the conflicting demands of self, and an allegory of the appropriation of modern art by business and the mass media. The artist is portrayed as divided between the demands of a money economy, represented by Pete's landlord and would-be business partner Dupuis, and the anarchic individualism of the drifter François. The appeal of the dramatic conflict lies in the clash of voices skilfully transmitted through Linda Gaboriau's translation. While Pete struggles to complete a musical score, Dupuis's brash tones and contorted syntax counterpoint François's hypnotic lyricism. The romantic solution, however, is too pat: during the final moments language and music merge in chaotic syncopation while the artist, alone and serene, continues his creation silhouetted against a semi-dark sky.

In order to appreciate fully the poetic basis of these texts it is necessary to experience them in performance. As Wallace suggests in his prefatory remarks, "these scripts require that we approach 'dramatic literature' from a new perspective, one in which silent reading is recognized as incomplete if not inappropriate, and reading aloud *also* is understood as an act of

the body." My major complaint about the anthology concerns Paul Lefebvre's Introduction which overstates the uniqueness of these plays in the context of Quebec theatrical history. A case in point is Lefebvre's enthusiasm for the plays' open-endedness. *Don't Blame the Bedouins*, he observes, like *Breaks*, is structurally bold because the author "remains faithful to himself and rejects the idea of the work of art as the transmission site of a clear message, for which the play would be an easily decipherable code with only one meaning." Surely this may also be said about the best of pre-1980 Quebec theatre, in particular the plays of Michel Tremblay and Jean-Claude Germain whom Lefebvre cites as the older generation of playwrights. An awkward hyperbole also informs Jean-Marie Lelièvre's Preface to *Don't Blame the Bedouins*, in which we are instructed about the merits of the play: "Rarely has there been such perfect fusion of form and content: rarely has a play gone so far in making a universal statement." I hope that the next anthology of this kind will include more informative and incisive commentary.

VIVIANA COMENSOLI

LOWRY'S NOXON

GERALD NOXON, *Teresina Maria*. Wilfrid Laurier Univ., n.p.

GERALD NOXON'S PREVIOUSLY unpublished novel *Teresina Maria*, begun in the 1930's, has finally reached print, thanks to the Lowry connection and *The Malcolm Lowry Review*, whose editor, Paul Tiessen, is largely responsible for the venture. Lowry had read the novel in the 1940's, and had written to his agent, Harold Matson, on its behalf, but despite Lowry's conviction that it was "absolutely first rate" the book was not then published. It is not hard to see why. The book, here edited in a form close to the original typescript, is by no means first rate, as *Under the Volcano* is, and it lacks the popular touch of Margerie Lowry's *Horse in the Sky* (the two works cited in the Introduction). The prose still needs polish, and, despite its vividness and readability, the novel is structurally flawed in a fundamental way. There would have been, and presumably will be now, a very limited readership for it.

For all that, the book was well worth publishing, and, given obvious limitations in funding, the editors have done a commendable job. There are a few lapses: some errors of punctuation that have not been corrected; some quotations are incomplete; the odd line is left relict on a very bare page. Slightly unsightly (for it could easily have been corrected) is the failure of right-margin justification when a long word follows, creating an unnecessary hiatus in the reader's thought. But the print is clear, the margins generous, and misprints almost non-existent.

More worrying is the failure of the Introduction, of what must be a unique edition, to give more hard facts about the book and its background. We are offered useful details about Gerald Noxon, his relationship with the Lowries, and his cinematic background, and, indeed, these are to the point. Even so, I should like to have known, on the first (unnumbered) page of the Introduction, whether in fact Noxon did submit the manuscript to any publishers, and, if so, what the responses were. A little more detail about the precise dates of writing would have been useful, and details of the political and social background of Mussolini's Italy would have been more pertinent than the iteration of Lowry's unstinting (though unavailing) support.

The novel is set in the Italy of Il Duce, in Rome and *sus anexas*, and it evokes that era unforgettably — but through the smaller vignettes (Mussolini playing ten-

nis, Signora Bicci catching the train on time) rather than panoramically. The wines are mouth-watering, the food succulent, the marvellous automobiles lovingly described, and the graft and corruption of that era felt in the frustrations and triumphs of the unexceptional people rather better, perhaps, than in the description of the bigger fish. The tone is authentic, and the people ring true.

Yet the novel fails stylistically and structurally. The prose is often vivid and immediate, and on the whole Noxon avoids in his descriptions of simple people a Hemingway-like reduction of thought and language. However (and, I suppose, the comparison is inevitable), he lacks entirely Lowry's sense of verbal orchestration and symbolic resonance. The digressions (e.g., comparisons of Italian trains to those of London, Paris, New York) are distracting rather than functional, and too often (as with the references to Claude and Poussin) impose a way of seeing the scene from without, rather than from within. There are any number of vivid vignettes, and memorable images, but these (even allowing for the cinematic approach) do not entirely cohere, for Noxon is not entirely the master of his verbal medium. And, incidentally, the misquoted quotation on page 244 comes from *Don Giovanni* rather than *Figaro* — again, the error is not functional.

The structural problem is more considerable. The central character, Teresina Maria, is warmly and sympathetically portrayed, as is her anguish when she discovers that her husband-to-be, Roberto, sells himself for sex to his American employer. Yet later nothing is made of the moral ambiguities implicit in such early scenes, and Roberto, increasingly, becomes a positive force in his schemes to leave Italy and head for America. Another ambiguity is implicit in Roberto's early contact with the flashy American gangster, Scallero, and it seems likely that Roberto will end up driving for the Mob rather than for Mrs. Withrington Smythe, to whom he has an introduction — but the ambiguity is not deepened, for as the varied complexity of the early scenes simplifies itself to the thrill of the car-chase (told very well, I must concede), Roberto becomes more uncritically commendable. The action is not finally controlled by the kind of irony promised at the beginning, and the result is perhaps analogous to what happens in the film of *The Graduate*, where irony is lost as Mrs. Robinson gives way to her daughter, and the moral ambiguities promised (he did, after all, sleep with his wife's mother) are ignored for the sake of the plot.

Yet it is a good plot, and one which would make a good film, maybe a better film than novel. As a novel, though, it can stand on its own, albeit a bit unsteadily, without Lowry's helping hand (the scene of Pezzoni asking for a drink, with all deference to the Introduction, is not reminiscent of the Consul). The editors, perhaps, have been a little too anxious to sense influence; if there is any, I suggest, it works the other way, for many of the cinematic qualities of the opening of *Under the Volcano* were a later addition, after Noxon had seen the manuscript, and it would be worth speculating about the connection here. Still, *Teresina Maria* is not *Under the Volcano*, nor was meant to be, even though the association will be responsible for most of the interest in it. It may not be the first-rate novel Lowry asserted it to be, but it is a reasonable second-rate one, and in rescuing it from oblivion Paul Tiessen, Miguel Mota, and *The Malcolm Lowry Review*, to use Lowry's words, have done a swell job.

CHRIS ACKERLEY

VERS MIRAGE

NORMAND DE BELLEFEUILLE, *Catégoriques un deux et trois.* Ecrits des Forges, n.p.

ANTHONY PHELPS, *Orchidée nègre.* Triptyque, n.p.

JOEL POURBAIX, *Dans les plis de l'écriture.* Triptyque, n.p.

PIERRE MORENCY, *Effets personnels.* L'Hexagone, $9.95.

ROLAND GIGUERE, *La Main au feu.* L'Hexagone, $6.95.

Catégoriques un deux et trois de Normand de Bellefeuille a reçu en 1986 le "Grand Prix de la Poésie de la Fondation des Forges." Le dos de la couverture étale les louanges de Joseph Bonenfant, Paul Chamberland et Ginette Michaud. Ces membres du jury, chacun à leur manière, insistent sur la virtuosité technique du poète. Mais le lecteur averti a vite fait de mettre le doigt sur la plaie. *Catégoriques un deux et trois* est un livre qui trahit ce vide qu'Hubert Aquin nomma jadis "la fatigue culturelle." Le Prix s'explique ainsi par le fait que le jury a reconnu ici une avant-garde sans surprise, une écriture bien "Les Herbes Rouges." On peut ainsi conclure avec Normand de Bellefeuille: "Catégorique: il y a des images qui sont des maladies, une seule suffira désormais contre ma haine des arrière-mondes!" Et le poète a raison d'affirmer: "Nous sommes si peu préparés à la répétition." Tout cela parsemé, sans surprise, de Nietzsche, de John Cage, de Vladimir Jankélévitch, de Philippe Sollers et de Michel Serres. La poésie de Normand de Bellefeuille est une femme qui se croit ravissante dans la lourdeur de ces faux bijoux. Je sais, ça plaira à certains. . . .

Tout autre est la puissance chantante d'*Orchidée nègre* d'Anthony Phelps:

> Ah Père aux chuintements de rhum
> aux petits pas de riz
> dis-moi dis-moi
> toi qui fais levain aux pierres mortes
> dis-moi si sous couvert d'absence
> je ne m'en vais que vers mirage
> que vide vers vide et vide et vide

C'est ainsi à travers le long poème lui-même, "Orchidée Nègre" et au cours des textes recueillis sous le sous-titre "Typographe céleste" qu'Anthony Phelps offre un véritable lyrisme de la conscience. Voilà au moins un moi poétique qui ose parler de son "désert de l'Ecriture" où il espère que de temps en temps "pousse une oasis." Avouons que depuis Jules Supervielles une telle humilité cosmique est chose rare. Elle n'est d'autre part dépourvue ni de charme ni d'humour:

> La vie est belle et douce Orchidée nègre
> Tu me dépasses d'un mot qui traverse la fontaine
> et les moustiques à qui perd gagne
> exigent leur droit d'auteur
> L'herbe tondue te fait tapis

Dans les plis de l'écriture de Joël Pourbaix pourrait faire songer à l'oeuvre de Normand de Bellefeuille. Cependant, même si Joël Pourbaix affirme que "la suite poétique et la réflexion théorique ne peuvent être dissociées l'une de l'autre," il ne fait pas passer ses essais pour des poèmes. En effet, le livre est divisé en deux parties. La première, "Dans les plis de l'écriture," comprend de véritables poèmes — soit en prose soit en vers libres. La deuxième partie, "Sous les plis de l'Ecriture: L'Altérité poursuivie," révèle un poète d'une haute intégrité intellectuelle qui médite sur les questions les plus importantes de la poétique contemporaine; un poète qui lit Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, Mircea Eliade, Maurice Blanchot et Jacques Derrida pour comprendre le mystère de ses propres démarches créatrices. On se fera une idée de l'étrange pouvoir poétique de Joël Pourbaix en méditant sur la saisissante simplicité de ses vers:

> à la fenêtre vient
> le bleu de la nuit
> en décembre une fin de siècle
> le lacis des pensées diurnes sombre dans l'oubli
> . . .
> le réel est une nuance qui tremble (24)

Effets personnels de Pierre Morency est un très beau livre qui reprend des poèmes en prose publiés en 1986 à tirage limité et illustrés par trois dessins originaux de Roland Giguère. Seule la suite "Douze jours dans une nuit" est inédite. Cela semble cependant assez pour souligner que malgré ses longs silences, et peut-être grâce à eux, Pierre Morency demeure l'un de nos meilleurs poètes. Sa recherche du dénuement atteint ici un haut langage:

> c'est un jour
> tellement blanc
> il est enfoui
> sous une paix de coton
> il se dépose dans les pistes
> du bruant   c'est lent
> cela fait monter les montagnes
> léger noyau d'immensité

Signalons enfin le plaisir que l'on aura à relire cette nouvelle édition de poèmes que Roland Giguère écrivit entre 1949 et 1968: *La Main au feu*. La claire et intelligente préface de Gilles Marcotte ainsi que les quelques notes bio-bibliographiques font de ce volume une édition idéale au point de vue pédagogique. En dehors de sa valeur poétique incontestable, *La Main au feu* révèle une énergie qui n'a rien à envier à la poésie des années quatre-vingt:

> le temps traverse le brasier et noircit
> à l'aube nous fouillerons la cendre
> pour célébrer la dernière étincelle
>
> nous jaillirons ensemble.

ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ

KROETSCH

ROBERT LECKER, *Robert Kroetsch*. Twayne, $19.95.

CONCERTED CRITICAL ATTENTION has now been focused on Robert Kroetsch's novels and the exposition of his phenomenological, post-modern, post-structural, and structural musings. Robert Lecker draws on some of that scholarly criticism and on Kroetsch's intertextuality play to fashion a post-modern critical overview. Since 1978 this prominent young ECW bibliographer, editor, and McGill scholar has also been examining Kroetsch's writing in "modified" or "early" versions of many chapters and sections in this book. Lecker's arrangement of Kroetsch's novels goes like this: Kroetsch's first two books, *But We Are Exiles* (1965) and *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), have usually been considered conventionally realist, but they harbour an oddly strong tension between tradition and innovation. This tension breaks open in the wild parody and duality of male character in *The Studhorse Man* (1969) and is soon followed by careful post-modern theoretical refinement in *Gone Indian* (1973).

It is in *Badlands* (1975) that Kroetsch achieves the contingently perfect balance of story and antistory to "distance himself from the kind of writing that implicitly questions the act of writing." Kroetsch burdens a female narrator, Anna Dawe, with overstuffed story and facile notions about uncovering historical truths concerning her scientist father. Her naïve confusions amid that over-ambitious process engender a William Dawe "who lives out a magnificent antistory, inhabiting the narrative but defying language at every turn." The magic realist text, *What the Crow Said* (1978), is "Kroetsch's most sustained effort to escape the shackles of realistic fiction" through the subversive processes of the tall tale. However, Kroetsch's bold writing falls prey to strategic excesses that disable the locale of the novel. A heavily Barthesian *Alibi* (1983) is Kroetsch's "first attempt to apply the concept of erotic delay to a full-length novel." This is why a surfeit of convention and detail (gimmick) plays on its surface. We are counselled not to be impatient (dissenting).

There is valuable and important play and much postural detail of an interesting sort inside Lecker's book. And undergraduates, at whom Twayne texts are normally directed, will find a strong introduction to post-modernism in this nervous, restless, and clever totem to Robert Kroetsch. But the book's readers may also want to consider why Lecker invests such enormous energy demonstrating how post-modern and deconstructive Kroetsch's oeuvre is, only to conclude that Kroetsch's work occupies a "borderline" place because it has "an aesthetic center" linked to a "crucial tension." Is this, then, a cosmetic bandage for an aging North American post-modernism? Is Kroetsch supposed to embody (?) a distinctively Canadian strain of post-modernism? Or does Lecker's hegemonic, progressive reading of Kroetsch's varied literary works place Kroetsch so firmly in this "borderline" region that national or regional difference threatens to become a defect?

Kroetsch's relationship to theory is impishly playful, eminently fashionable, and his literary writing is often quite self-conscious (reflexive). Does Lecker include Professor Kroetsch when he warns readers:

> More and more often we see studies of his poetry and fiction that deliberately fragment their arguments or that end in intentional ellipsis. This is too easy.

Indeed. But nowhere in this ambitious, homogenized overview does Robert Lecker provide readers with compromising distinctions that seriously challenge any of Kroetsch's novels, or the grandly preoccupied styles of his generation of male writer. Some Kroetsch novels are just more successful experiments than others and Robert Kroetsch, now 60, is simply "in the midst of a prolific career," a flattering body of work proceeding wholesale and endlessly, it seems, from this writer's tension-filled balancing of imaginative desire and limitation. In a chapter coyly entitled "How Do You Grow a Poet," fragments of Kroetsch's poetry are virtually interlocked with snippets of usable critical theory. Nowhere do we read that most of Kroetsch's poetry is unaccomplished, clumsy.

Kroetsch's best post-modern novel is *The Studhorse Man.* Others of his works well worth reading more than once are the long poem *Seed Catalogue* and *Badlands,* his most poetic novel. Curiously, the last two also connect most intimately with Kroetsch's sense of place and with the terribly anxious question mark around source and imagination that underlies his work. *Seed Catalogue,* in particular, seems to be a return to his parents' garden by the Heisler Alberta farmhouse where Kroetsch, the skinny, solemn-looking, asthmatic little boy spent so much time as a child.

Badlands, the novel that most closely and curiously circles a little boy's 'innocent' dream garden, might be interesting to feminist critics. Although Professor Lecker attempts a flattering(?) feminist(?) alternative to his positioning of disembodied, margin-note narrator Anna Dawe as the wilful story fixer and character fixer of *Badlands,* I'm not convinced (or perhaps I'm not interested). Unacknowledged or recognized by Lecker, however, is the fact that *Badlands* is Kroetsch's most erotic work and that fifteen-year-old Indian girl/woman Anna Yellowbird is the most carefully incorporated female presence in the novel. Anna Yellowbird shadows the lovingly sweaty scientific expedition and eventually nurses dwarf paleontologist William Dawe as he recovers from a broken leg near the prehistoric Alberta dig. Dawe's openly independent and managing wife is tucked away in Ontario, of course, in a more than makeshift house. Yellowbird feeds Dawe and then makes him comfortable out in the sun and under the shade of a cottonwood beside the expedition's tent-

house. Shortly, "to his secret and erotic delight," she picks him up and "carrie(s) him like a boy" into the tent where she caresses his body, eventually fellating him. Oddly, Kroetsch's account of this sensuous moment retracts nervously, becoming crudely and retroactively controlling:

> Whatever they had done, Dawe and the Indian girl, he would not call it making love any more than would she, he not having genuinely experienced that genuine making, ever, she not having understood that impossible concept any more than she had understood something called an ocean, an army, a world war. . . .

Anna Yellowbird, the pre-literate and perfectly accommodating mother/lover, is, I think, the volatile/tamed? centre of this key Kroetschian novel, and a region of the mind Lecker's quite able and curiously defective book does not touch.

ANNE HICKS

FEELINGS

MONA FERTIG, *4722 Rue Berri*. Caitlin Press, $8.50.

RHONA MCADAM, *Hour of the Pearl*. Thistledown, $8.95.

WITH QUIET SELF-REFLECTION, these books present highly personal accounts of events in the lives of the writers. *4722 Rue Berri* is what Mona Fertig calls "a poetic journal (with dreams, drawings & poems)" of a period from the beginning of April 1982 to the end of August of that year, covering the period just after she had moved from Vancouver to Montreal. Rhona McAdam's *Hour of the Pearl* is comprised primarily of lyric poems ordered in such a way that, while they remain personal, they form a narrative about the painful effects of growth and experience.

4722 Rue Berri, beginning with an "S.O.S.," is the expression of a life disrupted. Early in the book, Fertig explains that she is "keeping some kind of record." What Fertig is trying to do perhaps has its parallel in another work, which she sees in Montreal, Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*:

> Waiting for hours in line with many white-haired ladies. The incredible build-up. Excitement. Moving slowly up the line inch by inch coffee hot chocolate 3 hours a hundred sewn triangles hanging on the wall. Each one made by a different woman coming from a different space. Lace and beads. Felt and wool. Feelings. Then finally entering the black tombwomb and facing the triangle of life. History. Herstory. Ourstory.

The importance of the political statements of such works as *The Dinner Party* and *4722 Rue Berri* is undeniable. And the quotation from Penny Kemp at the end of Fertig's book indicates both what is important politically and socially and what is wrong artistically with the book. Celebrating Fertig's work, Kemp says that a journal writer writes "not so much to be remembered as to remember." So where does that leave the reader? Reading someone's journal is a kind of voyeurism, so the life itself must hold our interest. But, like any good writing, good journals, if they are to be anything more than historical documents, require insightfulness and skill with language that are, unfortunately, lacking in *4722 Rue Berri*; the book may help Fertig remember her time in Montreal, but it holds little interest for anyone else.

Hour of the Pearl contains some wonderful insights and some well-crafted poems, particularly the title poem, which opens the book. "Hour of the Pearl" focuses on Yolanda, who "approaches thirteen with a new haircut," "with magic," "with hesitation," "with music," and "with all she has." The strength of the poem, however, is in the distance between Yolanda and the speaker of the poem, who does not understand what Yolanda is going through, but who nevertheless remembers what it was like to be heading

into her teens and "finding someone new inside," an identity. The exuberance and questioning of the youthful Yolanda are subtly contrasted with the lack of understanding of the mature speaker, perhaps the same speaker who, in the final poem of the book, "The Age of Manners," shows what happens to youthful enthusiasm:

> You reach a certain age and suddenly
> everyone around you is covered with bruises;
> there's hardly room for another blow.

Yet in between innocence and disillusionment is a vast experience: school and family life in adolescence, then love, and parting. Perhaps the most disturbing element of *Hour of the Pearl* is that the speaker — and the connections among the poems indicate that the speaker is, for the most part at least, the same — faces each experience with the same stoic acceptance, and the poems have a consistently melancholy tone: each experience seems to affect her in the same way; rarely do the moments of exuberance return. Ultimately though, *Hour of the Pearl* is a look back at the development of a sensitive woman.

ROBERT ATTRIDGE

FIRST NOVELS

LESLIE HALL PINDER, *Under the House*. Talonbooks, $9.95.

MARTIN WAXMAN, *The Promised Land*. Black Moss Press, $12.95.

BOTH THESE FIRST novels deal with confused, alienated individuals whose psychological problems stem significantly from loss of contact with their parents. Waxman's novel is comic while Pinder's is serious to the point of pretentiousness, but both suffer from misapplication of technical skill — trying too hard for certain effects at the expense of the work as a whole.

The Promised Land explores the shopping mall as a contemporary cultural symbol through characters whose involvement in selling has come to dominate their lives. Sandy Rodd has experienced the call to retail sales as others experience a religious conversion. Martin Mall has grown up in the mall he manages and has come to regard it as both a parent — he has changed his name to Mall — and a paradise on earth. After various successful but unsatisfying careers, Seymour Black discovers his true quest, immortality, in the ownership of a mall: "Malls are forever. If that's not immortality, I don't know what is."

Though mainly concerned with being funny, Waxman manages to make his characters vivid and sympathetic in spite of their obsessions. Although his short novel carries such a heavy satirical burden that characterization and plot seem relatively unimportant, Waxman is a better than competent craftsman. He handles dialogue especially well, and in addition to using it to reveal character and advance the plot, he makes dialogue his most effective device for satirizing commercial obsessions. His parodies of the clichés of retail sales and adaptations of the jargon and clichés of more serious activities to selling situations are both funny and telling. When Ms. Rodd sells drapes to Mr. Mall for his office, for example, the preliminaries are described as "foreplay" and the mundane business of estimating quantities becomes "the physical act itself":

> Suddenly her heart was palpitating. Her arms were flailing about in a frenzied motion. Sandy was unable to control the sounds; the little yelps of joy that came pouring from her mouth.
>
> She was drowning in the pleasure of the estimate. But oh, she thought, what a way to go!
>
> Sandy was almost there. Her body was undulating; her blood was rushing through her veins. Faster, faster, faster. She was exploding. She experienced a wave of total creative control.

> "90 yards," she shouted, "Triple fullness! Triple fullness! Triple fullness!!!"

Hardly subtle, this technique is still amusing, and Waxman employs it successfully in linking selling with religion, politics, literature, and popular psychology as well as sexual relations.

Notwithstanding a few apparently pointless inclusions and passages that barely miss being silly, *The Promised Land* is never boring and, with little pretence of being profound, it does provide insight into our consumer society. Though Waxman seems to feel he has to sell himself first as a humourist and second as a novelist, his technical ability is impressive in a first novel and, with more confidence and commitment, he ought to be able to turn out substantial fiction in the future.

Leslie Hall Pinder is as self-consciously artistic as Waxman is humorous. Nothing is straightforward in *Under the House*, and its complexity often seems pointlessly imposed. Pinder's subject is the Rathbones of Saskatchewan, a family more successful in acquiring land than harmony. She portrays the family in fragments of time between 1915 and 1986, usually focusing on the experience of one character at a time. While this method does make the reader intimately aware of the inner experience of the focal characters, it also makes for difficult reading and a diffuse, haphazardly structured novel. Adding to the difficulty, Pinder concentrates on characters that are neither central to the main action nor as potentially interesting as others that get little attention. Throughout most of the novel, her centres of consciousness are in the dark about both the family's damning sin — an act of incest, the particulars of which most readers will guess long before Pinder intends — and the personalities of most of those around them. Maude is the least successful. She is senile as the novel opens in 1986 and seemingly strives for something like senility throughout; her confusion and vagueness of mind, though convincingly rendered, cause the novel to bog down in the passages narrated through her thoughts. The only centre of consciousness given as much space as Maude is Evelyn, a troubled youth existing almost outside the central Rathbone family, into which her mother marries when she is nine. Although interesting in her own right, Evelyn neither knows nor cares much about the Rathbone family as a whole, and thus narrating the story through her adds to the novel's characteristic disunity and confusion.

Seen only obliquely through biased minds, potentially interesting characters such as the would-be patriarch S.D., his loyal wife Kataryn, and their sensitive son Clarence remain nebulous and unsatisfying. Stanley, the older son and the inheritor of S.D.'s ego, is seen from within only in a couple of passages, which are too obviously manipulated to make him look bad. Pinder's method of exploring minds through symbolic motifs, fragmented impressions, and elusive similes works well only for the two troubled female characters to which she devotes most of her attention. This is not to say that Pinder lacks ability. As with Waxman, her problem seems to be a matter of concentrating too hard on certain aspects of her novel at the expense of others — an error in judgement rather than a lack of talent.

H. W. CONNOR

THRILLER

FRED CEDERBERG, *The Last Hunter*. Stoddart, $23.95.

RON BASE, *Foreign Object*. Doubleday Canada, $18.95.

The Last Hunter is a mystery/adventure novel in the best John Buchan manner, nicely spiced with up-to-date plot twists and unexpected plot reversals worthy of

John Le Carre. The blend of old and new is matched in the format: harking back to the 1930's, each chapter has a pleasant sketch suggesting its content. In a more modern manner the chapters are also prefaced by a series of cryptic cables, as in this one for chapter 1 (only date and time change in the series: the last one is 2-6-66, thus setting the fictional time as 18 days of crowded action):

> 15-5-66 2200 hrs GMT
> File: AH 1945
> For prime ministerial and presidential eyes only, to be hand delivered on receipt.
> TO: MI 5, CIA, RCMP (Operation Alois Sibling desks) [it is no clue that only "Sibling desks" is printed, only a typo!]
> Society member departs Stuttgart. Destination Toronto via New York. Control.

The longest of them, serving as 'Prologue' to the novel, is "For Prime Minister's eyes only" and dated 3-5-45. They give fair clues that are fully explained at the novel's end when the full identity of the Hunters and the Keepers and what is being hunted and kept is known.

The novel's protagonist, Cal Sanders, is a divorced 40-year-old reporter whose refusal to accept the official explanation for the death of a West German businessman in Toronto soon embroils him in international espionage. The action quickly shuttles Sanders from Toronto to Spain, Gibraltar, France, London, and back across the Atlantic to Montreal (where he craftily "rescues" the heroine from the KGB, which is the greatest threat to Cal), on to a fishing camp/motel at Gananoque, where he outwits the KGB agent trailing him, and across northern Ontario, through Sudbury (not even Cederberg sets any threatening action there) and on to a "Camp Curry," just south of Elliot Lake, where the last revelations occur. The reality of the settings, especially in the final pursuit, sharpens the impact of the killings, the car chases, and the hair-breadth escapes "i' th' imminent deadly breach." These conventions are used so as to persuade the reader of their freshness: none more so than the natural romance between Sanders and the young enemy agent set to trail him. A cliché piece of soap-opera only in retrospect, not in its adult, economical telling. Indeed, *The Last Hunter* is a useful piece of ammunition for those who do not spurn the presence of romance in such adventure thrillers (or novels of detection), a critical battle which is still being briskly fought. It is only when rehearsing Cederberg's plot that its basic similarity in shape to *The Thirty-nine Steps* emerges. Such similarities are bound to occur between good examples of a genre.

Cederberg writes so confidently in his tradition that *The Last Hunter* is a model in itself, whereas Base's *Foreign Object* is more an example of trial and error because he cannot decide on a model. He has an intricately plotted, exciting novel of crime and detection to write but, mistakenly, does not trust his tale nor his own story-telling ability (shown towards the close of his novel when he gives that ability freer rein). Tom Coward, his problem-solver and "hunter," also a journalist, is too often over-concerned with demonstrating his cleverness: he is as self-conscious as his creator. Where Cederberg effortlessly spins his tale, Base lets the effort show. Cal Sanders gets on with his job but Tom Coward has several jobs to do. His tale is set at Cannes during the Film Festival and he moves in that bizarre world of stars, starlets, and producers. He is as bowled over by this as he is determined his readers shall be. The reader is treated to the "inside-story" of the Festival delivered in the glib behind-the-hand manner of "one-who-knows"; the gossip takes over for its own sake rather than for that of the novel.

This exhibitionism is an imitation of Ian Fleming's dangerous technique of seeding his James Bond novels with "lo-

cal" facts to show his own supposed familiarity with all places where 007 happens to be sent. 'Dangerous' because such knowledge is sometimes second-hand and one egregious slip reveals both author and character as poseurs. *Foreign Object* specializes in long lists of what the jet-set wears and where it is bought. I know nothing of these matters, nor are they of any service to the story — except, perhaps, in a fleeting reference; certainly not in regular, detailed lists. In Base's previous novel, *Matinee Idol* (Tom Coward's first case), the "killer," returning to his apartment tired-out, consoles himself by putting on "Mozart's E^b piano concerto," the supposition being that Base and the reader share the same expertise: in this case we do, which jars my acceptance of the casual reference as I am taken out of the novel's flow to wonder which of Mozart's three important piano concertos in that key is meant (K 271, K 449, or K 482). It doesn't matter: if the "killer's" taste needs to be shown, simply 'a Mozart piano concerto' would have sufficed, as also would 'some Mozart.' A deal of fuss over nothing? But Base does not think it is a mere 'nothing,' it is an important detail as far as he is concerned.

The puzzling out of such matters breaks whatever grip the novel has, and I can only be more suspicious about this device when I find it more extensively used in *Foreign Object* than in *Matinee Idol*, and about matters where I cannot test its accuracy. If Tom Coward takes on a third case I hope that Ron Base will take Fred Cederberg as his model and give me what *Quill & Quire* found in *Matinee Idol*: "a likeable, often chilling, ultimately memorable thriller."

R. W. INGRAM

VOICE PROBLEMS

ALBERT GELPI, ed., *Wallace Stevens: The Poetics of Modernism*. Cambridge Univ. Press, $22.95.

MARJORIE PERLOFF, *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*. Cambridge Univ. Press, $24.95.

R. A. YORK, *The Poem as Utterance*. Methuen, $18.95.

ROBERT BILLINGS, *The Revels*. Porcupine's Quill, $6.95.

ROBERT HOGG, *Heat Lightning*. Black Moss, $9.95.

JOHN NEWLOVE, *The Night the Dog Smiled*. ECW Press, $9.00.

"POETRY SPEAKS/ONE LISTENS" is Robert Hogg's neat version of a phrase made famous by a distinguished French critic run down and killed by a car in a Paris street a few years back. In a literal way he is probably right: multiple thousands of ears attend to Barthes, but perhaps only one person will *really* be listening to Robert Hogg's poetry — the poet himself. How this comes about is easy to see. In part the academization of reading is responsible for altering readers' expectations, but in greater part the problem is the insufficiency of the late modernist lyric. Readers now know that subjectivity is not the only subject for poetry, even if much of the poetry we get still demonstrates what Charles Olson condemned ages ago as the "lyrical interference of the individual as ego" and what Charles Bernstein calls the "conduit theory of communication (me — > you)." In the late 1980's, the free verse lyric form has become just as conventional and humdrum as the love sonnet at the end of the sixteenth century, and it takes a poet of superior talent to get readers to listen to the old form working in new ways.

Marjorie Perloff's superb analysis shows not only how the crisis of the free verse lyric is really the logical outcome of overdependence on the poetic models of Stevens and William Carlos Williams, but

also how the Pound tradition has been both more representative of twentieth-century poetic practice and more productive of innovative technique. Starting from the vexed question "Pound/Stevens: whose era?" (Eliot is no longer in the running), Perloff traces the essential distinctions which illuminate the subsequent traditions, taking Pound's collage (vs. Stevens's lyric), his encyclopedic (vs. meditative) forms, and his constructivist (vs. expressionist) ethic as the high road of the century. The chapters in the book are arranged according to chronology so as to present a history of the modernist turn in poetry; in her view the turn begins (and continues now and in post-modernity) with Pound's crucial distinction of *writing* in preference to questions of genre and to his assumption of the page as a visual construct rather than as a standard form for communication. From that we get Williams's visualization of poetry, George Oppen's idea of "presence" in the "shape of the lines," and the pivotal space between verse and prose explored by Beckett.

The last four chapters in Perloff take on the current events in poetry, the principles of which she sees deriving from Pound's discoveries: the return of narrative ("story"), the inclusion in post-modern poetry of material previously excised (political, ethical, historical, philosophical), the viability of fragments (the *collage* mode), and ultimately the advent of language-centred poetry in the 1980's, which is conceptually based. In all of these responses to the Pound tradition what is clear is that the old lyric voice gives way to multiple or even fragmentary voices.

By comparison to Perloff, six of the seven essays edited by Gelpi (the exception is the one by Perloff here) are turgidly argued, disparate, and, in spite of the attempt to connect Stevens to later poets such as Zukovsky, Olson, Duncan, Dorn, and Ashbery, hermetically sealed off from a continuing tradition. I take the cover illustration here — Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* in *black and white* — as an emblem of the monochromatic analyses herein. In Stevens's poetry the monochromatic aspect is the monologic aspect. As a late Romantic Stevens aestheticizes the poet's voice so that it eliminates or annexes the voice of the other. As Gerald L. Bruns points out, this un-American avoidance of heteroglossia (Bakhtin's useful term) obviously did not dismay Stevens, whom he represents as a confident self-encloser in the poet's act of language. But it is clear that the cul-de-sac of self-enclosure in minor poets who follow Stevens leads only to the trap of the solo lyric voice and its endlessly repeating conventions.

Which brings us to two representative Canadian poets. Of the two, Billings is closer to the Stevens tradition, but he has a strong localized connection to the land north of Toronto, where in several of these poems he locates his self. Lexically too, Billings localizes the poems, isolating again and again the same words: silence, heart, look, wife, how, remember, lake, voice, I, eye. Indeed, the first section of the book gives us a kind of Romantic cyclops in its indulgent seeing through the "Voices for the Eye." These are almost archetypally I/eye-centred poems, but their self-indulgence is saved (in the best poems) by their luxuriously slow pace, so that the words stand apart from the poet's ego and even apart from each other. As with the music of Count Basie, Billings seems to do as much with the spaces between the words as with the word themselves.

But there is a real problem with the voice. Billings is capable of some beautiful silences, both in words and spaces, as in "Beach Stones" and in parts of "Open Winter." But too often the voice is flat: "This is how you touch your wife's body," "At midnight when there are no voices /

you can not tell the sky from the lake," "the space heater humming its one insolent note." The one constant note is the drone of the ego, working out the various ways of saying "I see" and "I say." But although the poems problematize the ways of seeing, they are never allowed to distrust the ways of saying. The voice here hears many other voices — "What a man listens for is a voice" — "I listen to their voices, the / deep voice in the shallows off Thorah Island" — but what the reader gets is solely solo Billings.

Fifteen years after *Standing Back* (1971), Robert Hogg's voice has changed relatively little in *Heat Lightning*. Here we get the same allegiance to his Williams-Olson heritage in the narrow lines, the laconic observation, and the care for the field of the page. These are not ambitious poems in the way that Billings's are: Hogg avoids the hieratic ego for the demotic I, beginning with a charm to attract the influence of Ganesh to the book and a brief disavowal of the accuracy of personal vision:

> Out of the darkness
> toward the light
>
> or so we like
> to think
>
> driving the car
> at night

Besides brief poems of domestic, family, and social observation, Hogg has produced lyric poems with a narrative turn, including "Postcard, from America" and two classical portraits, "Medusa" and "Prometheus." The first is a sour prosy travelogue, the latter two achieve intensity through Hogg's narrow line. But mostly Hogg stays rooted in two places. One is in the sometimes mystical landscape of ordinary life: "Roots" must be the only poem ever written which includes the word "rototiller." The other place is in poetic tradition, and here Hogg's mild voice gets overshadowed by the sheer number of ancestor writers he mentions: Williams, Creeley, Olson, Oppen, Blake, H.D., and Pound (a passing reference to "In a Station of the Metro" in "Rocking Backwards"). But at least we hear those *other* voices through him.

The Poem as Utterance ought to be a better book than it turns out to be after two splendid introductory chapters on pragmatics as a strategy for hearing the voices in texts. Subsequent chapters deal with the high modernist poets — Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine, George, Rilke, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Montale, and Quasimodo — but only to discover in a new way what is already known: that the speech acts of modernist poets can be categorized as explanations, reminders and reminiscences, self-analysis, and metalinguistic acts. "This, then, is a poetry of disruption," says York rather obviously. "But it is also a poetry of reconciliation," in which an intended speech act (not one which is merely a simple interaction between the conscious wills of speaker and hearer) is co-existent with "a will-less contemplation of the scene in which the act is performed." All of this is to say what is frequently forgotten by both readers and poets, even those who follow the modernist tradition, that poetry is fundamentally a set of speech acts, and that (as those two early chapters make clear) language, of which poetry is a part, "can only be conceived as dialogue, or at least as ultimately permitting dialogue."

York's observation that if we speak to ourselves it is because we are unaccustomed to internalizing external linguistic transactions applies perfectly to John Newlove's award-losing collection. Even the epigraph, from J. B. Russell's *The Devil*, which explains the internalization of suffering as a guarantee of the idea of evil in others, demonstrates the transaction upon which Newlove builds his poems. As in all his earlier work, he is here playing with the conventions of the Ro-

mantic voice in decline, but there are many other voices internalized here besides the expected utterance of self-observation. Newlove begins, in "Driving," with the speech act of the other: "You never say anything in your letters. You say / I drove all night long through the snow / in someone else's car. . . ." And throughout the poems which follow he brilliantly incorporates other voices everywhere.

What poet writes nowadays as "we"? There he is in "The Cities We Longed For." What poet nowadays writes as "you"? There he is in "The Permanent Tourist Comes Home": "Speak. But be careful of making moulds / which the spiritually illiterate / can fill up with gumbo." What poet nowadays can write as Al Purdy? There he is in two of the best shorter poems from the book, "Visiting the Purdys, 1973" and "Even Wisdom," doing the Purdys in different voices. Still, for all the voices, the Newlove universe is a pretty serious place — it is death, love, and life, in constant rotation. The major poems here, "The Green Plain," "Insect Hopes," "White Philharmonic Novels," and the long prose-poem "The Perfect Colour of Flowers," all work with the problems of competing voices in that universe, among which the poet's has no acknowledged primacy:

> This whole civilization is noise . . .
>
> And we are surrounded by liars
> so that when the poet that is in us says
> we are surrounded by liars
> he is called a liar
> or is given prizes, liar
> obligations . . .
>
> But I wanted to tell you still how lovely we are . . .

Amongst a whole collection of such voices, the one Newlove produces in "Big Mirror" (about incarceration in the dentist's chair), is perhaps the most remarkable, as it demonstrates his gift for making paranoid *angst* so funny:

> Big mirror on cabinet in corner can see from corner of eye
> self and look dumb tied rigor-mortis here . . .
> I am safe look like pay insurance
> Our work and will grunt hurt and screw up eyes good.
> Evil damn dentist comes fast around
> left side of chair holding weapons.
> Now start fat man

Late in the 1980's, paralyzed by conventions and worn out through over-use, the modernist lyric poem is having severe voice problems. It takes a Newlove to show what can still be done with the form's decline, but also, and more important, where the voices of the poem go next.

REGINALD BERRY

LONG LIGHT

GWENDOLYN MACEWEN, *Afterworlds*. McClelland & Stewart, $9.95.

ELIZABETH BREWSTER, *Selected Poems of Elizabeth Brewster* (2 vols.) 1944-1977. Oberon, $12.95.

THE POETRY OF Gwendolyn MacEwen is pure. Like water. You can see so clearly through it. It quenches your thirst. It also ponders the universe, a spectacle both grand and intimate; it contemplates the world with its festering sores of racial paranoia and xenophobia. At the centre of all this clean high running is MacEwen herself probing, invoking, remembering, suffering, smiling.

In a first section of *Afterworlds* called "Ancient Slang" she speaks like an oracle — personal to everyone, wondering where all the words go. They become afterthoughts, "lethal gossip of the spheres." She gives us also "The White Horse" of wisdom and innocence, "the first horse to come into the world," who looks at you wondering why you are here when all your countries are broken. We meet the Loch Ness monster, "this swan of Hell," "this ugly slug" in a brilliant tour de force that

has the lugubrious legendary beast dying of loneliness "In his mind's dark land, / where he dreamed up his luminous myths, the last of which was man." MacEwen is best when writing from her breathless cosmic imagination but falters a little in poems such as "Genesis 2," where she is simply playing Rubick's Cube with God or where she is foisting little poetry jokes on us. Even here, however, there are exceptions. In "Let Me Make This Perfectly Clear," she tells us to shove the poem qua poem and concentrate on what matters — "out there in the large dark / And in the long light, Breathing."

MacEwen makes unexpected identification with curious figures from recent history. In her poems they tell our story — the Niagara Daredevil who discovers what truth is by flinging himself into the canyons of his soul; Eva Braun reflecting on Hitler as a lover, with the voice of sardonic decadence: "Marlene Dietrich told some guy who wanted her: 'I'll sleep with you when Hitler's dead.' Then after the war the guy confronted her with her promise and Marlene said: 'Hitler's alive and well and living in Argentina. Goodbye.'" In a cold, spare section called "Apocalypse," where Rasmusin searches for the remains of the Franklin expedition, various voices image the splendid but merciless aesthetic of death by freezing in a land that is "the white teeth / Of a giant saw." The snow is a ruined vault where he reads traces of pain. The other long poem in this section called "Letters to Josef in Jerusalem" is a lyric indictment of contemporary political madness. Deftly, MacEwen turns a personal attack into the leitmotif that blends lyricism with social vision producing such chilling insights as "Things do not fall apart; it is worse: everything is fused in an awful centre."

"After-Thoughts," MacEwen's prose section, is not as startling or disturbing but then these are after-thoughts. The delightful exception is "1958," a nostalgic revel in batwing sweaters and ducktails that is wholly sustained. The book ends with "Avatars," breathless, quivering love poems delivered by a full female voice documenting the stunning disaster of ecstasy:

> We proceed in beautiful devastating stages
> Towards our end, as the horse and rider
> Collapse together in the catastrophe of love.

Elizabeth Brewster's is a quiet, enduring wizardry. She does not startle but she satisfies, often in unexpected ways. Brewster keeps you level, looking out at the world, neither too far up nor too far down, for its sweet ironic revelations. Regularly facing loneliness and boredom, she never leaves you stranded out there but pulls you gently back to awareness you should have had in the first place:

> Ten years from now
> I may write my great book.
> My lover may marry me
> for my old-age pension.
> In heaven I shall be a ballet dancer
> creating perfect patterns
> without words.

In two volumes covering forty years of poetry writing, the *Selected Poems of Elizabeth Brewster* brims with insight, gritty humour, comfort, and common sense. Brewster herself mocks that last accolade: common sense would be dull were it not so unique. Hers is not so much a common ecstasy as an ecstasy in common things. She is both reasonable and closely observant. Rejecting large patterns and passions, she makes you look down at your feet for the glorious designs — dandelions, turning to white puffballs — a "circular net / of stars rayed together / enclosing air." In many poems she speaks to other writers. To Katherine Mansfield's tortured life and death, she compares her own quiet beginnings with a clarity that puts you right there, watching an infant's white hands clenched over covers in the pale January sun. She is very smooth, with

a technique so self-effacing as to be transparent; thus, she can tell you simply what is there.

There is often a circular pattern in this poet's work. She takes you in ever-decreasing spirals through mundane but carefully selected detail to the gently visionary. Her talent is to bring a poem around and make connections. Her love poems are full of the tough and the tender, the wry and the coy. She wonders if love is only her breasts wanting his hand, yet thrills in the knowledge that another person is an island, sharp and rocky and dangerous. She muses about love that is still alive: "You disarrange my life. / I cannot predict you," and concludes "The inconvenience of joy / is that it is habit forming." Brewster's voice is a reasoned one wrestling with all the jolts of living that acute sensitivity brings. Occasionally she longs for Augustan humanity — senatorial and calm with a Roman smile that is "ironic, wise, malicious." Her plea in this warring world of noisy rhetoric is for the "white magic" inherent in just continuing as though the world will last, in being who you are, in being Elizabeth Brewster with her steady glowing independence.

PATRICIA KEENEY
(formerly Keeney Smith)

COUNTERPOINT

GEORGE JOHNSON, ed., *The Collected Poems of George Whalley*. Quarry, $10.95.
LOUIS DUDEK, *Zembla's Rocks*. Véhicule, $8.95.
JOHN NEWLOVE, *The Night the Dog Smiled*. ECW, $10.00.

HAS THERE EVER been a time when the imagination of the poets was not at odds with their time and place? Each of the three books reviewed express a kind of resistance-fighting, and readers will be grateful for the courage that it took to write them.

The Collected Poems of George Whalley, a posthumous collection edited by George Johnson, is a tribute to the late Coleridgean scholar and literary theorist. The book contains previously published wartime poems and later pieces culled from Whalley's papers. Whalley's topical World War II 'diary' poems are examples of the Canadian documentary poem, and quite good. Others are heavily descriptive landscape poems. The rest are love poems, the strongest of which express his painful alienation on returning home after serving as a sub-lieutenant on the destroyer *Tartar*. In "Counterpoint," Whalley describes poetry as "only another thread / of melody in the long / multiple counterpoint / that spans the centuries / in gentle but unyielding / defiance of ugliness." Yet "all will be forgotten / because we never can bring ourselves to say / exactly what passed there in the smoke-filled dark" ("World's End"). What endures appears in "Dunster," a love poem written on-leave in England, "the print / of our bodies" in "the shimmering Exmoor heather."

After the war, Whalley's imagination became theoretical and academic. He argued in *Poetic Process* (1953) that art is the prototype of reality and by its processes reality may be grasped and known. The later poems are based on this premise. "Clivden," echoing "Dunster," celebrates "the brave encounter" of a pair of historical lovers, who leave an imprint in the grass, "Formal and reticent these three centuries." Generally well-wrought and mellifluous, these mid-century poems "imprint" the world with their documentary, descriptive, and lyrical impulses, so that it may be more beautifully conceived.

Louis Dudek and John Newlove have resisted such formalist desire to impose truths upon reality. Prolific nearly half a century, Dudek is now properly regarded as one of the central figures of twentieth-century Canadian poetry. *Zembla's Rocks* is his first major collection of lyrics since

The Transparent Sea (1956). The book's arrangement is not strictly chronological, but its division into three parts loosely corresponds to the major stages of Dudek's artistic development. The book invites us to contemplate the growth and maturation of the poet's mind. Part one concerns domestic and professional relationships: childhood, parenthood, love, teaching, and arguments with poets he has known. He asks, in "To the Reader," "that you may read me and remember, / and think of what I knew and lost, / and of your own time, as golden." For Dudek, a writer's personality is central to whatever truth a poem may have. The personal voice of part one becomes more publicly critical of society and culture in the second part. Many poems display the epigrammatic quality of Dudek's particular brand of wit. In the satires, theology, various 'isms,' Johnny Carson, Marshall McLuhan, and much else come up short, weighed against a hard-won self-knowledge.

The third part is a meditation on the nature of truth and reality. Dudek secured his reputation as a philosophical poet with his third and fourth book-length meditational poems, *Atlantis* (1967) and *Continuation 1* (1982). Here, in "Atlantis," he returns to his earlier metaphor for reality as fragmentary and intermittent moments of truth submerged in the commonplace. "The Continuities" reminds us that every action is "propulsive, having an infinite progeny / to the end of time." No life, no human relationship, no thought, can ever have an ending. The imagination, an eternally recurrent process by which 'true' reality is continually recreated, is at issue.

Zembla's Rocks is not the eagerly awaited continuation of *Continuation 1*, but as poetic memoir it is a success. The language is spare and confident. Dudek's indented lines match the rhythm of his thought, and his voice falters only in affectionate parodies of Auden, Cummings, Hopkins, Williams, and most often, Pound. In a "language of light, / a clearing for the spirit," that "All poets speak" ("Fragment"), Dudek re-inscribes reality with a personal vision of the self, engaged in the act of writing, "alone at the center of being."

John Newlove also pits his imagination against the world in personal, spare, and conversational language. Yet Newlove, who rarely finds the truth comforting and affirmative, is even more at odds with his time and place. He characteristically writes in two voices. One, lyrical, often speaks of love and at times of recollection. The other is the tough, bitter, lapidary voice of self-loathing and anti-humanism that readers have associated with his name. Both voices have been flawed in the past. Whenever lyricism degenerates to mere plaintiveness in a Newlove poem, it sours. In *The Night the Dog Smiled*, this happens only once: in the otherwise strong philosophical poem, "The Green Plain," which reprints the 1981 book of that name. The more public flaw, didacticism or its inverse, self-pity, is not to be found in his new collection of mature poetry, the first since *Lies* (1972). The book is so rich intellectually and emotionally that I cannot do it justice in this space. "White Philharmonic Novels," from which the book's title has been drawn, is a sequential poem and one of Newlove's finest efforts to date. It quotes lines and, once, a whole poem from *The Night the Dog Smiled*, which is Newlove's way of saying that his work is a special fiction, else "What good is a witness / who will not tell his tale?" It is an elegy, yet the death we must mourn is our own and the futility of our messy, noisy, pretentious civilization. It is beautiful, yet its beauty lies not in any identifiable image, but in its courage, "You cannot reveal yourself. / You cannot conceal yourself. / It is necessary only to be relentless." It is also a

simple, entirely convincing declaration of love.

Elsewhere in the book, in "Syllables *via* Sanskrit," for instance, Newlove presents an image of the poet as an alienated man overcome by sadness in his search for truth, and by momentary discoveries of love among people, memories, and figures from the past. The prose poem, "The Perfect Colours of Flowers," suggests that even in the greatest horror and evil a certain beauty can be found, if one is relentless in search of it. Witty poems on daily living, like the hilarious "Big Mirror," a poem about visiting the dentist, help to relieve the horror and the sadness. Newlove is in search of a poem that will bequeath the truth of a race to posterity, and the historical meditations in *The Night the Dog Smiled* are more global and temporally far-reaching than similar poems have been in the past. "Time is dead," he announces in "The Permanent Tourist Comes Home."

When Newlove identifies with his culture, he overflows with self-disgust. Yet he feels cleansed by love, though loving is always a pulling up of his canoe on the bank of the "always world flow" ("The Green Plain"). A strong poet with song and speaking out for weapons, Newlove fights against yet another age of error and complacency. He fights for us.

A. R. KIZUK

CHOICE OF LENS

BRENDA LEA WHITE, ed., *British Columbia: Visions of the Promised Land.* Flight Press, $12.95.

E. PAULINE JOHNSON, *The Moccasin Maker.* Univ. of Azirona Press, U.S.$9.95.

SHERYL SALLOUM, *Malcolm Lowry: Vancouver Days.* Harbour Publishing, $9.95.

INCREASINGLY, FOCUS IS the crucial problem facing Canadian critics and reviewers. What the general reader, now possibly no more than a relative of, and three generations removed from, Virginia Woolf's Common Reader, sees and reads is frequently not what the writer imagined and wrote; and often the publisher now stands to one side, a peripheral blur. The critic-reviewer (commentator) must choose whether to speak to the author, the general reader, or the publisher. No longer do they stand, a cluster, viewable through one lens.

A good 'for instance' of this situation is found in *British Columbia,* edited by Brenda Lea White. The eighteen contributors set about their task with a will, and, with the exception of W. P. Kinsella, they chose to write about the assigned topic — British Columbia. And, with the noted exception, there is rarely a boring line to be found in this gathering. Each wrote lovingly of his or her concept of, and foothold in, B.C. Seventeen of the eighteen authors cannot be faulted.

The editor (who may also be the publisher) of these "visions" has created an entertaining and valuable book. Who does not wonder, however infrequently, about a writer's relationship to the *genius loci* of his/her choice? Jack Hodgins and Howard White (neither contributors to this collection) have made the coast of B.C. big business, but we have heard little from other areas and other writers.

As can be expected Dorothy Livesay, George Ryga, Anne Cameron, Jack Shadbolt, and Susan Musgrave are not tonguetied when it comes to talking about home. Much of what each says, for each is a national figure rooted in a place, illuminates our contemporary condition. And here we must pause. What is the next step: does the reviewer continue speaking to the authors and the editor, or does he now turn to the general reader? If so, then it must be pointed out that thirteen of the eighteen contributors live within an hour's drive of downtown Vancouver; three more live within sight of Vancouver's "big

smoke." Evelyn Roth's address is not given, and George Ryga lives in Summerland, a village in B.C.'s southern interior.

Instead of looking at British Columbia from 35,000 feet, the editor chose to give us a pedestrian's view of the province's Lower Mainland. There should arise at this point an ethical question concerning a book's title and its relationship to the text. Whatever one feels about this, the final decision must be tempered by a re-reading of the extended cliché and post-Expo hype that is Ms White's Introduction.

Another problem common to the optics of focusing is to be seen in A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff's edition of *The Moccasin Maker*. The editor simply assumes that there is an audience out there who will share her interest in the stories in this collection. But there is no enthusiasm on Ruoff's part in her Introduction. Nor do her reasons for reprinting this collection touch the reader's nerves. Ruoff's dry and sometimes prolix Introduction at one end of this book, and her Notes and Bibliography at the other, sandwich E. Pauline Johnson's text in much the same way as did two graham crackers sandwich a chocolate bar in my childhood.

Right as the editor is to point out that Johnson's *Legends of Vancouver* and *Flint and Feather* remain in print, she fails to realize that the majority of readers (buyers is probably more accurate) are tourists, grandmothers buying their childhood favourites for their grandchildren, and the curious. None of these buyers/readers constitute an audience willing to plow through Introductions, Bibliographies, and notes; most will not recognize their value.

Whether or not these romantic stories were important to Canadian literature prior to World War I is academic. Today even the quickest reading makes it clear that these stories, unreal and misleadingly unreal, belong next to *Wind in the Willows* and those other beloved books of earliest childhood. No small honour this, and there they should be allowed to remain, forever safe from those editors Edmund Wilson so loathed.

Sheryl Salloum's *Malcolm Lowry: Vancouver Days* belongs to that nineteenth-century genre that included *Longfellow's Country* and *Browning's Italy.* Highly popular once, and today still readable, their appeal declined in the 1920's. Two similarities were shared by all volumes in this genre: They were written by devotees who took it for granted that their subject is the greatest writer in the English language, and the compilers revealed a marked inability to concentrate on the crucial fact and telling detail. Their lenses pan without interruption or perception. The initial value of *Malcolm Lowry* will depend on the reader's evaluation of Lowry. Sadly, for one wants to enjoy this handsome volume, its value on this level is a blur. It adds nothing to our vision of Lowry and his major work. In one way or another everything in this book, on a literary or personal level, has been stated previously and often more succinctly.

Yet, in spite of this lack of critical-editorial-biographical focus, the book does not lack value. Like the view of Vancouver offered by Brenda Lea White, Salloum's homage to Lowry's Vancouver, accidental as this may be, is a psycohistory of a place. In the context of Vancouver then and now — read as such — the value of these books rises to something far greater than that implied by their titles.

CHARLES LILLARD

DUMMIES & CHILDREN

BRIAN ALDERSON, *Sing a Song of Sixpence: The English Picture Book Tradition and Randolph Caldecott.* Cambridge Univ. Press & British Library Board, $24.95.

GINETTE ANFOUSSE, *Sophie et Pierrot.* La Courte échelle, $19.95.

JEAN SPEARE, *A Candle for Christmas.* Illus. by Ann Blades. Douglas & McIntyre, $10.95.

MARK THURMAN, *Two Stupid Dummies.* New Canada Publications, $10.95.

TIM WYNNE-JONES, *I'll Make You Small.* Illus. by Maryann Kovalski. Douglas & McIntyre, $10.95.

TIM WYNNE-JONES, *Mischief City.* Illus. by VictoR GAD. Douglas & McIntyre, $12.95.

THE CHILDREN'S BOOK as a source of guidance — socialization, therapy, or imaginative revenge — continues to dominate recent offerings for the very young. Whether the lesson is equality of the sexes, the reliability of parents, or the dignity of the young self, for many adult writers and publishers, a children's book seems by definition to demand an obvious and uplifting lesson. Adult disdain for such lessons is rejected as invalid — after all, children, not cynical adults, read these books. But are children that different and that dumb?

Illustrators, too, with the exception of Ann Blades, seem convinced that children have special requirements, specifically clutter and colour. Very rarely does the illustration contribute to the story in the way celebrated and examined by Brian Alderson in *Sing a Song of Sixpence: The English Picture Book Tradition and Randolph Caldecott.* Alderson's book, published in conjunction with an exhibition at the British Library, places Caldecott within a particular tradition of English narrative illustration. In this tradition, drawing, not colour, is primary, and the reader's interest centres on the narrative energy and invention of the illustration. In contrast, recent Canadian illustrations seem guided by only two principles: big is best; and colourful is better.

Sophie et Pierrot is a book/game/cassette extravaganza admirably determined to persuade the very young that the sexes are equal. It comes complete with a "Guide d'utilisation" that spells out in infinite detail the many ways adults can encourage children to use the material. Let there be no naïve readers in the nursery. The game alone is given three pages of general and then precise instructions designed to encourage imagination, caution against stereotyping, prompt research, and promote learning shapes and numbers. The book is also analyzed as a way to facilitate discussion of an egalitarian society, and the cassette is seen as a tool for identifying different instruments, practising rhymes, and inventing dances. One is reminded of elaborate toys that children soon abandon so that they can invent their own educational games with a bucket, a wooden spoon, and a tea towel. *Sophie et Pierrot* is a book designed by a committee with a deep mistrust of independent children's activity, a rigid vision of literature as propaganda, and a contempt for the awareness of teachers and parents: "Cet ensemble désire sensibiliser les enfants, mais aussi les parents et les éducateurs, aux stéréotypes masculins et féminins encore largement véhiculés dans l'éducation des petites filles et des petits garçons." Many other books have done that recently, and far less pretentiously. Obviously much traditional reading for the young is sexist, but *Sophie et Pierrot* lacks the imaginative appeal that will let it replace such socially offensive works.

A Candle for Christmas may have the traditional male protagonist, but the lesson Jean Speare offers is more sophisticated than *Sophie et Pierrot*'s. On the surface, *A Candle for Christmas* has two subjects: a child's longing for his absent parents and concern that they keep their promise to return by Christmas; an In-

dian child's coping with the strangeness of staying with the reservation's white nurse. Yet the dream that Tomas has as he waits for his parents complicates the simple reassuring lesson about parental promises. Longing for his parents, Tomas falls asleep and dreams of a gigantic candle that takes over the universe and lights his parents' way home. He suddenly awakes remembering that he has left the real candle burning on the windowsill and retrieves it before it can go out leaving him in darkness or can tilt over starting a fire. By this act, Tomas demonstrates his growing ability to take care of himself even as his parents' return satisfies his longing for dependence. And he is the hero, for the candle has indeed magically guided them home through a snowstorm. A Christmas story in its celebration of love, faith, and magic, *A Candle for Christmas* is illustrated with Christmas card-like paintings, suitable to fantasy, if not to a realistic portrayal of reservation life. The scenes are beautiful, still, with a primitive simplicity recalling Kurelek. Human figures are stylized to take on a statue's immobility; facial features smoothed out. Lacking the energy Alderson praises, perhaps the images are too consistently beautiful; a contrast between the reality of reservation life and the beauty of Tomas's dream might have been more powerful.

The lesson in Mark Thurman's *Two Stupid Dummies*, although expressed by a canine doctor of psychology, Dr. Zighound Froid the Fourth, has little to do with dreams. The story is the fifth in the Two Pals on an Adventure series and follows Douglas the Elephant and Albert Alligator struggling with the stresses of working on a transcontinental train and with the demands of impatient passengers and angry bosses. These adult figures are never satisfied and like to humiliate the heroes with various insulting names (which are probably closer to a child's vocabulary than an adult's — when was the last time an adult called someone a Bean-Brained Butterball?). The power of language to affect the child's self-perception is the subject, as Douglas gradually comes to believe he is as dumb and stupid as his employer says. Even after Dr. Zighound cures him, the insults continue, only now the adults call each other names. So there are two clear lessons here: Dr. Zighound's advice, "Sometimes the things that people say to you have nothing to do with what YOU REALLY ARE," and the lesson of the comic ending, that adults are sillier than children. Even the book's parody of psychological testing, a series of flash cards asking Douglas (and the reader) to identify the ambiguous images, suggests the adult world really is ludicrous.

That children's books often benefit when the lesson is not obvious is demonstrated by the work of Tim Wynne-Jones, although like Thurman, Wynne-Jones also assumes that children need to hear that adults are peculiar and often foolish. Yet what does the protagonist learn in *I'll Make You Small*? Always bring a gift? In this intriguing story, Roland is frightened by his mysterious neighbour and the neighbour's equally mysterious, derelict house. As a child, Mr. Swanskin was terrible, "always breaking things," and now as an adult, he frequently threatens Roland; but when Swanskin disappears, Roland is sent to investigate. He discovers Swanskin repairing the toys he broke as a child. Yet if Swanskin regrets his own childhood behaviour, he still dislikes children, "'Children! Children!' he shouted. 'They ruin everything!'" and does indeed turn Roland small. But like Odysseus and his magic moly, Roland is protected by his gift of a pie, and the horrific situation deflates into Swanskin and Roland sitting down together to eat the pie. Swanskin, the fixated adult making amends for his childhood behaviour; Roland, the child hero conquering his own dark tower with

a monster who is still childlike in his love of food — *I'll Make You Small* echoes fairy tale patterns (including the ambiguities of those tales and the uncertainties of their lessons), and for once the illustrations support and add to the text.

The illustrations in *Mischief City* are not as successful, often distracting the reader from the poems. Based on a play by Wynne-Jones, *Mischief City* tells its story through twenty-five poems that the author admits are indebted to Shel Silverstein, Edward Lear, Dennis Lee, and Frank Zappa. Although the quality is uneven, some of the poems and illustrations do capture the six-year-old's frustration with his parents, e.g., "Talking":

> We're driving down the highway
> And I'm hanging out the door —
> But Mom and Dad are talking.
> They do a lot of talking.
> And when Mom and Dad are talking,
> They don't see me anymore.

In support, VictoR GAD has drawn a surrealistic illustration of talking mouths — on parents, wall, and carpet. There are also comic poems about art as therapy especially as the product of sibling rivalry:

> My folks say I'm creative
> My creative urge is strong.
> It didn't use to be until
> My sister came along.

Playing with nonsense and fantasy, exploring child-parent relations, appealing to the child's love of aggression, both physical and verbal ("Stupid Stegosaurus" seems directed at the same tendency *Two Stupid Dummies* strives to amend), *Mischief City* pleases for not taking itself too seriously. As in "The Arrangement" the best solution is for parents and children to "keep / Out of each other's way." Advice that might apply to simple-minded lessons and children's books.

ADRIENNE KERTZER

STORY & MORES

H. GORDON GREEN, *The Devil is Innocent.* Harvest House, $19.95.

MICHAEL HENNESSEY, *An Arch for the King & Other Stories.* Ragweed, n.p.

DIANE SCHOEMPERLEN, *Frogs & Other Stories.* Quarry, $10.95.

IF FICTION PROPERLY challenges social conformity, it may yet insufficiently examine the ideology by which it inevitably operates. The novel and short story collections here reviewed each question the constricting mores of rural, small-town life. Yet, their characterization may be challenged in so far as it derives from a ready-made rather than a hard-won ideological sense.

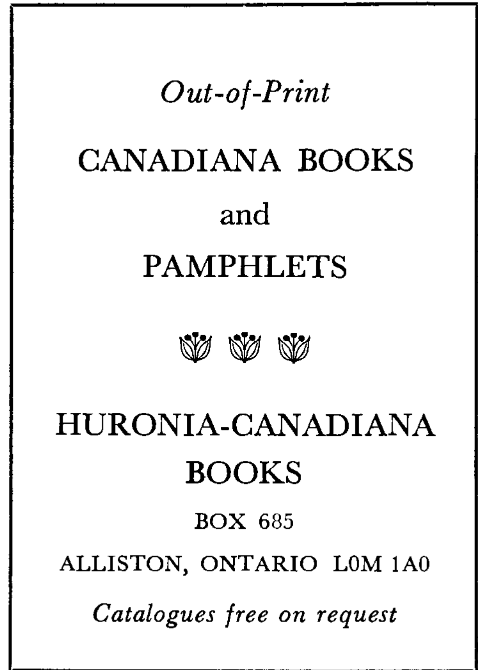
The action of Green's novel takes place in Mountford, a 1920's Ontario village. A nostalgic, journalistic style simply opposes Green's belief in sexual frankness to the community's religiosity: he does not convincingly blend social satire and promotion of country life because he does not test his creed. He holds sex fascinating because shameful and thinks male obsessions self-correcting — his views are nothing if not conventional. Neither premise is rendered plausible by the characterization. The Reverend Joseph Jackson, a crusader against the sexual activities of youth, is a mere joke: Green does everything to make him a grotesque laughingstock. Childless because he misdirects his energy into religion, Jackson is also a child molester. His influence in the community is wholly negative: he is a leader by default because his flock refuses to ask questions and to find the truth for itself.

Green focuses on the adolescent Jeffrey who is drawn by religious ideals but led to other values by the few humanists in the village. The revival meeting at which he is converted is crassly commercial and the hollowness of his conversion is emphasized by Cece, a blind friend, who cleverly criticizes William Cowper's hymns.

Green's religious prejudices are most apparent in his depiction of Deborah Landon, the strait-laced teacher who battles to preserve school morals but gives her virginity to a pupil. She is conventionally contradictory and repressed. Her complacency collapses when, after strapping Pete for bawdiness, she makes him give her sexual pain in return. She is made to admit sexual impulses and to be helpless before them. Green enjoys having the rebel pupil "bust a virgin." He also values the voyeurism by which Jeffrey sees Deborah's face made beautiful by violent male sexuality.

Through Jeannie Mason, Green also presents female sexuality resisting communal values. But if she validates passion, she finds the conflict between passion and duty worthless. For Jeannie, sexuality is a pure act. The basis on which Green makes the good characters spiritual is no clearer than that on which they value sexuality. Old Doug who bases his education of Jeffrey on animal procreation merely asserts that atheists are more Christian than Christians. Another voyeuristic episode leads to Jeffrey's being told that sex is unrelated to property and that adultery is no sin. When he is sexually initiated, his shallow learning is apparent in his physical and anti-feminist notions of sexuality. Green disparages moral reform by simply associating it with hypocrites who try to stop the sale of condoms and skin magazines. The defeat of the reformers by Pete is reactionary. Pete, who sees human conduct through animal behaviour and who saw the Reverend Jackson's attempt on Jeannie, merely exploits voyeurism to unmask the priest.

The first part of Hennessey's volume, containing autobiographical stories, is sentimental rather than reductively behaviourist. The first story, "Mister Currie's Protestant Shoes," records the author's conversations with his Irish Catholic father about the Protestant shoe seller. Religious talk between father and son involving imagery of Protestant and Catholic shoes advances the boy's ecumenical awareness that different sects worship the same God. "An Arch for the King" concerns the boy's fascination with the arch built for the King and Queen and torn down after their visit. The building of the arch lets him fantasize about helping the builder. Far from chiding his son, the father prepares him through the dismantling of the arch to accept loss as a principle of life: the father figures his own death in the fall of the arch. In saying that this imagery helped him accept his father's death, Hennessey testifies to the moral involvement of imagination and sentiment.



"Sainthood and the CCM Bicycle" honours the gentleness of Hennessey's father by showing how he, instead of criticizing his son's materialistic attitudes to church, leads him to consider his self-deception. Through self-criticism, Hen-

nessey wins a deeper love for his father, later praising him as the ideal teacher. Hennessey's distance from male codes is conveyed in "The Day I Saved Blabber's Life," a narrative about an outing with adolescent acquaintances one of whom he saves from drowning. As a young man, Hennessey rejects heroic achievement: he is effective but socially diffident. His unconventional pluck and sensitivity is celebrated in the next story which, besides recording his vulnerability as a naval cadet, deals with his romantic infatuation for Patti Page and with the sympathetic officer who helps him to meet the famous singer. The young Hennessey had an innate goodness and quiet stamina that is endearing. To Hennessey, this story proves that fantasy is an aid for dealing with the uncertainties of the world. In the next story, he moves away from this sentimental emphasis. "Making Amends" questions the impulses of a man who repents his youthful affairs, doing so because he is vain and self-dramatizing. His recriminations are absurdly nostalgic, and they stop him from renewing his love for his wife.

The second part of Hennessey's volume is neither autobiographical nor sentimental. Its stories expose the cruelty that lurks in banal talk. In "The Priest and the Pallbearer," a rich priest is confronted by his past. He defends himself with shrewd rationalizations which rebound on his accuser. By contrast, "Wasted Lives" describes a conversation between a sensitive priest and an intelligent atheist. This priest confesses his part in the abuse of a poor church worker only to be mercilessly triumphed over by the atheist. In "The Long Humiliation of Life" a man learning of his former sweetheart's death must confront the fact that his life has been made hollow by his denial of his first love. He tries to fend off remorse and desolation but the daughter of the woman he should have married forces him to recognize his self-loathing. In this and other stories, Hennessey probes the contradictions and cruelty of the righteous. Thus, "Webs We Weave" concerns a daughter who, despite her own courtship, disapproves of her mother's remarriage. The daughter is both fiercely sexual and prudish. The violence evident in "Half A World" stems from the manners of three drinking buddies in a Charlottetown pub. Their angry talk consciously reflects the violence of nature and frustration with the decline of rural life. But they do not relate their anger to their sexism and buddy system. When he exposes hypocrisy rather than promotes sentiment, Hennessey is a much more ideologically engaging writer.

Schoemperlen's feminist stories depict women living in rigidly conformist small towns. Because her characters feel trapped by their sexual roles and mundane circumstances, she makes her stories both colloquially shapeless and provocatively discontinuous. The first story, "Frogs," is a wry, undramatic treatment of romance which relies on various stylistic intrusions. Like the others, this story is not contained by one mode. Val, the sexually easy-going central character, speaks grammatically to her mother so as to seem to conform to established notions of family, but her actually slapdash private mentality is a sign of moral refusal to conform. Val's mentality is presented as the valid character of a well-adjusted working woman who scorns domesticity and the men she goes with. Thus, the lover who owns a Porsche and takes her to expensive clubs is a boring consumer who is better to think about than be with. In her imagination, she is superior to men because they lack substance.

In "Notes For A Travelogue" Schoemperlen nicely uses the monologue form to present a wife's sensitive reaction to her chauvinistic husband. The couple takes a holiday to save their marriage, he hogging the driving and she useless when it comes

to erecting the tent. She learns to be indifferent, not caring that the husband thinks divorce inevitable: she scorns his fantasy of a graceful separation.

"Histories" deals with a young wife who goes on an exciting all-day skiing and photography trip in the Rockies to escape the stultifying environment of the small town in which she and her husband live. Privately rejecting her husband's possessive worrying, Anne asserts her own mentality and learns about the history and environment of the mountainous region. She talks to an old-timer, Herb Murchie, who presents a circular rather than linear view of history which ideologically explains Schoemperlen's writing style (her narrative models are usually somewhat transparent, if interesting). After recognizing living history in Herb, Anne relives the experience of explorers. Yet she cannot share this with her husband. To protect herself, she will tell him of her trip in the future and then only inadvertently, as if it were not important.

The problem with Schoemperlen's stories is that her characterization is not discriminating enough because she is ideologically bent on presenting the mindset of women as it is stultified by social norms: her stories lack rhetorical, inventive, and stylistic energy. In her insistent depiction of typical female mental problems, Schoemperlen does not confront the rational and logical assumptions about mind and character that many feminists question. Too often her stories present the passivity of women (their isolation from other women and their waiting for men) impressionistically and as if women are not creating a positive alternative mentality. Nonetheless, of the writers reviewed here Schoemperlen has the keenest sense of how social ideology works and of why it is properly countered by fictional ideology.

ROBERT JAMES MERRETT

PAGE'S BRAZIL

P. K. PAGE, *Brazilian Journal*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, $22.95/$14.95.

P. K. PAGE'S TRAVEL writing transcends the genre: *Brazilian Journal* offers us not only the vicarious experience of a foreign place, but also fresh insight into the workings of Page's mind. Reviewers have profoundly misunderstood the form and intent of *Brazilian Journal* when they have called it a "diary" and have complained that Page does not offer enough of her most private thoughts in the book. *Brazilian Journal* is based on letters and on extracts from a journal Page kept during her years in Brazil (1957-1959), on assignment with her husband (then diplomat) W. A. Irwin. Page is not confiding in a diary; rather, she records a more significant intimacy in the observations of her extraordinary eye. Through the striking poetic imagery of her prose we understand more clearly the development of Page's visual art.

Page's sensibilities are overwhelmed, even jarred, by the sensuous beauty and languor of Brazil, and she recasts her experiences into metaphoric language to convey her sense of the incongruity of what she sees and feels and her knowledge of reality:

> How could I have imagined so surrealist and seductive a world? One does not *like* the heat, yet its constancy, its all-surroundingness, is as fascinating as the smell of musk. Every moment is slow, as if under warm greenish water.

The cadences and imagery of her prose would seem to belie Page's claim that she could not write poetry while in Brazil. Certainly many of her observations hold all the promise of poetry:

> The beach was beautiful — slightly hazy. Black, brown, white Brazilians in *futebol* sweaters, kicking the ball about in the thick, soft sand; the curving facade of apartment buildings — whites, pinks, blues; the odd-

> shaped mountains — how describe their shapes? elongated cones? the top joints of thumbs? — making the sea look like a surrealist painting; and the waves tumbling in — riding in green and high, their plate glass cracking and breaking and pulverizing into crystals and white powder.

This is pure Page: the careful attention to colour; the fascination with the curves and "cones" of shape; the startling conceit of the "plate glass" waves. Despite the poetic beauty of her prose, however, one cannot help but notice Page's tendency to aestheticize experience. This tendency results, at least partly, from the overwhelming power of her mind to create images.

Page's poems about Brazil were written after her return, but the images in the poems come directly out of her journal entries. (I am thinking particularly of the poems "Brazilian Fazenda" and "Brazilian House.") "Travellers' Palm," the poem from which Page takes the last eight lines as the epigraph of *Brazilian Journal*, is another poem that comes directly out of her travels. Unfortunately, the last eight lines are almost too far out of context for the reader: we do not know that the "taster" is "tasting" "old water / tasting green, / of vegetation and dust / old water, warm as tears." This water is extracted by the taster from the branches of the traveller's palm; the taster's replenishment at the tree is a metaphor for the nourishment the artist finds in travel. The whole poem might well have been used as the epigraph. (At the very least, the epigraph should have been identified.) In any case, that travel enlarges and actually alters the mind of the artist is made clear in the metaphor of the "boughs" of the traveller's mind in the last three lines of the epigraph:

> a fabulous foreign bird
> flew silent from a void
>
> lodged in my bows.

Increasingly in the book, Page sees Brazil in terms of the paintings and painters she admires. The works of the Brazilian painter Portinari, for example, allow Page to see an anguished and intense Brazil, the Brazil of his Expressionism. Page uses visual art throughout *Brazilian Journal* as a metaphor for the artistry she sees around her. This use of art as metaphor is illustrated neatly in Page's description of one of her many official calls as wife of the Canadian ambassador: "As I stepped from the small box of an elevator into the apartment of the Swiss minister, I entered a Matisse painting." When Page takes up painting in Brazil (signing her name P. K. Irwin), her visual art becomes a kind of expansion of this metaphor, and the wit and good humour of her prose spill over into her paintings.

Page's visual art in *Brazilian Journal* shows most clearly the influence of Dufy, but Paul Klee probably influenced her art most profoundly. Unfortunately, Page's Klee-like paintings, some of them completed only a few years after leaving Brazil, do not appear in her book, a pity because we do not see where her interest in painting ultimately took her. Page's *The Glass Air* (1985) reproduces some of the paintings from the early 1960's, works that reveal the level of sophistication and abstraction Page was to achieve in her art, far beyond and very unlike the more "realistic" works in *Brazilian Journal.*

The colour and black and white reproductions of Page's art that do appear in *Brazilian Journal* form a pleasing gallery and are wholly appropriate to the book, accurately reflecting Page's artistic development as she records it in prose. (I wonder, therefore, why the painting of the piano and the chandelier appears on page 240 when it was first mentioned on page 76.) The painting of the dinner party at Itamarity is particularly fine: its witty interplay of light, form, and colour resembles Dufy's, and its retreat from the outlines of representational art signals

Page's move away from the apparency of things.

After Brazil, visual art takes on special significance for Page, doubtless because her orchestration of form, line, and colour in painting taught her eye to "see" differently. Her recent "painterly" poems, "Deaf-Mute in the Pear Tree" (*The Glass Air*, 1985), and, particularly, "Winter Morning" (*Canadian Literature*, No. 113-114), represent this change of vision.

CYNTHIA MESSENGER

L'INQUIETANTE ABSENCE

FRANÇOISE LAURENT, *L'Oeuvre Romanesque de Marie Claire Blais*. Fides, n.p.

> Nos possessions sont là, debout ou couchées dans le désordre d'un camion ouvert.
> — Marie-Claire Blais, *Vivre! Vivre!*

> La théorie veut nommer ce qui tient effectivement le rouage ensemble. L'aspiration de la pensée pour laquelle le non-sens de ce qui est seulement apparent était autrefois insupportable, s'est sécularisé avec l'insistance pour la démystification. . . . Elle aimerait soulever la pierre sous laquelle couve le monstre. C'est seulement dans ce dévoilement qu'elle voit un sens.
> — Adorno, *Der Posivitimussreit*

EN SEIZE CHAPITRES, trois notes et un avant-propos, F. Laurent propose — comme à la belle époque du collège classique — sous des titres ambigus d'examiner "les contes et les mythes," un "roman de poète," "l'exilée," "une race insoumise," "l'espoir," "des loups et des louves," "le procès de Dieu," et ainsi de suite, jusqu'à "la rupture." Les notes sont du même acabit: elles s'intitulent *l'air du temps*, *confluents*, et *Visages du père*, et l'auteur y trouve de moyen de citer Kierkegaard, de parler du nouveau roman et de Robbe-Grillet, de Georges-Henri Lévesque et Edmond Wilson. Une bibliographie des oeuvres et une liste des prix complètent l'ouvrage.

Si, comme on le dit souvent, la lecture d'une oeuvre est parfois affaire de religion, je ne suis certes pas de la même "confessionnalité" que Françoise Laurent. C'est ce que voudrait signaler le rapprochement inaugural de deux citations, l'une volontairement incomplète, l'autre résolument ambitieuse. Si la première résume bien le travail de Madame Françoise Laurent qui, passant en revue tous les livres de Marie Claire Blais, dispose ici et là quelques traces d'érudition (dates, noms d'auteur et jugements) sans autre volonté semble-t-il que de nous montrer le génie de Marie-Claire Blais (et peut-être un peu le sien comme par hasard!) à travers ce qu'elle appelle son oeuvre, la seconde indique ce qu'on aurait pu faire surgir de "l'oeuvre romanesque de Marie-Claire Blais."

Aussi, ce qui m'a intéressé, avant le propos même, c'est l'univers théorique dans lequel il s'inscrit. Deux choses constituent ce que l'on pourrait appeller ici l'abcisse et l'ordonnée de l'institution littéraire; l'une s'appelle l'oeuvre et, découlant d'un ensemble systématique, témoigne de l'effort d'un auteur, l'autre s'appelle une pensée — on pourrait autrement la nommer une thématique, un message — et manifeste à la fois par la récurrence et la cohérence ce qu'on nomme communément son génie.

D'emblée le titre renvoie au propos de Foucault qui, traitant de l'oeuvre de Roussel, écrivait: "Je crois qu'il vaut mieux essayer de concevoir que, au fond, quelqu'un qui est écrivain ne fait pas simplement son oeuvre dans ses livres, et que son oeuvre principale, c'est finalement lui-même écrivant ses livres. Et c'est ce rapport de lui à ses livres, de sa vie à ses livres, qui est le point central, le foyer de son activité et de son oeuvre. . . . L'oeuvre est plus que l'oeuvre: le sujet qui écrit fait partie de l'oeuvre."

Ce pourrait donc être le motif principal d'un ouvrage intitulé "l'oeuvre romanesque de Marie-Claire Blais" ou dès l'avant-propos il est précisé qu'un "créateur est son oeuvre, avant tout et inexorablement, et sa vie privée, son milieu, ses sources, ses intentions ne sont qu'aliments dont l'oeuvre laisse parfois deviner le métabolisme." Non une oeuvre pour Françoise Laurent, ce n'est pas ça, cela réclame essentiellement semble-t-il de la quantité, et de la cohérence. Ecoutez-la plus tôt nous mettre en garde: "Renonçons à l'illusion qui souvent pousse a privilégier la curiosité de la vie privée par rapport à l'étude de l'oeuvre." Et encore: "tout concourt à la conclusion que ce n'est pas Marie-Claire Blais qu'il faut interroger, c'est son oeuvre. Miroir d'une vie régie par l'activité créatrice, et l'écho qu'elle trouve dans les choeurs." Et c'est bien fait pour ceux, naïfs, qui croyaient qu'on était au moins autant "sa vie privée, son milieu, ses sources, ses intentions" que ses textes.

On connaît pourtant l'importance des personnages écrivants dans les textes de Marie-Claire Blais. De Jean Le Maigre à David Sterne, de Pauline Archange au Paul de L'Insoumise, c'est l'écriture qui transforme tout, qui les sauve tous et qui les sauve de tout, de l'ennui comme de la bêtise, de la misère comme de la mort. Faudrait-il oublier par exemple que le "journal" de Paul ne nous est connu qu'à travers un autre récit; celui du narrateur, ce narrateur qui "pense faire à soi-même ce récit d'une solitude qui ne servirait à personne d'autre" et qu'à ce titre le sujet majeur de l'oeuvre romanesque de Marie-Claire Blais pourrait bien être l'écriture. Et que ce qui s'y profile, c'est tout compte fait une éthique de l'écriture. De fait l'écriture constitue le personnage central des récits de Marie-Claire Blais, et ce qu'ils mettent en scène c'est ce que j'appellerais une systémique de l'écriture, c'est-à-dire cette notion qui me paraît fondamentale, voulant que l'écriture, l'écrivain, le lecteur forment un tout, une machine dont les effets sont difficilement dissociables. Nulle part ailleurs, mis à part sans doute chez Aquin, l'écriture ne renvoie aussi clairement à l'écriture. C'est l'héritage du positivisme et de la méthode expérimentale classique que cette tendance a parcellariser l'objet texte — générant à chaque tentative une nouvelle boîte noire dont la plus encombrante est certes le sujet scripteur — qui a fait buter une bonne partie de la théorie littéraire. La question même de l'oeuvre en est un exemple éclairant, c'est une notion qui n'est pensable que dans le cadre d'un système qu'on pourrait appeller la littérature, un système ouvert sur un environnement de textes, d'intentions, de réactions et de lectures qui exige que soit considérer à la fois le fait et le contexte.

Malheureusement il s'agit là d'un aspect que Françoise Laurent laisse tout compte fait dans l'obscurité. En ce sens son travail n'éclaire ni l'oeuvre, ni l'auteur; au contraire il concourt, me semble-t-il, par l'impressionnisme qui domine sa méthode, et cela malgré l'intérêt que semble manifester l'auteure à l'endroit de la mythologie des récits, de la langue de ces derniers et du statut des personnages, à reconduire le mythe même de l'écrivain, s'éloignant du même coup à chaque page d'un science du texte qui serait autre chose qu'une fiction.

ROBERT MORENCY

PICK OF THE CROP

DAVID HELWIG & SANDRA MARTIN, eds., *86 Best Canadian Stories.* Oberon, $12.95.

DAVID HELWIG & SANDRA MARTIN, eds., *Coming Attractions 4.* Oberon, $12.95.

OBERON'S TWO MAJOR story collections for 1986 range widely in mood from cynicism to tenderness. Many are technically brilliant, virtuoso performances which

help to support the claim that the story is the Canadian genre *par excellence.* Both volumes are edited by David Helwig and Sandra Martin, old hands at choosing from an abundance of riches.

Coming Attractions, now in its fourth year, is an annual anthology devoted to the work of novice writers. This collection features three stories each by Davy James-French, Lesley Krueger, and Rohinto Mistry, all born in the 1950's. They come, respectively, from Prince Edward Island, Vancouver, and Toronto-via-Bombay. (Mistry arrived here in 1975.) All are impressive writers, but the technically proficient stories of James-French lack the emotional warmth and philosophic depths which add strength and beauty to the work of the other two. His work is hard-edged, "like a cracked cough drop," to borrow his own phrase. His characters discover that life ends "badly," that rescues are "all faked"; they profess to dislike unfinished endings but these are exactly what James-French offers us, tongue in cheek.

Mistry's stories are set in the Parsee community of Bombay but exhibit the sensibility of an exile caught between two worlds, "blind and throbbing between two lives." The narrator of "Lend Me Your Light" calls himself Tiresias, the blind seer, "humbled by the ambiguities and dichotomies" which confront him. He pretends to have missed the epiphany which Mistry gives to the reader through the secondary characters, one selfish, the other compassionate. The materialistic friend who disgusts the narrator may, after all, be trying to cope with his own sense of powerlessness and anger. Hope for the future lies not in the New World but in the Old, in the work being done (at considerable personal risk) by the narrator's brother in rural communities. Mistry's ironies are profound, his humour painfully accurate. His satiric gift leavens the sombreness of the tales. Krueger's work is equally sensitive and refreshing. Her insights into human nature are shrewd, while her images dance their way through the intricacies of the narratives. In "Miracles," the double voice of the child-narrator is reminiscent of Laurence's Vanessa.

Of the dozen writers represented in *86 Best Canadian Stories,* only Alice Munro's name will be familiar to many readers. Her long story, "Miles City, Montana" (one of the best in her prize-winning collection, *The Progress of Love*), gets the anthology off to a good start. Several other names are familiar to us, but for poetry. These include Patrick Lane, Tom Marshall, Paulette Jiles, and Robyn Sarah. Lane's first published story, "Rabbits," is a bleak little tale where the sexual bullying of the does by the big buck rabbit symbolizes the relationship between a man and a woman, and suggests the woman's suicide. Marshall's story of a depressed woman alone with her two small sons is also a downer, although his handling of suspense is good.

Settings range all over the map, from South Africa and Italy to the Canadian Arctic. Bharati Mukherjee and Dave Margoshes choose New York City. Mukherjee's "A Wife's Story" starts with an upper-class Indian woman's reaction to a racist stage play, and moves to her relation with her wealthy Indian husband who visits her in America where she is studying. The woman thinks, "It's the tyranny of the American dream that scares me," yet the Indian couple have themselves embraced that dream/nightmare of wealth, sex, and anarchic freedom. In Jiles's "Night Flight to Attiwapiskat," a woman photographer is forced to confront her life and her values when the small plane in which she is travelling north develops engine trouble.

My favourites include Ray Smith's story of a woman plagued by a brutal Nazi fantasy, Ernst Havemann's African-based

"Death of a Nation," and Gertrude Story's "Swan Song, Two." Story has published a prairie trilogy of prose fiction. Her hilarious portrait of the war between the sexes strikes a blow for all women and leaves you chuckling. The child narrator is the perfect foil for two tough but tender characters. Story's ear for prairie lingo is acute.

Robyn Sarah uses a dried-up pond with a muddy bottom to portray a friendship between two women. Jane Urquhart's "Italian Postcard" is cleverly crafted but seems based on an emotional vacuum. Her American woman's attraction to an Italian monk, which parallels Santa Chiara's unrequited passion for St. Francis of Assisi, is beautifully depicted but hollow. Sometimes one suspects that technique is replacing genuine emotion in the modern story.

PATRICIA MORLEY

MAGIC DECADE

HAROLD HORWOOD, *Remembering Summer*. Pottersfield Press, $11.95.

ALREADY DISTINGUISHED AS a writer of short stories, novels, and travel books. Harold Horwood has once again proved himself to be a master craftsman. *Remembering Summer* in some ways continues Horwood's earlier novel *The Foxes of Beachy Cove* (1967), using the same Newfoundland locale just a few miles from St. John's and the same reflective, now middle-aged, Eli Pallisher. But here any specific parallel stops, for *Remembering Summer* is more experimental in structure and in prose style than its predecessor, richer in both theme and characters.

Using very short chapters of five to eight pages each, the novel develops its theme without the aid of rigid, inhibiting plot structure. It depicts in kaleidoscopic fashion the characters, events, reflections, and emotions of Eli Pallisher during the 1960's and early 1970's. To deal with this turbulent social period, Horwood employs prose styles which transmit the intellectual and emotional reactions of both the protagonist and the dozens of rootless young people to whom he gives shelter and with whom he shares experiences.

At times brutally primitive — "Let's split, blow the scene, take the road..." — Horwood's style can capture the essence of the hippie generation. But it can also reveal in prose that rivals A. M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* the rich resources of our language: "Long pointed feather-fronds of music came arcing down out of the darkness, coloured silver, filling the void and swishing the cringing flesh in a long cascade of ecstasy." The influences on his style, although many, are all transmuted into Horwood's own: echoes, tags, and quotations from e. e. cummings, Blake, Shakespeare, Joyce, Sandburg, Eliot, and Birney are all visible. No student of Canadian literature, for example, can fail to relate the style of the following quotation to a well-known Canadian poet: "Traffic paced by Chrysler-covered baldheads went synchromeshing through boozeblunt synapses converting air to cancer by the cubic mile while lower animals neon-bright passed on with pocket-hoarded coinage into the promised land of the commercials' gum-drop castles and candy chariots." Horwood, indeed, has an excellent ear for the rhythms of English, an ear which he confesses was trained by the most beautiful prose work of the last three hundred years, the King James' Version of the Bible.

Remembering Summer constitutes not just a defence of the 1960's but also a proclamation that it is the most important decade in the social history of modern man. For Horwood, the period forms a watershed, separating the generations who proclaim materialism and rational-

ism as their guides from those of us who have received a precious legacy from what can be described truly as a counter-culture, a legacy which offers us sensual experience, emotion, affection, honesty, and frankness in place of the rigid, oppressive structures, beliefs, and values of pre-1960. Drugs, alcohol, rock music; free love, gay males, and lesbians; anti-establishment social, political, and philosophical ideas — all crowd the pages of this remarkable work. The protagonist, Eli Pallisher, looks back at the 1960's from a vantage point ten years later. In doing so, he forces us to take stock of our own value system. *Remembering Summer* is a troubling novel for that reason, but rewarding when we make our own personal inventory. For Horwood, the period was "the magic decade," and much of the novel's content springs from his own personal involvement with the hippies and his commitment to their values.

Certainly they are colourful characters, and Horwood successfully individualizes each of them. Some came to Beachy Cove as children of eight and nine years of age, in which cases Eli Pallisher lightly sketches their growing awareness not only of themselves but also of the decade. Others came to him already hippies in belief, dress, language, and action. Kabba, the six-foot, muscular black is a good example of the first group; but equally well drawn are the gentle Gazelle, the poet Dannie, and the wayward Shanta in the second group. Together they provide the reader with what is undoubtedly the best portrait of an age, a portrait enriched by Eli Pallisher's own reflections. Neither Ginsberg nor Kerouac excels Horwood in painting the hippie period, an age when "Flesh became spirit, as it had among the Greeks."

Is there a conclusion to the novel? Certainly the closing chapter is an updating of the lives of the principal characters, with the predictable development of some hippies into yuppies, with the commitment of others to experiments in the commune and kibbutz, with the tragic and disillusioned deaths of still others of the group. Be that as it may, Horwood remains convinced that the 1960's reached full bloom in the summer of his life and will blossom again: "Spring will come back to the world, and its young weeks will leap like lambs on the meadow. Then the words and deeds of the magic decade will be remembered: that brief flowering of the spirit when it seemed that man's long bondage was about to end."

One final remark. It's a pity that editorial scrutiny failed to remove a few typographical and spelling errors which detract from the beauty of the style, of the poetic use of typography, indeed, of all the aesthetic niceties that help to make this novel the best prose work that Horwood has written.

S. G. MULLINS

LES COMPAGNONS

HÉLÈNE JASMIN-BÉLISLE, *Le père Emile Legault et ses compagnons de saint Laurent: Une petite histoire*. Leméac, $15.95.

MANY ARTICLES AND books have been written on the college priest, Father Emile Legault, who almost singlehandedly developed local theatre in Quebec from 1937 to 1951. Through his work with the Compagnons de Saint Laurent, Legault trained actors and theatre craftsmen, educated and developed a large public following of Christian and classical plays, and encouraged government and institutional support for the theatre. He was an important force in Quebec theatre (not only at the time of his active involvement but well into the 1950's and 1960's), for many of the people who worked with him at the amateur level went on to become professional actors, directors, writers, art-

ists, and technicians (Jean Coutu, Thérèse Cadorette, Lionel Villeneuve, Hélène Loiselle, Félix Leclerc, Alfred Pellan).

Hélène Jasmin-Bélisle's essay is an attempt to re-create the enthusiasm of the Compagnons and of their infatigable leader. To a large extent she succeeds. Her book is full of interesting and amusing anecdotes about Legault's dealings with his young charges, their varied and sometimes difficult experiences on the road, and chaotic administration of the troupe, the exciting rehearsals, the financial woes of the company and of most of its members, the contributions of great artists such as the playwright Henri Ghéon and the actress Ludmilla Pitoef, and not least, the joy of work and discovery *le père* Legault managed to convey.

Unfortunately, the book itself reminds one too much of an amateur production in that story lines are not always completed, sentence structure is far too often incoherent or illogical, there is no index, and several chapters contain apparently unrelated material. Of course, in some ways this chaotic presentation corresponds to the dynamic and creative chaos that seemed to surround Father Legault. In Chapter 5, for instance, Jacques Létourneau joins the troupe (we are not given the date), Father Legault annoys some of the troupe during the 1940's by talking too much about the past (how long did this go on, when or how did it stop?), Jean Béraud's negative critique of *The Rape of Lucretia* is quoted (what effect did this have on the troupe's morale?), Father Legault's response in *Le Devoir* to a negative critique of *Britannicus* (implications? repercussions?) is immediately followed by a paragraph on another play, *Briser la statue* (Break the Statue) in which Thérèse Cadorette replaces an actress at the last minute, and the Compagnons' log book for one of their tours in 1949 to New Brunswick and eastern Quebec is reprinted in detail. The chapter closes with a long description of car troubles in Chicoutimi and elsewhere and a short note about a disastrous but amusing presentation of *Noel sur la place* (Christmas in the Square) in some village east of Montreal.

According to her list of references, as part of her research Hélène Jasmin-Bélisle met with over fifteen former members of the troupe, sifted through sixteen years of back issues of seven daily Montreal and Quebec newspapers, consulted several books and articles on the subject, and had access to the Legault archives as well as to those of the Fathers of the Holy Cross (of which Father Legault was a member). Although she never quite manages to present the results of this extensive research in a coherent fashion, the information she relates does amuse and intrigue. Perhaps most important, it will help to keep alive the memory of a great figure in Canadian theatre history.

ELAINE F. NARDOCCHIO

VOIX UNIVERSITAIRES

GILLES DORION & MARCEL VOISIN, eds., *Littérature québécoise, voix d'un peuple, voies d'une autonomie*. Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, n.p.

Littérature québécoise est un document de travail qui se propose de "concrétiser" un échange entre l'Université Libre de Bruxelles et l'Université Laval. Echange qui a comme objectif la diffusion de la littérature québécoise en Belgique, et celle de la littérature belge au Québec. Le recueil *Littérature québécoise* comprend donc une vingtaine d'articles (dont 16 sont écrits par des professeurs de l'Université Laval) qui se proposent de retracer chronologiquement l'évolution de la littérature québécoise à partir des écrits de la Nouvelle-France, à travers le roman, le

conte, la poésie au 19e siècle et jusqu'à l'étude de quelques orientations contemporaines dans le domaine littéraire (roman, théâtre) ainsi que dans le domaine social (appareil scolaire, laïcisation). Alors que quelques études analysent en profondeur tel texte ou tel aspect d'une oeuvre d'un écrivain, la grande majorité des études sont des survols, des esquisses et des études se voulant plus ou moins générales: équilibre judicieux étant donné que cet ouvrage vise un public désirant s'initier au "mystère de la parole" québécoise. Intéressantes, la plupart des études, tout en reconnaisant l'impossibilité d'être exhaustives, lancent le lecteur sur des voies de recherche et d'investigation qui pourraient s'avérer fructueuses et suggèrent souvent des outils fort précieux. (Nous pensons ici en particulier à un article instructif sur "Le discours critique des années soixante.")

Le lecteur reste un peu surpris et perplexe quant au choix de certains écrivains à étudier. La justification d'un tel choix n'est pas donnée et nous sommes portés à croire qu'il s'est fait en fonction des intérêts particuliers des critiques plutôt qu'en fonction du besoin d'une représentation rigoureusement fidèle de l'ampleur et de la diversité de la réalité littéraire québécoise. Cette même attitude est reflétée dans le fait qu'un seul article traite du théâtre québécois alors que six au moins parlent de poésie. Le recueil se termine par un article intéressant sur la spécificité de l'écriture québécoise, article qui se veut *une introduction* à la littérature québécoise. Nous croyons que ce choix d'une étude qui introduit pour clore ce recueil est fort opportun: le recueil serait avant tout une invitation à lire. *Littérature québécoise* est un recueil qui montre une fois de plus la difficulté sinon l'impossibilité présente d'arriver à une synthèse par rapport à l'ensemble du fait littéraire québécois. Projet difficile donc de par l'ampleur et la diversité du sujet traité et de par la multiplicité des approches possibles. Néanmoins entreprise louable et certainement utile car nous croyons que l'ouvrage contribuera comme il se le propose à une meilleure connaissance de la littérature québécoise dans le monde francophone hors du Canada.

IRÈNE OORE

CAMEO & CONFLICT

ELIZABETH BREWSTER, *Visitations.* Oberon, $11.95.

ALISTAIR MACLEOD, *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

ONE COULD HARDLY imagine two more dissimilar books of short stories, although their authors share a similar rural Maritime background. Elizabeth Brewster's quiet, uneventful stories in *Visitations* avoid all but the most tentative resolutions. Alistair MacLeod's *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories* is a book of drama, often violence, which seeks profound implications and flirts with didacticism.

Brewster is better known, and regarded, for her many volumes of poetry than for her fiction (two novels and two previous short story collections). Most critics have noted the similarity between the elements of her poetry and her fiction — autobiography, nostalgia, ordinariness, understatement — and suggested that the "making" of them into literature is more satisfying in the poetry. The six stories in this volume will not reverse that judgement; in fact, the final one prosaically demythologizes invention and significance in her fictions and deliberately asserts, "This is not a story. A story has a beginning, a middle and an end. A story has direction. A story has a theme. It has a conflict you can recognize. There is a climax, maybe a rec-

ognition scene, a reversal. A story has mystery. . . . I can't tell stories in [this] way."

The stories she does tell are graceful and well-written cameos of women from youth to old age; the voice, whether first or third person, is kindly, spinsterish, cautious, undramatic, sensitive to the ambiguities of memory and truth, and therefore mistrustful of climaxes or epiphanies. Brewster's characterization of the sisterhood of women is finely observed and carefully detailed; her men (except for her father) are shadowy background stereotypes — lover, teacher, rapist, philanderer. She exchanges narrative development for a descriptive exploration of relationships with contrast, but seldom conflict: a college woman and a crippled girl; an old maid and her promiscuous sister; an abandoned wife and her middle-aged friends; a female professor and her elderly neighbour. The result is a feeling of quiet wisdom about people and their pasts but no emotional intensity or profundity.

At their best, Brewster's stories dignify the commonplace, but the least successful story is an illustration of the perils of superficiality attempting significance. "A Perfect Setting" claims the heightened setting and atmosphere of a "murder mystery," but all the details dissipate in a trivial non-ending. In contrast the book begins and ends with sensitive stories which draw most strongly on autobiographical diaries and memories, and explore the ambiguous gap between "the story you live and the story you tell." The last and much the longest story, "Collage," in itself justifies the volume; it is a "scrapbook" of nineteen fragments or "prose poems" which present both a memorial to her father and a "penance" for her past shame about him, a way of both "coming to terms with" her parents and "prolonging their existence." Here her deep, personal honesty, her warmth and wisdom, and her acceptance of life as undramatic endurance illuminates the ordinary details and raises the particulars to universal truths.

Alistair MacLeod's first collection of stories, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*, appeared over ten years ago and has been justly celebrated. The seven stories in this second collection are also mainly set in Cape Breton, and again he creates a universal mythology out of a deeply realized sense of the people and the place, and the epic struggle between them. The reviewer risks the same sentimentality and melodrama that MacLeod occasionally falls into when discussing the emotional power of his stories of pathos and horror.

An English professor like Brewster, MacLeod has not moved as far geographically, or emotionally, from his Maritime roots, though he fully exploits the ironic contrasts between the modern, materialistic world and the "primitive" Gaelic past. In his best story, "The Closing Down of Summer," as well as several others, the lost language becomes a symbol of the poignant communication gap between the heroic and tragic, men who still struggle with violent death in mines, forests, and seas, and their sons who "go to the universities to study dentistry or law and to become fatly affluent before they are thirty." But in this book every man (the women are mainly supporting actresses) is his own island of "inarticulate lonliness." MacLeod's sensitive narrators (first person in six stories and of the sons' generation in five of these) try to bridge that isolation by articulating their feelings and seeking meanings in the suffering, loss, and death, and connections between the past, the present, and the future.

In "Winter Dog" the narrator unites his present life, and his frolicking children in the first snow of an Ontario winter, with the memory of his near-death as a boy in a winter sea, the dog who saved him but whom he could not save, and the imminent death of a loved one beside that

same Maritime sea. In "Vision" the "tangled, twisted strands" of lives and stories become even more complex as the narrator attempts to "see and understand" the pattern of family relationships — betrayal and sacrifice, love and death and violence — spanning five generations and extending into the legendary past. The dramatic plot (no understated ordinariness here) weaves the complexities of human beings into the richness of myth and embroiders it with repeated images. It could be a bit much (with its five-tiered structure and elements of the gothic, erotic, and ghostly), but it is remarkably convincing because of the framework of realistic detail and clear, though lyrical, prose style. The same elements are, however, less convincing in the much slighter title story which announces its mythologizing, "once there was a family," and attempts its connection with the present by using the stilted convention of the historical present tense.

There is not a lot of humour in the tragedies which predominate in this book, but the bleakness is relieved by the warmth of male comradeship and family love (in, for example, the Christmas piece "To Every Thing There Is a Season" which just avoids sentimentality). There is some effective satire on the modern world in "The Tuning of Perfection," but the melodrama, symbolism, and theme seem most forced and didactic in this story. The ironies of life are more realistically portrayed in "Second Spring" with its comic metaphor of the prize heifer mounted by the wrong bull. The rhythm of this story, illustrating the theme of the interdependence of nature's cycle and man's life on the soil, builds with natural suspense, careful detail, and skilful scene — painting to resolve itself in a satisfying irony.

BARBARA PELL

QUESTS & JOURNALS

ROGER NASH, *Psalms from the Suburbs*. Quarry, $8.95.

HAROLD ENRICO, *Rip Current*. Sono Nis, $6.95.

GREGORY GRACE, *A Sacrifice of Fire: Expeditions into the Interior*. Wood Lake Books, n.p.

IN THESE THREE volumes the authors are all on a quest for the significance of self in the modern world — through poetic process, literary memory, and spiritual autobiography respectively. Their journeys are not always successful, but their travel diaries yield some valuable insights along the way.

Roger Nash's poetry is a celebration of the magic in the ordinary, the holy in the daily; this volume continues the recreating and redefining of the world begun in his first book, *Settlement in a School of Whales* (1983). Most of the poems exist to construct novel metaphorical connections between the natural and the human worlds: "The sea comes in playing its piano keys"; "Sleep draws us / closer to the goldfish at the centre / of the mind." His best poems remind one of A. M. Klein's *Rocking Chair* studies, and Nash's poet as landscape attempts fresh-seeing, Adamic naming which will redeem the commonplace. Sometimes they work (though never as well as Klein's): in the playful imagery of "Letter to a Friend," the clever humour of "the lecture on nasal archeology," the precisely extended metaphor of "Trench digging in summer," the atmospheric shiver of the first three parts of "The hound on the hill" (unfortunately weakened by the Dr. Seuss silliness of Part IV), the gentle humanity of "After her stroke," the moving pathos of "Bomb sites," and the brilliant, kaleidoscopic voice of "Schubert's lessons for clarinet in an old trapper's hut." In these and a few other successes, it seems enough that our sensibilities have been enriched with Nash's original poetic perceptions.

It is not quite enough. The quest for newness too often produces only novelty: cheap, silly, or strained conceits ("Song of Ghengis the cat"). Some verses (four or five lines) are only working ideas for a poem; some poems consist of fragments that never coalesce. The main weakness of *Psalms from the Suburbs*, however, is that, unlike the original psalms, they contain poetry but little wisdom. The subject matter (pretzels, pajamas) is often too ordinary to merit "the celebratory, spirit-wrestling, religio-aesthetic" importance that Nash claims for it, and when the subject is important (war, immigration), the reader is surprised by the lack of irony and intelligence in the treatment of it ("Military training" and "An invasion of goats").

In Harold Enrico's second collection of poetry (his first, *Now, A Thousand Years From Now*, appeared in 1975), the poet, now 66, after a lifetime of scholarship in the humanities, declares himself on "a journey into the self in search of peace and a truce with mortality. In it I encounter again the poets I have read and liked, revisit the places in Europe and America where I have been, and finally try to come to terms with the ghosts who haunt me." His poems are as complex, intelligent, and erudite as this introduction suggests, and also as pretentious and private.

The best thing about Enrico's poetry is his imagery. In most poems pictures are sharp and immediate, the metaphors fresh and powerful, the conceits and aphorisms clever and convincing. At times the images grow organically to define a poem, create an atmosphere, or sketch a narrative:

> Word after word ripples in my ear
> the widening circles disappearing in the reeds
> at the pond's edge
> while the heron in its purple mantle,
> anchored in mud,
> erects a motionless monument
> to you under your journal's noon.

In other poems, the precisely detailed and complex figures cascade in fragments over the reader (for example, "Forebodings" and "Christmas Carnival"). The poet's voice is quiet and nostalgic, his language intelligent and formal, his verses carefully crafted, with occasional rhyme, and even a villanelle ("Distances").

But the sum is less than the virtue of the parts. Enrico makes a number of poems dependent on obscure literary figures, complicated allusions without contexts, and untranslated Italian phrases. More seriously, the brilliant images and startling fragments often do not add up to a communicated significance; not only within the five titled sections of the book, but even within many of the individual poems, there is a lack of thematic unity and coherence. Of course poetry is not prose, but the reader is increasingly frustrated in *Rip Current* by the suspicion that the complexity is just cleverness, and the profundity merely pretentiousness. Ultimately the "ghosts" in Enrico's literary summation of his life seem too private to be shared.

Gregory Grace's *A Sacrifice of Fire* is a rare and beautiful book; it is not, however, a collection of poetry. It is a journal of spiritual autobiography with 270 numbered entries, only one-tenth of them poems. Yet the rest might almost be called prose poems, so sensitive and transcendent are the meditations. The introduction to the book, by Vancouver theologian David Lochhead, is an intelligent survey of the problem of modern Christian literature — the loss of a common, communicable spiritual language. Without resorting to either fundamentalism or charismatics, Grace expresses a "language of the spirit" that combines theological depth with the concerns of contemporary reality, and biblical themes with modern intellectual

thought (Marxism, Freudianism, literary deconstruction, etc.).

Grace is honest in revealing the exterior landscape of his "interior expedition" towards identity which unites all the fragments: meditations on his failed father, jailed brother, unfaithful wife and their sexual reunion are startling confessions from a rural Manitoba pastor. Yet there is no sense of either personal exploitation ("The judge called [my brother] a write-off. Most people write off most of the world most of the time"), or intellectual pretentiousness ("All theology is small talk. Cosmic chatter"). He is also courageously candid about expressing a faith unfashionable in the world:

> Jesus is in the livingroom. . . . I feel that
> he is not only listening to, but also
> re-experiencing, with every fibre of his flesh,
> the story I am telling him. I know that he will
> not report what I have to tell him to a higher
> authority.

And equally unappreciated in the Church:

> Our sexuality is a sacrifice of fire unto
> God, a sacramental act. . . .
> There is a bad odour to the Church insofar
> as it distances itself from the world. I
> sometimes think that the purpose of the Church
> is to insulate God from the world; a temple
> keeps God in his place.

Not all the fragments are brilliant; some of the poetry is trite and some of the epigrams trivial. But the greatest weakness of the volume is actually a *felix culpa*: it cannot be read at one sitting without weariness and saturation, but it greatly repays thoughtful and periodic immersions.

BARBARA PELL

BRACES & FRECKLES

GINETTE ANFOUSSE, *Les Catastrophes de Rosalie*. Illus. by Marisol Sarrazin. La courte échelle, $5.95.

SYLVIE DESROSIERS, *La Patte dans le sac*. Illus. by Pierre Huet. La courte échelle, $5.95.

BERTRAND GAUTHIER, *Le Journal intime d'Ani Croche*. Illus. by Gérard Frischeteau. La courte échelle, $5.95.

JOCELINE SANSCHAGRIN, *Atterrissage forcé*. Illus. by Pierre Pratt. La courte échelle, $5.95.

DESPITE THEIR RELEVANCE or topicality, contemporary "problem novels" about the dangers of drugs and alcohol or the trauma of parental divorce or the dilemma posed by junior high school peer pressure in matters of dress and social behaviour often fail miserably to attract today's nine- to twelve-year-old readers. The burgeoning designer label/rock video sophistication of this particular reading public would seem to make acceptance of such a literary form impossible. However, in each of these novels (one humorous text, one detective story, one diary novel, and one fantastic tale), the author has succeeded in making the "contemporary problem solving" formula come alive in striking and innovative ways.

Ginette Anfousse, best known to date for her marvellous Pichou books with their very brief texts and opulent illustrations, turns to a longer prose form in *Les Catastrophes de Rosalie*. Rosalie Dansereau has the normal problems of a nine-year-old girl (lingering baby fat, boring schoolwork, love-hate relationships with boys, Christmas pageants, "best friends," allowance money) which are recounted in first-person narration within the framework of a single year in her life. But the predictability of the plot is totally undermined by the fact that Rosalie is an orphan (her father and mother having died in an airplane crash when she was just two months old). Freed from the con-

straints often imposed upon a child protagonist by membership in a traditional family, Rosalie nonetheless still has an incredibly tumultuous home life since she has been legally adopted by her seven aunts (whose names cover the alphabet from A to G: Alice, Béatrice, Colette, Diane, Elise, Florence, and Gudule). The seven adult female characters are, of course, all "role models" for her; yet each of them also possesses an irritating "mother" characteristic against which she rails. Rosalie's year-long rebellion against parental authority (times seven!) is paralleled by a development of a strong sense of self as she manages to avoid one "catastrophe" after another. Rosalie is fiercely independent and a wonderful observer of adult foibles. Her Halloween outing, her role as Angel #1 in the school Christmas pageant, her escapades with her friend Julie (the human calculator), and her on-again, off-again friendship with Marco Tifo make Rosalie's "year in the life" a memorable one.

Jocelyne Duchesne and her two best friends, Agnès and John, call themselves "The Inseparables" and share the good humour and down-to-earth common sense of a Rosalie Dansereau. However, in Sylvie Desrosier's *La Patte dans le sac* their lives become involved in the dangerous grown-up world of drug trafficking when Jocelyne's mutt, Notdog, is picked up by the police when he arrives at a drug runner's cabin near the U.S.-Canadian border carrying a small packet of heroin fastened to his collar. Jocelyne's uncle, Edouard Duchesne, who is her guardian (Jocelyne, like Rosalie, is an orphan) and who is listed as the dog's owner, is taken into custody on suspicion of trafficking. Jocelyne, Agnès, and John must then work together in order to find the true guilty party and save not only Uncle Edouard but Notdog, too. Their detective adventure, which is both believable and exciting, allows for full reader participation as the three friends follow various clues and red herrings.

Bertrand Gauthier's diary-novel, *Le Journal intime d'Ani Croche*, also maintains the level of sophisticated contemporary language and humour found in both the Anfousse and Desrosiers texts as we experience a year in the life of Ani Croche, who is ten years old going on forty. Unlike Rosalie and Jocelyne, Ani is not an orphan; however, the reader can only sympathize with her when she says she sometimes wishes she were one since her parents have separated, and Ani is suffering from all the usual upheavals such change brings about in a child's life. Ani's friend Simon has moved away, her father has taken to having crying fits, her mother is upset because her latest boy friend has left her, and Ani doesn't get along with her father's new girl friend. Ani confides everything to her diary, addressing her thoughts to her favourite doll, Olivia. Along with Olivia, the reader shares Ani's loneliness, her mad passion for various rock stars and rock groups, her perceptive insights into adult behaviour, her dreams, and her first "love." The diary form allows what is sometimes in problem novels the rather banal description of a child's view of separation and divorce to regain a sense of immediacy; it also provides a formal means for the child-writer to deal with the real pain of such an experience in an everyday context rather than in isolation.

With Joceline Sanschagrin's fantasy text, *Atterrissage forcé*, the reader encounters yet another strong female protagonist. Wondeur Lacasse, who like Rosalie and Jocelyne is also an orphan, possesses the magical power of flight (passed on to her by Léontine, the woman who found her and brought her up). On the morning of her twelfth birthday, Wondeur sets out to travel around the world — and hopes that she will also be able to find her real father. However, her

"forced landing" inside a strange walled city (whose inhabitants can never leave) obliges her to rethink her original plans. Fortunately Wondeur makes friends with several other children, and with the help of a female mentor, Kousmine, manages to escape and to carry on the quest for her father. The narrative abounds with secret passages, maps hidden in old books, and strange forbidding adults who must be outwitted by the children.

All four of these novels are studies in healthy rebellion against parental authority and the parallel development within the child of a personal, individualized ethics. In each novel there is an attempt to provide positive role models for young readers by presenting warts-and-all characters who make mistakes, learn from them, and know how to laugh at themselves. Characters have braces and freckles and glasses and language problems (John, the English-Canadian in *La Patte dans le sac*, says "oreilles" for "orteils," "valeur" for "voleur"; Rosalie is always in trouble for her constant use of "sapristi de mocheté"; Ani's name alone — she is *not*, after all, "sans anicroche" — presents difficulties for her). Yet they are also loyal, generous, idealistic, and courageous. Rosalie, Jocelyne, Ani, and Wondeur each explore, in varying genres, in varying narrative voices, the passage from childhood to adulthood via the momentous events of pre-adolescence. They are problem-solvers of the best kind.

LYNN KETTLER PENROD

PRESENCE/ABSENCE

BP NICHOL, *The Martyrology: Book 6 Books 1978-1985*. Coach House, $14.95.

THE FIRST PAGE of any book usually contains what is called a "half title," or "bastard title." In *The Martyrology: Book 6 Books 1978-1985*, this page is lined as an accountant's sheet and contains the words "a counting." The most obvious reason is that "A Book of Hours" is divided into hourly sections, presumably the time of composition, and numbered 1-28. But the poem does not just mark or account for time spent. Origins, half relations to Black Mountain and *TISH* poetics, are acknowledged. The use of space on the page as a grid for *keeping* time is mentioned in a note at the end of the text and is demonstrated with dexterity in the slow and haunting movement of "Hour 7." In a more visual poem, a serenity is evoked in Nichol's juxtaposition of the simple words "sky / wind / cloud / bird" as an aural-visual construct and with the repetition in the following lines at the end of the book:

> wanted nothing more than that
>
> bird song
>
> wanted that
>
> nothing more then

The shift of meanings among the words continues beyond the aural-visual time-space of the reading, and the song is evoked. The last words of the book, "nothing more then," state the finality, the absence and closure, but, then, reverberate back to the present absolute "nothing more," and, then, beyond the book itself (then what?). This presence and absence is re-counted throughout the book. In the meantime, St Orm springs time by breaking his watch, and St Ranglehold moves in with his counted measures, introducing the comic into the cosmic:

'i don't have time for this sort of bullshit'

thump
click
tick

In "Book I. Imperfection: A Prophecy," Nichol accounts for, recounts, and maps myths of origin and journeys from the Old World to the New. But in "Hour 8," there is no mumbling, there are no maps, and the writer is, simply, "lost."

But who is the writer? Pronouns move around the text with no fixed meaning. "I" and "you" move dialectically back and forth between the writer and the reader. Nichol sometimes addresses this collusion as "we," though sometimes this is another group of "I"s. "Me," the mirror image of "We," is sometimes only part of a word, no longer a pronoun, "mark the me's" ("The Grace of the Moment"), but just another theme or object in the book. This treatment of the self as an object, like any other, is reminiscent of Charles Olson's theory of the Black Mountain poet's "universist" stance. The self does not control the poem; rather, the poem flows through it. Perhaps a more immediate perspective on the self is the post-modern deconstruction of the narrator. Stephen Scobie, in "Surviving the Paraph-raise" (*Open Letter*, Summer-Fall 1986), provides an interesting discussion of the ambiguous presence/absence of the signature:

> ... in *The Martyrology*, bpNichol recognises the similarity of his form to that of the Japanese travel-journal-poem, the *utanikki*, by writing, 'You too, Nicky.' The effect of this technique, Derrida suggests [in *Signéponge*], is that 'by not letting the signature fall outside the text any more, as an undersigned subscription, and by inserting it into the body of the text you monumentalize, institute, and erect it into a thing or a stony object. But in doing so, you also lose the identity, the title of ownership over the text: you let it become a moment or a part of the text, as a thing or a common noun' ...
>
> To include both the third and the first person in the same text is to *admit* the split self, and also to *invite* further splitting. ...

In "Hour 1," there is both identification and distinction between Nikko (a Japanese poet) and Nichol:

Nikko
March 30th 1689
lodged in an inn at
the foot of
the mountain
(wrote poems)

Nichol
February 11th
1979
mounted on
his foot at
the in stant
dis lodged
(writing
poems)

So, when Nichol writes "who to, Nicky?" in "Continental Trance," we wonder who Nicky is: Nikko, Nichol, or simply one further step from "You too, Nicky," *utanikki*, a poetic form. The sounds of the names and the words are similar. But Nikko is from the past; Nichol's particular writing, even though using the past tense here, is active and present because the particles interact in the reader's presence.

The doubling of first and third persons, Scobie says, "like the appearance of the double in folk-lore, is an omen of death." Perhaps more than in any of the previous books, human death and mortality have become dominant themes. In 1971 Nichol published *ABC: THE ALEPH BETH BOOK* and proclaimed: "POETRY BEING AT A DEAD END POETRY IS DEAD." So it is not surprising that death also has a literary purport in *The Martyrology*. The presence (life)/absence (death) inherent in facing one's double springs up as signifiers confront signifieds, as old worn-out forms of writing confront present experience. In "Hour 7" a tension is drawn between self-refenential words, objects in themselves that are distanced from, per-

haps metaphors for, real objects and emotions, and words that are simply bridges to understanding, perhaps similes for, the real world:

> white out
>
> loss
>
> of vision
>
> of the heart's working
>
> the thingness of things
>
> in storm
>
> in heat
>
> the fire in the grate glows
> coals shift into ash
> the crumpled pages flare & are gone
> ....
>
> around you
> the selves flicker

A simile is not real in itself; it only approximates the reality. (In "Continental Trance," Nichol writes, "i don't like the 'like' / except as entrance to / a "pataphysical reality.") An echo is set up with the shadows of truth that Plato saw flicker around the walls of the cave. But which "thingness of things" is Nichol referring to? The entire passage can be read in two ways, as any paradox of metaphor can be. Literally, the snow storm blinds the poet. Perhaps he burns his pages of words, disgusted by their lack of truth or reality. But "white out" could be liquid paper, which erases the "real" words. The "crumpled pages," brief though their existence might be, are real objects that "flare & are gone."

The transformation of page to flame, of one object to another, the brevity of existence, and the necessity to immerse oneself and one's poetry into this state informs much of *The Martyrology*/is the martyrology of the old language saints. "Briefly: The Birth/Death Cycle — Hours 11, 12, 13 & 14" emphasizes the pain involved in mortality and anchors theory in biography: "GOD IT ALL SLIPS PAST US / so briefly." The pull between the elation felt in a verb(al) language that is in constant motion and the aching brevity of the implied and necessary mortality is "a difficult music / the muse sticks to." Still, these changes, the movement, and the reconstructions of language are what revitalize Nichol's poetry and evade closure (death): "mostly you are there at the end of this sentence like a period."

The pun is another technique Nichol uses to avoid narrative closure, and, as "Hour 14" continues, Nichol refers to the "period" of his life and a literary "period," thus breaking the closure implied. In "TRG Report — 2: Narrative (part 5). Fictive Funnies: Featuring Syntax Dodges," Nichol's cartoon character falls from one frame into another, thinking "OH MY GOD!! I've fallen thru a hole in the narrative sequence into a different world!!" (*Open Letter*, Fall 1974). There are many puns throughout *The Martyrology*, and Nichol uses them to scatter the narrative into many directions at once. "Inchoate Road" must be mentioned here, as it is almost entirely composed of puns, the majority of which are based on water: "water music"/"what our music," "eaupen measure," "au," "be/l'eau," "o eau," "watair," "veaucabulairies," and, among others,

> water water water you
> doing?

(meme eau: i'm just looking at the sea'n
  world
    (eauver & eauver)))

Each time the word is repeated it acquires a different meaning (shades of Gertrude Stein), so that, although the sound is the same, "meme eau" (same water/memo) becomes a contradiction in terms, and Nichol asks: what are you ("water you")?

Negation and affirmation abound in this book. That is the "puncertainty"; it it also "(Heisenberg's principle of one certainty" — "in the subatomic world, we can never know both the position and momentum of a particle with great accuracy" (Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* [Suffolk: Fontana, 1976], p. 162):

i think in ink
particle charged airs
hum
    anity
  in
    anity
    an ity world a
pen opens
floods over me

It is uncertain at what exact point the particles "hum" and "anity," for example, will become "humanity." We can say that this will occur during a reading (read Capra: "The time it takes to go through ... [a wave] pattern represents the time during which the particle passes our point of observation"). But we cannot pinpoint when or if the reading will take place, nor at what point in the reading the interaction will occur. Further, these particles may or may not interact during a reading; it depends on the reader (read: it depends on the energy in the probability wave). Sometimes particles are called "resonances" in physics because they are not objects and do not last long; they are, writes Capra, simply "intermediate states in a network of reactions." The "hum" of particles in Nichol's poetry are often sounds, though words too appear:

a river arrive
air ver-y cold &

the drift

under the stillness
the silent stretches
a current accrues
air collide us

One could say that the particles "a river," "arrive," "air ver-y cold," and "air collide us" are the same particles, but that their consistency depends on relative perception. Seen from view A, which particles appear to interact? Seen from view B, which interact? The mathematical equations for the word "POETRY" that Nichol creates in "Hour 1" do not have the same emotive excitement that his word particles do. This could be the difference between the analytical physicist's representation of the world in mathematical equations and the mysterious particular actions of the world itself. The sayings of Heraclitus ("'everything gives way & / nothing stays fixed'") are closer to the theories of quantum physics than to any previous Western theories of absolute time and space.

Nichol's poetry is active, alive, and "present" (see the play on the various meanings of this word in "Hour 11") because of the particular momentum of the cosmic dance "that letter of / the law waltz." But exploding the atom and the verbal relation of this to deconstruction raises questions. This is the first time Nichol has actually examined this relationship other than mentioning the explosion of Knarn, the fourth world where the old gods lived in Book 3 of *The Martyrology*. In Book 6, concerned as it is with mortality, this question holds more weight:

neutrons & protons in constant conflict
split
    'brighter than a thousand suns'
& then
the horror of it over & over
                ("Hour 24")

what am i to do with
the ineffectiveness of the poem
that it reaches only the converted
only those to whom such messages get thru
that it is not a gun
nor a means to peace
but only that least of things
words

("Hour 16")

The elemental world is a sacred area, not to be profaned by destruction. Steve McCaffery, in "*The Martyrology* as Paragram" (*Open Letter*, Summer-Fall 1986), discusses the relationship between the words "witz," "wit," and "witch." The German term "witz" means

> intellectual faculty based on ingenuity, mental acuity and (in contrast to *mathemata*) the ability to grasp truth unprovably, non-scientifically and at a single glance. Until the 17th century its gender is feminine (the phonic affinity of 'wit' to 'witch' through the Anglo Saxon *wicca* — alluding to a sacred, secret knowledge — is worth note)....
>
> Wit, as we trace it, will never be far from the theme of liberation through dissolution and through an ordering of knowledge upon the chemical senses rather than on rational science.

This does not contradict what I have previously said about physics, since the irrational and immeasurable quantum leaps and loops caused rational Western physicists much concern. Nichol's play with language certainly shows "witz." His concentration on elemental particles and on revitalizing the language by setting up chains of energy from within the body also connects him to the elemental invocation of natural powers, desire for peace, and ecological cleansing held by many members of wiccan practice. The elements of the pencil are the elements of the earth, the elements of creation: "beginning with lead & wood." The "Y," formed in the landscape by two rivers, and the continual puns with water have obvious roots in elemental nature. Words and letters are generated from allusion to the Bethluisnion, an ancient calendar alphabet in which the name of each month is taken from the name for a sacred tree. The list of elemental and wiccan sources goes on with the poem written on "Hallowed evening's eve" and the invocation of the four elements, albeit through puns, in the Epilogue of "Inchoate Road." The noun "inchoate" means "elementary" or "imperfect"; the verb means "to begin" to "take the first steps in." There is a beginning, a new life, a re-creation of the language in these elemental connections (primal, grounded in the body, in landscape, and in the particular physical universe), a revitalization and invocation ("source-ery") of the spirits, the saints, the "st's" in language. This present/presence that Nichol presents us with, this "Grace of the Moment," is not a static noun, but a language in continual change and verbal movement:

now now now now now
stammering accurate speech
occupies the present
's past
a spa st's go to

The family tree and roots that Nichol traces in "In the Plunkett Hotel" are also "more verb than noun," as time alters what came before. Word and biography are both brief passages in larger contexts. The front and back covers of the book, photographs of Nichol's physical front and back, relate word to biography. The book is a brief passage in Nichol's larger life, which is a brief passage among generations. As one of, so far, six books, *Book 6* is a brief passage in *The Martyrology*. On the front cover, Nichol holds a book called *The Martyrology: Book 6*, designed with purple lettering on a grey, framed background, as the previous five books were designed. Presence/absence, affirmation/negation. If this is what *The Martyrology: Book 6* looks like, what book have I been reading?

ELLEN QUIGLEY

KING ARTHUR

NORRIS J. LACEY, ed., *The Arthurian Encyclopedia.* Garland Publishing, $60.00.

GEOFFREY ASHE, *The Discovery of King Arthur.* Debrett's Peerage Limited/Methuen. $18.95.

IN THE PAST, Arthurian studies have been highly compartmentalized according to language, period, and discipline. They have also been dominated by medievalists who have tended to denigrate any work later than 1500. It is satisfying and exciting to have at last one comprehensive volume, *The Arthurian Encyclopedia,* which makes us aware of the legend's remarkable persistence through fifteen centuries of time and four continents of space. The range is extraordinary, covering literatures in medieval and modern French, English, German, and Dutch, in Latin and Breton, Italian, Spanish, Portugese, Provençal, Catalan, Tagalog, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish. Even Japanese, Yiddish, and Russian/Serbo-Croatian are represented. The arts are selectively discussed with the variety of modes indicated by entries on the Modena archivolt, the Chertsey Abbey tiles, the Oxford Union murals, and the Wagner operas, *inter alia.* Forty-nine black-and-white plates depict Arthurian sites, heraldic subjects, and works of art, including manuscript miniatures. Short entries on particular authors and titles, arranged alphabetically, are combined with definitive essays on major authors and general topics; e.g., Chrétien de Troyes, Malory, Tennyson, film, book illustration, illuminated manuscripts, and modern scholarship. Cross-referencing and a list of entries arranged by category facilitate the location of particular items. The editors have limited bibliographical references to those works which are most reliable and accessible.

If one is not pursuing a specific piece of information — dates, authorial canon, generic details, plot résumés — one can derive edification and delight from opening the volume at random and reading about Canonbie Dick, a horse-dealer who discovered King Arthur asleep inside the Eildon Hills; Alan Jay Lerner's Camelot which was absorbed into the Kennedy myth; or Martyn Skinner's expectation that Arthur will return in 1990 to save Europe from a Marxist technocracy. What impresses one most is not just the matter of Britain's longevity but its remarkable adaptability. Like the Holy Grail, it has provided each feaster with whatever is most desired — for medieval audiences, images of romantic love and chivalric virtue as well as an allegory of the Christian life; for the Tudors, a heroic genealogy; for the Victorians, political, social, and moral ideals appropriate to an industrial society; for contemporary readers, an escape from the selfish materialism of a technological world.

The *Encyclopedia* is predominantly a work of American scholarship; of ninety-four contributors, sixty-four, including the editor and two associate editors, are attached to academic institutions in the United States. There is a surprising failure to use scholars in Britain (six contributors only), Germany (one contributor), and France (no contributors), though the branches in these countries along with the North American branch are the four pillars of the International Arthurian Society over which Norris Lacy currently presides. One would like to have seen among the contributors such distinguished medievalists as Derek Brewer, Rachel Bromwich, Renée Curtis, Pierre le Gentil, Alexandre Micha, and Walter Haug. As a representation of the best international scholarship, this volume does not equal *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History,* ed. R. S. Loomis (1959). Because of associate editor Geoffrey Ashe's fixation on early British history, pseudo-history, and

folklore, Middle English Literature is given short shrift in comparison with such topics as Cadbury-Camelot, Camlann, and cave legends, and even the great Chaucer being dispatched in fewer words than are devoted to an early British historian, Gildas, chiefly noted in Arthurian circles for his failure to mention Arthur. Insufficient attention is paid to changes in characterization that resulted when Elaine, Gawain, Tristan, the Fair Unknown, Lancelot, *et al.* made the transition from Old French to Middle English romance. It is to be hoped that this imbalance will be remedied in the second edition, which is already in preparation.

The commonly held view of the "historical" Arthur is derived from Welsh materials including the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* where he is described as a *dux bellorum* (a battle leader, not a king) who won twelve great battles against the invading Saxons. The Arthur of pseudo-history and romance, a great king and continental conqueror who presided over a sophisticated court, was created by Geoffrey of Monmouth in *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1135), a work written to glorify Henry I's Anglo-Norman court and to provide England with a hero to rival Charlemagne. Though there is a strong probability of Arthur's existence in the fifth or sixth century, no irrefutable evidence has so far been found. The Arthur "discovered" by Geoffrey Ashe (the identification was originally made in 1799 by Sharon Turner) was a fifth-century British king called Riothamus whose historicity is attested by two reputable authorities. In his *History of the Goths* (ca. 550) Jordanes recorded that King Riotimus with twelve thousand men came from Britain to Gaul in order to assist the Roman emperor Anthemius against the Visigoths. In 469 a Romanized Gaul, Sidonius Apollinaris, wrote a letter to the king, using the Latin form of his name, Riothamus. Geoffrey of Monmouth's failure to mention him, says Ashe, is explained by the fact that the twelfth-century historian turned Riothamus into Arthur. *The Discovery of King Arthur* is a typically Galfridian opus. Like his medieval predecessor, Ashe takes as his province early British history and also like his predecessor (whose *Historia* placed on a wizard's breast summoned up a covey of demons) he shores up fact with myth, rumour, and hypothesis. There is fulsome discussion of Geoffrey and his sources, material more concisely available in E. K. Chambers's *Arthur of Britain* (1927), which has the virtue of including the relevant Latin texts. Ashe also tosses into the stew pot saints, bards, and heroes; Arthurian romance in the High Middle Ages; archaeology; and some modern literature.

This is the kind of book which with its lack of documentation, its "might haves" and "could haves," its half truths, "very oblique" evidences, deliberate avoidance of specificity, and indiscriminate mingling of fact and fiction infuriates the scholar. But the dream-weaving, the variety of possibilities, and the attempt at giving a Dark Age character "a local habitation and a name" are exactly what appeal to the popular imagination. Having written about early Britain for more than twenty-five years, Ashe is a man whose time has come, bringing him Visiting Professorships at American universities and guide duties on such tours as "Magical Britain, a journey through the myths of time." His latest book, already available in paperback, is undoubtedly destined to be a best seller.

What, you may ask, has Arthur to do with Canadian Literature? For more than a century there has been a thin but steady stream of Arthuriana in this country. The legends were an aspect of Victorian medievalism that overflowed into the colonies. Neo-Gothic architecture is still to be seen; cf. the Parliament Buildings in

Ottawa, St. James Church in Toronto, and railway hotels from coast to coast, at least one of which has Arthurian murals. Canadian artists like Homer Watson (1855-1936), who painted "The Death of Elaine," were affected by Pre-Raphaelite romanticism. Galahad in Canada, as in Britain, inspired commemorative monuments. Despite John D'Arcy Badger's pretentious title for his sonnet sequence, *The Arthuriad* (1972), we have produced no great Arthurian literature. But Matt Cohen's satirical "Too Bad, Galahad" and T. G. Roberts's cynical Dinadan (*Blue Book Magazine*, 1947-52) have entertained us, and Frank Davey in *The King of Swords* (1972), taking a leaf from Mark Twain's book, has used Arthurian myth to criticize modern times.

Arthurian influences have come by indirection, as well, through school texts and other childhood reading, one suspects. Book V of the *New Canadian Readers*, published in Toronto in 1901, contained Sir Thomas Malory's "The Death of Arthur," Alfred Tennyson's "The Passing of Arthur," and Aubrey de Vere's "The Tomb of Arthur." Inspired by their literature class, L. M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables and her schoolgirl friends re-enact the Lady of Shalott's last voyage, though the leaky boat sinks ingloriously under the heroine. Behind such heroes as Ralph Connor's "Sky Pilot" and Robert Stead's Cal Beach, with their idealism, courage, and fearless pursuit of wilderness quests must lie the Galahad and Launcelot of Sir James Knowles's *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* (1862), Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur* (1880), and other juvenile adaptations which presented, in the words of one editor, "the highest type of manhood, the Christian gentleman." Even so recent a novel as Robertson Davies's *What's Bred in the Bone* (1985) assumes the reader's ability to appreciate Francis Cornish's ironic association with the Tristan myth. Davies also alludes to the short-lived Oxford Union Murals which D. G. Rossetti and Pre-Raphaelite friends painted in 1857, though he seems to have confused their context — secular scenes derived from Malory — with that of E. A. Abbey's Boston Public Library murals which depicted the Quest of the Holy Grail. As these examples show, the Arthurian myth is a persistent part of western culture which we Canadians share.

In scholarship Canadians are second only to Americans as contributors to *The Arthurian Encyclopedia*, fifteen in number including Raymond Thompson, the highly competent editor of the post-medieval entries. For a final connection Geoffrey Ashe and this reviewer were classmates in the English Honours seminars at U.B.C. over which our Merlin, the great Dr. G. G. Sedgewick, presided. He would have approved of the *Encyclopedia*'s grand eclecticism, which satisfies both scholarly and popular interests.

MURIEL WHITAKER

STORY & BOOK

VIRGIL BURNETT, *Farewell Tour*. Porcupine's Quill, $7.95.

TERENCE M. GREEN, *The Woman Who Is The Midnight Wind*. Pottersfield Press, $9.95.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF parts to whole is perennially problematic when the time comes for a number of short stories to be grouped together as a short book. Is coherence possible, desired, or even expected? Is the book to get its title from the first, the last, the longest, or the best story? Is the safest bet to title the collection independently of any of its component parts, thereby ensuring that non-eponymous runners-up do not get unceremoniously bundled into anonymous obscurity under the formula, tacit or pro-

claimed, "and Other Stories"? Is the whole decision inevitably arbitrary?

In the case of Virgil Burnett's collection, the decision was relatively happy since "Farewell Tour," the volume's last story, is a strong one and its elegiac title sorts well with both the story's terminal prominence and the surrealistic melancholia and threat that suffuse the whole book. The seven stories have been arranged with an eye to their cumulative strength, beginning with the least distinguished and advancing to the most striking. This principle has its dangers, given that among readers only reviewers are captive. Under no compulsion, a reader who has trudged through the ponderous inconsequence of "Travelling to Forget," "La Nottambula," and "A Masked Ball" might well not bother to persevere as far as "Fallowfields," "Canicule," "One More Gondola," and "Farewell Tour" itself. This would be a shame because these four stories are original in situation and assured in atmospheric control, displaying in their different ways a luring grotesquerie that is both haunting and poignant. While all seven stories deal with fractured or threatened relationships, the last four combine emotional conventionality with situational novelty in very beguiling ways, and against a variety of geographical and temporal backgrounds. If location seems at times gratuitous — like quickly painted and easily changed flats designed to suggest the confident cosmopolitanism of an author who "lives in Southern Ontario, but travels frequently" (are such pointless blurbs proofs of regional respectability or merely sly preening?) — it is not obtrusively so. The collection is packaged beneath an exceptionally beautiful cover, albeit one that seems to have little to do with what lies within.

Both package and title serve Terence Green's collection less well. "The Woman Who Is The Midnight Wind" is not a particularly noteworthy story and its hollowly evocative title has provoked an even more pretentious cover illustration that features an intergalactic hippie of indeterminate age standing in broody isolation on a polystyrene moonscape, a kind of 1960's kitsch unsuited to either the story in question or the book as a whole. This is an unfortunate marketing strategy because the stories include some ingenious and intelligent fantasies that justify Green's claim to be, as his publishers declare, "one of Canada's most accomplished writers of science fiction." It should logically be difficult to do anything very fresh with time travel, doppelgängers, or humanoid computers, but Green does, working with situations in which emotions engage with the substitutes that science has created for the human exchanges it has helped to destroy. Whether those exchanges are between man and woman, parent and child, siblings, or teacher and taught, the stories have a wit and sympathy that push through the dutifully deployed paraphernalia of the genre. They are not long enough to develop character with particular subtlety, but it is to Green's credit that the human is not flattened beneath facile futuristic playfulness. It is both the strength and limitation of much science fiction to be clever, which perhaps accounts for its difficulty in being serious. Green's stock in trade may be infallible lie-detectors, computers like Susie Q^2 with limitless powers and coy acronyms, or strippers who between the bumping and grinding educate their audience in temporal relativity and existential choice. But his ultimate subjects are the imponderables of human morality, which makes these stories more ambitious than they initially appear.

The question of genre relates to the conceptual uncertainty that seems so often to hang over short story collections, and which neither of these two volumes, for all the strengths of some of their component parts, entirely escapes. Given the impor-

tance of the short story to the present generation of Canadian writing, it would be logical for Canadian criticism to take something of a lead in the theory of short narrative, and study of the relationship between structural form and marketing practice might well be both illuminating and salutary. Surely we do not have to assume that built into the genre is its own marginality, manifest every time shape has to be imposed on discrete parts by main editorial force, of which arbitrary titles and slick packaging are aspects. In short, what, other than physical format, makes a collection of short stories a book, and what is one suggesting about the genre if the answer to that question is "nothing"?

KEITH WILSON

*** LAURIER LAPIERRE, ed., *If You Love This Country: Facts and Feelings on Free Trade.* McClelland & Stewart, $5.95. This paperback anthology should be required reading. Passionately, articulately — and comically (editorial cartoonists have a shrewd eye for political pettifoggery) — the (c. 50) writers and artists assembled here (Atwood to John Ralston Saul) explain why the "free trade agreement" makes no cultural sense. They also probe the political ramifications of a bad deal.

W.N.

AGAINST THE DYING OF THE LIGHT

Christopher Wiseman

(for Stephen)

One year old, my son was terrified
Of the moon. Nothing else worried him,
And he was famous in the neighbourhood
For never crying however hard he fell.
Scoldings produced nothing but a pout.
But one glimpse of the moon, crescent, full,
In between, and he was lost, racing
For the door, for shelter, for arms, for dark drapes,
Screaming "oom, oom" and pointing to the sky
As if he told of some portent past belief.

Today he heals, with knowledge, with no fear
At all of disease, of gross deformity,
Living strongly, steadily, under the moon's
Long pulling, busy, reassuring others.
But I nurse a secret hope that down inside him
Is left some of the old madness, some fear
Of the great sailing thing he once submitted to,
Which will not let him escape the wheeling terrors,
But allow him to see more deeply, be more soft,
Reflective, transformed by giant light.

WOODCOCK'S NORTHERN SPRING

Northern Spring is the third of George Woodcock's volumes of selected criticism, following *Odysseus Ever Returning* (1970) and *The World of Canadian Writing* (1980). Woodcock refers to both of these earlier selections in his opening paragraph, thereby proclaiming the essential unity of the volumes. In introducing, also in 1980, the anthology of Woodcock's prose and verse, *A George Woodcock Reader*, editor Doug Fetherling wrote of the "unity and singlemindedness" of Woodcock's work. And he explained: "The comomn thread, simply, has been the way man-made institutions pose a threat to human dignity and freedom." Of course the institutions are not so visible in Woodcock's literary criticism, but the humanist concern for self-realization and the writer's potential freedom from convention and cliché in a mature literature is omnipresent. The unity of Woodcock's outlook is unquestioned, though these selections evidently were not planned as a series. The volume titles sound *ad hoc* for these occasional pieces, review articles, introductions, even with later patching to give coherence to the individual volumes and the trilogy.

The title of the first volume, *Odysseus Ever Returning*, set up a mythical framework with potential for continued application. It was not, however, generally applicable to the contents, but only to the three essays on MacLennan (to whom the Odysseus-term was originally attached), and to Irving Layton, and Leonard Cohen. Similarly, the second title, *The World of Canadian Writing*, suggested an environment far more complete and self-sufficient than the individual essays, and Woodcock's regionalist views, indicate. Now *Northern Spring*, with its sub-title echoing VanWyck Brooks's *Flowering of New England*, proclaims rather quietly that CanLit has arrived, and no longer needs to pretend anything.

The biological metaphor of maturation dominates the opening essay — another occasional piece slightly modified to introduce the book — along with the concept of "variegation": "It is with this movement of maturing and variegation, together with the related phenomenon of regionalism, that *Northern Spring* is largely concerned. . . ." Not that one quarrels with the title itself: a northern spring comes late, but after a long spell of false hopes betrayed it bursts out into sudden blaze, in this case the "explosion" of Canadian writing in the 1970's. But the title may have other applications as well, including a renewed spring for the ever-blooming author-critic. Woodcock points out, too, in all three volumes, the role his *Canadian Literature* played as virtually the only critical magazine devoted to CanLit during much of the 1960's. He sees these essays, especially those in the first two volumes, as the contemporary evidence for that literary awakening, both the evidence and, modestly, in part the cause. In his reminiscent articles he lets us understand that his own domestic return and adaptation — chilly days followed by the warmth of success and recognition — paralleled the renewed literary spring and the varied, multiple publications of the 1960's and 1970's. "The experience of being born again," he reminds us in the second essay,

> is not restricted to pentecostal religion; it can be the experience of any person who at a critical point in his or her life finds that a new setting, with its own geographical shape and historic resonances, offers a home to the emotions he needs to express.

There is nothing surprising, either, in Woodcock's use of the term "variegation." It goes together with his consistently idiosyncratic approach not only to literature but to the social and cultural scene. He does not let us forget his early interest in anarchism; frequently he extols individualism against social pressures to conform; for the same reason he rails against the tendency for Canadian writers to be too closely associated with the universities.

Part of this non-conformist, anti-academic attitude relates to Woodcock's sense of the importance traditionally in Western European literature of the literary milieux, the writers' coteries, the lively critical debates carried on by the writers themselves and centred on the little mags, often edited by those same writers, as Woodcock himself was a writer-editor in London. He attributes the strength of English and French letters to these, and clearly it was with these in mind, recalling his own past, that he founded *Canadian Literature* at the University of British Columbia in 1959 and became, along with Bob Weaver in Toronto, and a very few others, the voice of both criticism and encouragement for the young writers and critics of the 1960's. How much was cause, how much effect, we cannot say, but *Canadian Literature* and George Woodcock and Canadian writing flourished together, as Woodcock has every right to remind us.

Odysseus Ever Returning reported that Canadian writing had "passed beyond the Lost World phase," that is, was turning to its own time and place and character for its materials, its attitudes, and its inspiration, and hence of course the relevance of the Odyssean myth. It was the most current of the three volumes, in the sense that eight of its ten author-subjects were still living. The two exceptions, Wyndham Lewis and Malcolm Lowry, had both (like Woodcock) been raised and educated in Britain, and so could be seen as applying the distanced, objective critical eye to the Canadian scene. Like Smith in his *Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), to which he refers, Woodcock also wrestles with the native/cosmopolitan paradox: what is being celebrated is the liberation from external cultural domination especially by England and the U.S., but liberation can not come without the higher standards and contemporaneity and sophistication that can be learned only from those external models. Himself a cosmopolite who has written on and in so many countries and cultures, Woodcock encourages simultaneously both internationalism and self-realization — the two not contradictory but mutually supportive. The Canadian authors he prefers are generally those who have drawn on both native and cosmopolitan traditions. So Callaghan, Lowry, Birney, and Ethel Wilson appear in both the first and second volumes, and MacLennan in the first and third.

Callaghan is rather a special case: he rates three essays, but clearly Woodcock's favourite Callaghan book is *That Summer in Paris*, Callaghan's first international, and only non-fiction, book. Woodcock points out, as others have done, that Callaghan's theory and practice were often at odds; the professed cool realist was most commonly a committed writer of moral parables. More congenial to Woodcock is Ethel Wilson, who like him came late to Canada; she is the only author to be favoured with essays in all three volumes.

To some extent this is a regional bias, and understandably so, as Woodcock stresses regionalism. It is part of his anti-centralism, his appreciation of eccentricity, his anti-institutionalism, anti-conventionalism, his sympathy for intellectual anarchism, that is, his emphasis on self-development and individuality. Woodcock is erudite, astonishingly well read, but again in a somewhat offbeat way, as befits the self-educated man — he says as

much in praise of Al Purdy. We may even come to see Woodcock's world of Canadian writing as the whole world, but the world seen regionally, like Canada, its regions consisting of creative centres of authors, editors, and critics, international in outlook and intellect but steeped in the particular landscape to which their emotions and imaginations respond.

One would suppose, in the light of his individualism, that some aspects of post-modernism would appeal to Woodcock, because of its concern to let the text find its narrative voices and the reader enter into his/her own relation to them. And he does give us instances, as in the article on Metcalf, of post-modern writing and how he deals with it, carefully setting out first, in the Woodcock way, the terms associated with metafiction, because this man of letters is always instructing, however gently, always enlightening his readers as part of his critical function. Woodcock is wide-ranging, eclectic, allusive, and clearly at ease with contemporary as with earlier writing. But the other side of this autodidact is his formalism; he is so often the generic critic, hence rather benevolent towards even Northrop Frye (whom he sees as the one major international theorist among Canadian academics, even though Woodcock professes not to agree with him). The responsible critic brings to his work, in Woodcock's view and practice, a mind informed by literature and criticism and broadened by knowledge of his own and other cultures, and he has a clear set of standards thus obtained, to be applied to the poem or novel at hand. Though more often generous, Woodcock can be harsh with those who don't — perhaps those who could but don't — have and maintain the standard. What is interesting is this combination of the independent individual with international criteria, the former reinforcing his personality, the latter his sometimes authoritarian voice.

Whether contemporary or traditional, Woodcock remains the humanist, and sometimes his humane values are at odds with his critical judgement. In these cases his approval of self-sacrifice and self-knowledge is paramount. For instance, in those three essays he devotes to Callaghan he identifies him as a moralist, deploring such later works as *A Passion in Rome* and *A Fine and Private Place* in which Callaghan tries to write full-scale novels, and praising the "laconic, moralist parables" *Such Is My Beloved*, *More Joy in heaven* and — incongruously — *They Shall Inherit the Earth*. I recall that Frank Watt also praised *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, and probably for the same reason, that it was set in a recognizable Toronto, in the Depression days — thus far realistic — and represented a young man coming through suffering to self-knowledge — and so both moral and positive. Who can knock the quest for self-knowledge? But *They Shall Inherit the Earth* is not a spare, disciplined parable, it is a long, preachy, ponderous, dull, didactic novel, and to that extent the essay is inconsistent.

Given that some of the pieces in *Northern Spring* are reviews, some essays, some originally were talks, some introductions to books, there is inevitably a range of tone and intent, but in general they are of two kinds: the assessments of individual authors or works, or else surveys putting these into historical, social, or national contexts. The Introduction, we are told, was a pamphlet commissioned by the Canadian embassy in Washington, and the second piece, "The Meeting of Time and Place," was a lecture for the NeWest institute of Western Canadian Studies. To some extent, therefore, their content and tone were predetermined. Whereas in the first two volumes most of the individual assessments were review articles or were suggested by new publications, in this latest volume more historical subjects are treated — "Nineteenth-Century Cana-

dian Narrative Poets," "Charles Heavysege and the Canadian Tradition," a piece on Sara Jeanette Duncan, and "Dorothy Livesay and the 1930s." The aim apparently was to round out a sort of Woodcock Literary History of Canada, or to rival the many briefer "surveys" that have appeared in recent years. (The best of these perhaps has been the one by W. J. Keith — who also was raised in Britain and like Woodcock assumes formal criteria and critical standards.) To this reader, Woodcock's essays on individual writers, though always well done, vary in intensity. All are thoughtful, all are informative, but inevitably some are more exciting than others. But where Woodcock's enthusiasms inspire his writing, the results can be very good indeed. On Margaret Laurence, Marian Engel, and Timothy Findley he reveals his sympathy for the self-fulfilled and the imaginative, for the unusual experience, even for fantasy. He even likes John Metcalf's *General Ludd.* But then one is puzzled by some exceptions. Wouldn't Ondaatje be an obvious Woodcock subject? And why is Woodcock less impressive on Alice Munro? Perhaps in her case it is because his predilection is not primarily for realism, even when it is so densely suggestive as hers. In general, he responds well to female writers and poets — this volume is dedicated to P. K. Page — and the essays on Phyllis Webb, Margaret Atwood, and Dorothy Livesay are all impressive.

The historical essays are less so. Why an essay now on Heavysege? The answer, I suppose, is that Heavysege is another expatriate of English background, adapting to Canada. Yet the same was true of Isabella Valancy Crawford, who adapted her art if not herself far more effectively than the pseudo-Shakespearian Heavysege, and Crawford gets only a grudging nod.

If I may have personal favourites among these essays, they are those on Laurence's travel writings and on Timothy Findley. It is partly that Woodcock is informative: he always gives us the essential facts just as he makes clear his critical position. So we follow Laurence through her experiences in Somaliland and Ghana, learn the sequence of her African writings, and then the relation between the experience and the art, before we get the assessment of the art itself. And Woodcock selects examples unerringly, both from such superb stories as "Godwin's Master" and from Laurence's journals — for instance, the encounter with the Somali mother in the desert, who licks the moisture from her hand. As we learn of Africa from his comments on Laurence, so, with Findley, Woodcock is prepared to instruct us in first-century Gnosticism and to relate to it the role of Lucie in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*:

> Here, with the appearance of Lucifer in *Not Wanted on the Voyage,* we come to another Gnostic idea, that of the eternal messenger, the emissary from the world of light who, as Jonas remarks, "outwits the archons, awakens the spirit from its earthly slumbers, and imparts to it the saving knowledge from within." Linked with the idea of the eternal messenger is the other widespread Gnostic legend in which, on the morrow of creation, the Demiurge exults like Yahweh with the Old Testament proclamation, "I am God and there is none other than I," and a voice echoes from on high, "Thou art mistaken! Above thee is First Man."

Woodcock writes on Findley with a certain glee, I think; he rather enjoys the iconoclasm of *Not Wanted on the Voyage,* as well as the fantasy. And of course he celebrates humanity, including our little segment emerging from our historical ark. As Woodcock presents it, colony evolves into nation, nation slowly establishes its own culture, writers begin to use their own environment and attitudes in their art. As cultural autonomy — as far as there can be any — emerges, the arts become self-generating and mutually supporting. Now, in the mature culture, we

are seeing the poets and novelists "of high, idiosyncratic talent," and the criticism to support and challenge them. So the idiosyncratic Findley, and so the critic Woodcock. That "idiosyncratic" is almost an article of faith, along with "the rejection of all orthodoxies of style and theme."

It is not accidental that this volume ends with an essay on the individualist poet Patrick Lane, a West Coast writer who emerged as part of the explosion of English-Canadian literature in the 1960's and 1970's. Lane had little formal education, and made that a strength, like Woodcock and some of those writers he admires:

> P. K. Page and Al Purdy, Raymond Souster and Gwen MacEwen, John Newlove and Milton Acorn, Alden Nowlan and Patrick Lane . . . ; they form a notable group among [then] living Canadian poets, and their presence shows that formal scholarship and poetic inspiration are unrelated factors. It also demonstrates how absurd are the pretensions of those who run so-called creative writing schools within the universities and presumptuously claim they can fashion writers.

Lane was a "genuine proletarian." "Work, a roving life and an observant eye gave him the basic material for his poetry, and he became one of those recent western poets who developed a strong consciousness of place. . . ."

Self-taught, unconventional, regional, contemporary — these are Woodcock virtues, and make Lane an appropriate figure to end the volume with. But this is not quite the end, because the essential Woodcock value must be stressed: in Fetherling's words, "that freewheeling humanism [that] is the best defence of personal liberty and also its main reward." In all Woodcock's writings one hears that humane voice, because for him humanism, however out of fashion nowadays, includes independence and individuality, and freedom from so many kinds of restrictions and institutions. He ends the Lane essay, and the book, with this lesson:

> The human condition, Lane is suggesting in these poems, modifies and largely frustrates all political hopes. The "China Poems" accept no ideology; they do accept friendship, human warmth, and . . . tenderness. . . .

D. O. SPETTIGUE

GEORGE RYGA: A TRIBUTE

IN OCTOBER 1986 George Ryga remarked in *The Globe and Mail,* "I have been mythologized by the media and I have had more than my share of it." Ryga was far too cantankerous and tough a writer to suffer mythologizing gladly, least of all the kind that characterizes our most sentimental literary form: the eulogistic tribute. Not that he was adverse to sentiment; most of his major works, in fact, are coloured by an intensely felt, evocative *feeling* — usually, outrage over the social inequalities endemic to Western capitalism. A tribute to George Ryga, then, bereft of mythologizing (but not "sentiment") is imperative. With his death in November 1987 Canadian writing lost one of its most significant, most powerful, and least comfortable, voices.

The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, of course, is Ryga's foremost legacy. By now it is common knowledge that it, along with Reaney's *Colours in the Dark,* marked a certain coming-of-age in Canadian theatre. A centennial "celebration" of the most acidic kind, it has been staged to international acclaim and revulsion — a paradox which attests to the seminal importance of Ryga's techniques and concerns. Like most of his works, *Rita Joe* begins with a local parable which then develops into an international political allegory. Going beyond the apparent social prob-

lems of a specific minority, the play crystallizes Ryga's recurrent obsessions with history and the ideological molding of it to maintain official power.

The play received more than its share of critical derision: the refrain of "propagandistic," "preachy," "clumsy," even "prehistoric," runs through most academic reviews. Admittedly many of the criticisms were justified, for Ryga had considerable difficulty harnessing his political convictions within the bounds of literary restraint. Ultimately, though, academic squabbling had less to do with literary etiquette and more with conservative ideology. The criticism now gathers dust in libraries; *Rita Joe* is still produced and adapted in fringe theatres around the world. Ryga immensely enjoyed this inversion of literary power: the dunning of what he typically described as "the glib shit machine / Of academic mediocrity."

Throughout his various careers as playwright, novelist, poet, short story writer, and scriptwriter, Ryga wrote from within a proletarian, anarchic, and politically coherent framework. His writing exists within the subversive theatrical traditions of Brecht, Weiss, and more recently Caryl Churchill and Dario Fo (with whom he shared the honour of being refused entry to the United States as an undesirable alien). And "alien" he most certainly was both at home and abroad. Not simply because of his immigrant family, his language, or his literary styles, but because he spoke of things which the authorities (and majority of the establishment) wished to remain silent.

Ryga never hesitated to point the finger, to rage bluntly that poverty, racism, class antagonism, and oppression exist (even in Canada!). Much more important was his attempt to expose the fact that our society itself is predicated upon (and needful of) strategies of control, exploitation, and waste. "Power-Knowledge" — and the official abuse of it — is the theme that permeates and sustains works as formally diverse and as distant in time as *Ballad of a Stone Picker*, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, and *Shadow of the Vulture*.

At one point in *Rita Joe* Jaimie Paul complains that nobody, "no priest nor government... know[s] what it's like to want an' not have . . . to stand in line an' nobody sees you!" On one hand the lament sums up the direction which George Ryga's writing has consistently taken: to speak for those who can't speak for themselves; to unwrite the blanketing histories of officially sanctioned narratives. And in this sense, it underlines Ryga's position as one of the foremost practitioners of a truly post-colonial, revolutionary writing. More poignantly, it stands as a self-reflective meditation on Ryga's present position in both Canadian theatrical circles and critical discourse; and in *this* sense, it is an indictment which demands redress. To borrow from what George Bowering once said of Margaret Atwood, George Ryga's plays, novels, poems, and scripts — his works as a whole — "does something that few [books] do nowadays. It hurts."

GARY BOIRE

NOOTKA RAG: FUNERAL MUSIC FOR GEORGE CLUTESI, 1905-1988

GEORGE CLUTESI, WHO died in February 1988 in Victoria, B.C., was a minor author and a minor artist, in both depth and range, but he lived and worked through some of the bleakest days in the history of his people, and the historians of Canadian literature, even perhaps of Canadian painting, will in due time find it necessary to remember him. He was a Tseshaht —

a member, that is, of the Alberni Inlet branch of the Vancouver Island people who, after 200 years, still resent James Cook's linguistic gaffe in choosing to call them the Nootka. In the tradition of his people, Clutesi trained himself as an orator from an early age, but his lifelong ambition was to make his way as a painter. He turned to writing only in his sixties and published in quick succession two books: a collection of homiletic tales, *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* (1967) — which Sheila Egoff correctly described as "often closer to Aesop" than to the condensed, elliptical tonalities of recorded West Coast oral literature — and a more ambitious historical fable called *Potlatch* (1969).

Often when I think of him I think also of another man, who lived his briefer and earlier life in another cultural ruin some distance away. He was a black man, not an Indian, and his name was Scott Joplin.

The differences are obvious and many. Joplin was an itinerant pianist, born of freed slaves on the Texas/Arkansas border in 1868. He died of syphilis and despair in a New York mental institution in 1917. George Clutesi was a stay-at-home moralist, born in his ancestral village in 1905, physically whole and spiritually vigorous to the last. Joplin's rags, songs, and waltzes brought him sufficient fame and income that, from his early thirties, he could devote himself to composition, teaching, and performing for more-or-less serious audiences, while Clutesi, to the end of his life, earned little besides gratuitous praise and abuse for his painting and writing. He fished, kept a store, worked on a pile-driving crew, acted in the film of Margaret Craven's *I Heard the Owl Call my Name* and did other tasks for money. In his later life a public school — where he could not teach, notwithstanding his learning and his pedagogical gifts, because he lacked a degree and certificate — employed him from time to time as a tribal dance coach and regularly as a maintenance man.

There are other differences too. Scott Joplin's culture had been kidnapped, Clutesi's evicted. By the time of Joplin's birth, the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 had been enforced, and the slow reconstitution of black culture in the southern U.S.A. had formally begun. The nadir of aboriginal culture in Western Canada is a little more difficult to date, since the abortive Riel Rebellion is as near as it reached towards civil war, but I think it is fair to put it about a full century later. The law disallowing native ceremonial life was quietly allowed to lapse only in 1951, when almost all who remembered the ceremonies were gone, and aboriginal suffrage in Canadian federal elections was not declared until 1960. It was important to George Clutesi to believe that this nadir had been reached, and a reawakening begun, in his own lifetime, and he gave to the dream of that slow process all the thought and energy he had.

For freed blacks as for uprooted Indians, white North American society found few uses. They could do menial labour, of course, or if they were eager enough to please, because they were different, they could entertain. Little by little, the reigning culture came to admit that blacks and Indians, like women, while generally unwelcome in any truly responsible roles, because they persist in being different, might do a little more than entertain; they might enrich: that is, they might serve as artists as well. Clutesi, like Joplin, always regarded himself with quiet determination as an artist, not an entertainer, and in his chosen fields he worked diligently to master the white man's most prestigious methods and means. He hated playing the dumb Indian as deeply as Joplin hated playing the ignorant black, though both knew well what protection the mask of stupidity gave.

Clutesi, like Joplin, made it his business to enshrine in the forms of the conquering culture some of the content of his own. It was African cross-rhythms, in Joplin's case, seeded into European dance forms and marches to make ragtime. In Clutesi's, it was Wakashan ceremonial theatre and mythology imported into watercolour, oils, and English literary fable. In the work of both men, a contest ensued to see just how much conquering the indigenous elements could stand. Clutesi's frontier colonial schooling, like Joplin's, led him to uncritical admiration for hand-me-down European standards, forms, and techniques, and the consequences in both cases were heartbreaking. Joplin laboured for years over his disastrous last work, the opera *Treemonisha*, which both publishers and producers steadfastly refused, and whose failure before a Harlem audience in 1915 ended his sagging career. Clutesi, whose readership was more dispersed and less demanding, suffered no such sudden humiliation, but his wooden and uneven second book — which his literary colleagues, if only he had had some, might easily have convinced him to repair — was nevertheless his last.

George Clutesi's achievements, both as writer and as visual artist, are easy to belittle now. In his constant concern to teach what he could to a suspicious and ill-educated audience of whites and of younger Indians, he pulled many punches. Readers trained on modernist literature, who expect at all costs the precise word and the economical phrase, find his prose intolerably spongy. Spooked by the limitations of his audience, he allowed native terms into his text only when they seemed picturesque, yet he would willingly break stage to insert an explanatory reference. (So, for instance, he avoids giving the Nootka name for that ancient West Coast delicacy *hawaqsti*, the inner meat of the seaslug, yet in the midst of an otherwise lyrical bit of historical fiction he will describe is as "a soft white substance that looked not unlike overcooked rice and tasted somewhat like macaroni.") His monosyllabic romanizations of Wakashan words, when they occur, now call up all the wrong associations, savouring as they do more of Longfellow than of Boas or Sapir. And the prosody of his songs and metrical speeches is closer to the shuffle and plod of Edgar Lee Masters than to the agglutinative purl of the underlying Nootkan originals, as Clutesi well knew.

By training and by instinct, he was less a poet or mythographer than an orator — a high calling in his own ancestral culture, and in nineteenth-century white culture as well. In this century, as we have chosen collectively to speak less and less and to write more and more, Clutesi's gifts, such as they were, have fallen deeply out of fashion. In an earlier generation, Lawren Harris and Emily Carr (who when she died left Clutesi her brushes) had high praise for his painting. But when Ralph Maud came to assess his books a few years ago, he could only remark on the "paradox that Clutesi offers himself as a doorway into the Native experience and then blocks our entry with works of art." Either more art or less, it seems to me, might have led to a solution, which is not to say that the two roads are the same. In any case, the paradox Maud saw is real enough, and it is — to return to Joplin — not unlike the paradox that confronts a listener who comes upon ragtime, either from the European classical tradition or from the improvisatory and microtonal world of the blues.

Out of the art of Scott Joplin and many others arose a whole new musical language, known as jazz, in which musicians of many different characters and races have found a means to speak, notwithstanding that those who spoke it first were black Americans. It is, of course, my hope and suspicion that we might temporarily find ourselves, in Canada and elsewhere,

with a literary language in some respects analogous to jazz: the fruit of another cultural collision, whose roots will be essentially aboriginal. How much of that literature will be written by Native Canadians, I do not know, though it is compelling to think that some of it must be.

Ragtime is not jazz; it is the hard exoskeleton or cuticle through which and out of which the supple, mothlike body of jazz evolved. George Clutesi's earnest and (as he said himself) romantic prose, full of duplicative adjectives, iterative verbs, and archaic constructions (*'Let us call all the strong and brave men,' the wise men would say. ... He scanned long the sky to the east before he called the villagers and their guests with his penetrating cry in the early morn ...*) is likewise not an instance of the fluent new literature I like to imagine being granted us in this country. But it was a stage along the way — and one from which, for all our engineering skills and learned ethnopoetics, we have not yet really taken wing.

ROBERT BRINGHURST

ON THE VERGE

*** MARGARET R. STOBIE, *The Other Side of Rebellion: The Remarkable Story of Charles Bremner and His Furs.* NeWest, $19.95/$9.95. This is an interesting study of how what looks like the small misadventure of an obscure man can have considerable ripples in history. Charles Bremner, a Scottish mixed blood living on the North Saskatchewan as a farmer and petty trader, was swept into the North West Rebellion as a prisoner of Poundmaker and the rebellious Cree. Afterwards he was falsely accused of being himself a rebel, and a wagonload of furs belonging to him was "confiscated," which meant that they ended up in the possession of General Middleton, the victor of Batoche. Patiently, striving year after year against official indifference and insolence, Bremner finally won compensation for his furs and had the satisfaction of seeing the blustery general resign in disgrace from the command of the Canadian militia. Justice had in a way been done, however tardily. It is a well-told story, the kind out of which a good short novel could be made, and I have found only one small historical flaw that mars the narrative; Dr. Stobie tells us that Gabriel Dumont was born in Edmonton, whereas in fact he was born at Red River.

G.W.

*** PETER C. NEWMAN, *Caesars of the Wilderness.* Penguin, $25.00. With the first two volumes of his account of the Hudson's Bay Company, *Company of Adventurers* and now *Caesars of the Wilderness,* Peter Newman has stirred up once again the flames of the perennial argument in Canada between popular and academic historians. The days when historians could be popular *and* academic, like Donald Creighton and A. R. M. Lower, seem to have ended, and we have the alternatives of professional historians who claim to be objective and generally need translations into functional English, and popular historians whose judgements tend to be subjective and expressionist even if their facts are accurate, yet who are much better reads than the dreary dons. In the case of Newman, popular historians stand up to defend him — Pierre Berton and A. L. Rowse, as do irrelevant popular non-historians like Mordecai Richler and Arthur Hailey (whose approval to many of us would seem the kiss of death); academic historians attack him not so much for inaccuracy as for a sensational presentation of the facts and a reliance on secondary sources, while the women's studies experts arraign him for machismo. From a literary point of view, the criterion is not one of historical attitudes, "scientific" or "subjective"; since almost all the facts offered by Newman will be known to anyone reasonably familiar with Canadian history up to 1870, the test must lie in presentation. And here, compared with a good popular history like Berton's best, *Klondike,* Newman's books seem over-written and fuzzily focused. On the defensive in his second volume, he justifies himself by claiming — with calculated modesty — that "this is a journalist's book." But a journalist presenting history is not writing journalism, which by definition is writing for periodicals linked to the fleeting present ("le jour"). He is trying to write history, to draw the past into a comprehensible order, and in this way he has to be judged. Considered as popular history, I would grade Newman's shaky epic as a goodish B, 75% or thereabouts.

G.W.

LAST PAGE

Timothy Mo's *An Insular Possession* (Lester & Orpen Dennys, $24.95) opens with what seems like a familiar landscape motif: the image of the river, with its hint of the grand flow of (here) Chinese history. But the writer from the start is using romance against romance: the river is sewage; the colonial hierarchy relies on the drug trade; and the newspaper that is the source of resistance to the most crass of profit motives places its faith perhaps naïvely in the power of language. Language is a motif throughout: differences between written and oral forces of speech become marks of power, and when the island of Hong Kong is established as a British (or Economic) zone of influence, language takes several forms. Cynicism abounds. But although — in answer to a protest: "Merely to exist is to be involved in the system others have created to tend your daily needs" — one character observes: "There is a Cape Horn of the mind, too, which is as difficult to double as the real. Monstrous? Yes, I allow that its waves are monstrous," the author is unwilling to let matters stand there. His character Gideon Chase seeks a commonality of being human; if he finds the insularity of body instead, he also realizes that that is not a denial of connection, but a sign of the extent of anyone's glimpse of a moral and mortal world.

Many of the issues raised in this novel recur in numerous other recent books: The interplay between language, race, and culture being foremost among them, particularly as applied in (and to) colonial and post-colonial societies and to marginalized social groups. Henry Louis Gates's *'Race,' Writing, and Difference* (Chicago, $30.00), a collection of essays by various critics, developed from a 1985 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, most obviously addresses such ideas. "Race," writes the editor, is in quotation marks because it isn't a *thing* but rather a *collection of attitudes*, a signifier of differentiation to a western world that equates history with memory. Gates himself, even while challenging academic and European hegemonies, writes (apparently unconsciously) *as an American*, perhaps proving his point; he resists the idea of "Commonwealth," for example, because it's a European political term (and therefore structure) which, he says, encloses him as a black man. Well, there's race again. What the term "Commonwealth" seems really to do is to exclude him as an American, and the idea of changing the terms so that they can be controlled by the American empire, while it is apparently acceptable to Gates, doesn't sound like much of an improvement to me.

There are essays here on various features of the "trope" of "race" — by Bhabha, Derrida, Todorov, and others. Mary Louise Pratt, primarily concerned with Victorian travel literature, argues that so-called "neutral" observation reinforces a susceptibility to "dominion." Gayatri Spivak examines sexual and racial otherness. Edward Said opposes ideology and theocracy, finding the foundations of "Otherness" in a *fiction* of "difference." Abdul JanMohamed uses Lacan as a way of demonstrating the "Manichaeanism" of British imperial policy, a policy founded in a notion of race as a "perceptual category" which, he argues, generates stereotypes rather than observations. This is a stimulating book.

And several literary works — particularly those constructed in terms involving interracial contact — inevitably invite being read within its paradigms. B. Wongar's *Walg* (Macmillan, £9.95), for example, the first of an aboriginal trilogy, combines a girl's initiation rites ("womb" = "tribal country") with an expose of the white man's rape of the land; asserting that continuities are effected by dream, and that only a woman can "make the tribe live again," the novel strives for eloquence but runs the danger of simply exploiting an idea of primitivism. Not so Louis Nowra's *Palu* (Picador, $10.95), cast as an evocative complaint, on the part of an educated New Guinea woman, against her husband's retreat into power and fear; here the political life is contemporary, the allusions to cargo cult more than mere anthropological gloss, the power of belief an ambivalent boon. But Trevor Shearston's *White Lies* (Univ. of Queensland, $15.95), also set in Papua New Guinea, draws more overtly on the familiar dualities: the traditional healer *vs.* the missionary, the "prosaic" geologist *vs.* the "transcendental" storyteller. Beside all such works must be placed Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (Viking-Penguin, $22.95), an autobiographical essay on travel in which the author and a companion traverse Australia ("the whole continent could be read as a musical score": the land "must exist as a concept in the mind, then be sung, to make it happen") in search of the "songlines," the ancient and still functional aboriginal claims on the land. A notebook and a commonplace book, recording Konrad Lorenz and contemporary land rights disputes, the book never pretends to be anything but an outsider's, but it's very effective. It's in the *Motorcycle Maintenance* mould, in search of meaning, in the belief of peace.

A set of South African settings gives a different perspective to the question of race, if only because the politics of power is so much on the surface. Nadine Gordimer's polished style turns a conventional trope into an effective picaresque political protest in *A Sport of Nature* (Penguin, $22.95); in it, a white woman ("problem child" or "innocent," says conventional wisdom) becomes the wife of a black revolutionary, committed to the overthrow of the political system. J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (Stoddart, $16.95) more obviously rewrites literary convention, challenging the "normative" presumptions of received history; here Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe" is reclaimed as a woman's narrative from the hands of that usurper — but pointedly it still leaves race as a marker of other margins. Christopher Hope's *The Hottentot Room* (General, $23.95) is less effective altogether, though its portrait of South African expatriates in London, and of the twin pressures of advertising and political propaganda, prickles with political irony. Zoe Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (Virago, $29.50), a linked set of ten stories, concerns itself relatedly with the politics of home and education; its conclusion declares a different commitment, however — for Wicomb, expatriate status for a black woman finally makes no sense. "Identity" and "elsewhere" do not compute.

Still other books address the politics of critical comparison, whether through individual writers and books, landscape and design, or notions of history and national literature: Peggy Nightingale's *Journey Through Darkness* (Univ. of Queensland, $22.50) favourably describes the writings of Naipaul; Michael Thelwell's *Duties, Pleasures, and Conflicts* (Univ. of Massachusetts, $27.50/$10.95) attacks them; both concern themselves with a "colonial dilemma." Hedwig Bock and Albert Wertheim edit *Essays on Contemporary Post-Colonial Fiction* (Max Huber, n.p.), a series of twenty-two introductory life and works essays on Commonwealth writers (including three Canadians, Laurence, Richler, and Atwood). Peter Wolfe's *Laden Choirs* (Univ. of Kentucky, $25.00) effectively focuses on the style of Patrick White, praising the "art of the copious" that wrenches "the traditional partnership between reader and writer."

John Drew's *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford, $37.50) provides much critical summary in order to demonstrate how, for example, Forster interpreted India through Neoplatonism. Along a different Romantic path, Raymond Lister's *The Paintings of William Blake* (Cambridge, $18.95) assembles a variety of illustrations; of passing interest are the editor's comments on Blake, Frances Brooke, and the salon of Harriet Mathew. Doris Y. Kadish, in *The Literature of Images* (Rutgers, n.p.), attempts more provocatively a semiotic reading of landscape — primarily in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English and French narratives — dismissing *pictorial* representations (with their emphasis on colour and light) in order to seek *relational* readings of space, i.e., those that connect complexly with power, perspective, and politics. As though in some degree in evidence, Jane Clark's retrospective compilation of Sidney Nolan's paintings, *Nolan: Landscape & Legends* (Cambridge, $45.00), takes account of his "non-academic, narrative painting," his "eccentricity of vision," and documents the connections he drew between place and cultural politics. Editors P. R. Eaden and F. H. Mares pursued this theme in *Mapped but Not Known: The Australian Landscape of the Imagination* (Wakefield Press, n.p.), a volume of essays and poems on landscape themes designed as a Festschrift for Brian Elliott; included are some valuable comments on the literary and intellectual ramifications of ideas about *imitation* and *novelty*, with parallels drawn in music and painting. For the Canadian reader, there are also instructive implications to draw about North America. Robert Lawson-Peebles's *Landscape and Written Expression in Revolutionary America* (Cambridge, $39.50) deals relatedly with place and attitude, arguing that revolutionary attitudes to land were part of the American rejection of the European intellectual and emotional resistance to empirical wilderness.

Peter Quartermaine's edited essays on Australian culture, *Diversity Itself* (Univ. of Exeter, £7.95), surveys film and social issues (women's roles, aboriginal status) as well as books; while some comments on curriculum seem curiously old-fashioned, several essays are particularly striking, especially Sneja Gunew's challenge to canonicity, argued through reference to Marx, Freud, iconography, and the idea of discrepancy. *Australian/Canadian Literature in English* (Croom Helm, n.p.), ed. Russell McDougall and Gillian Whitlock, assembles instructive essays on Facey and Grainger, on the politics of Atwood and d'Alpuget, and on other subjects; and Jack Healy writes an important essay on Indian and Aborigine. Especially valuable is a substantial introduction which traces the history of the connections between the two societies, the sociocultural context of the contact, and (within this frame) the implied role

of critic and reader. Helen Daniel's *Liars* (Penguin, A$14.95), constructed as a set of ten *dialogues* (cf. Escher, Godel, Bach), examines the work of eight contemporary Australian novelists (Carey, Bail, Hasluck, Jolley, Murnane, etc.) in a context involving France and South America. As the Whitlock-McDougall book demonstrates, there is another useful arm to this process of comparison; nonetheless, *Liars* is a lively and important book on strategies of fiction *and* criticism.

One of the most important comparative books to be published recently is Alfred W. Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge, $19.95) which argues that European imperialist expression was made possible by "biological" expansion — i.e., the spread of plants, animals, and diseases — and sustained by it. Persuasively written, the book follows expeditions and events from Leif Erickson onwards, demonstrating how European grains, trees, and animals were moved overseas (and rice and spices the other way), also how European weeds became necessary overseas both to guard against erosion (following European devastation of local crops) and to feed exported European animals. The book also shows how European germs became an unintentional but potent part of the cycle of expansion.

This book deals with the politics of choices in empirical spheres. Another importantly looks at the politics of narrative choice, the theory that relates historiography to narrative method. Hayden White's *The Content of the Form* (Johns Hopkins, n.p.) powerfully elucidates the way narrative choices inform the character of historical representation. Eight essays examine such topics as Foucault and questions of power, Jameson and questions of Marxism and utopia and a consequent end to "history," and Ricoeur and the allegories of temporality lodged in the chronicle. Drawing substantially on Benveniste, in an effort to distinguish between separate grammatical features of *discourse* and *narrative,* White argues the case why "neutrality" *is* an illusory position. The desire for narrative in history, he writes — or the desire to read and write history as narrative — constitutes a desire for closure, but closure is retrievable only *in* narrative because in real time it is imaginary; hence historical narrative constitutes an implicitly moralizing posture, no matter what arrangement is made or what conclusion drawn. One is tempted to add that narrative history is, consequently, another "insular possession" — which may, of course, help explain its appeal. But in this context, it would constitute a formal trope in its own right, and be read as closure.

W.N.

Other books received: two works in New Directions' "Revised Modern Classics" series: Kay Boyle's *Life Being the Best and Other Stories* ($18.95/$8.95) and H. E. Bates's *A Party for the Girls* ($19.95/$8.95); the seventh series of the *Paris Review* interviews, *Writers at Work,* ed. George Plimpton (Penguin, $10.95); Abdullah Hussein's *Downfall by Degrees and Other Stories* (Tsar Publications, $11.95); Donald B. Sands's edition *Middle English Verse Romances* (Humanities Press International, $29.95); Robert Atwan and Harvey Wiener's *Enjoying Stories* (Longman, $28.95); and Colette, *Six Novels* (Stoddart, $24.95).

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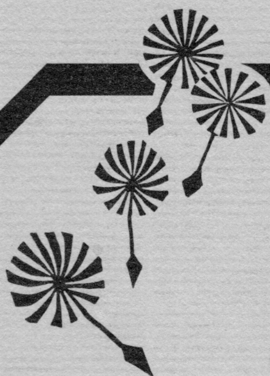

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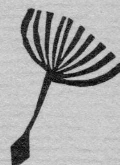

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