

\$20.00 per copy

# CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 122-123

*Autumn-Winter, 1989*



THE LONG POEM/  
REMEMBERING  
by NICHOL

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

NEW BOOKS

**ERNEST BUCKLER REMEMBERED**

Claude Bissell

The story of a warm and lasting friendship between two remarkable men: Ernest Buckler, acclaimed Nova Scotia novelist, and Claude Bissell, then president of the University of Toronto.

'Bissell not only shows us why Ernest Buckler was a great writer, but also reveals him as tough and thin-skinned, cranky and warm, funny and miserable, and all in all, as tortured and lovable a genius as Canadian literature has ever produced.'  
Harry Bruce, author of *Down Home: Notes of a Maritime Son*  
\$24.95

---

**LITERARY HISTORY OF CANADA**

CANADIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

VOLUME IV

W.H. New, General Editor

This new volume extends coverage from 1972 to 1984, referring back also to various figures and genres that appeared in the earlier volumes and substantially adding to our understanding of them. It also departs from the pattern of earlier volumes in a number of features: a chapter devoted solely to short fiction; separate chapters on writing for the media and on translation; extensive coverage of writing in several branches of the social sciences; and recurring themes such as gender, regionalism, and native peoples. In all it reflects the tensions, interests, and intellectual cross-currents of the period.

Cloth \$60.00, paper \$24.95

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

## contents

PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER

# CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTÉRATURE CANADIENNE

NUMBER 122-123,  
AUTUMN-WINTER 1989

A Quarterly of Criticism  
and Review

EDITOR: W. H. New

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:  
L. R. Ricou

ASSISTANT EDITOR:  
Eva-Marie Kröller

BUSINESS MANAGER:  
Beverly Westbrook

PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRIS  
PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Second Class Mail registration  
number 1375

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

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

*Canadian Literature* is indexed in  
*Canadian Periodical Index* and  
*Canadian Magazine Index*. It is  
available on-line in the *Canadian  
Business & Current Affairs Database*,  
and is available in microfilm from  
University Microfilm International,  
300 North Zeeb Road,  
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106

For subscriptions, back issues (as  
available), and annual and cumulative  
indexes, write: Circulation Manager,  
*Canadian Literature*, 2029 West Mall,  
University of British Columbia,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5

SUBSCRIPTION \$25 INDIVIDUAL;  
\$35 INSTITUTION; PLUS \$5 POSTAGE  
OUTSIDE CANADA

ISSN 0008-4360

Editorial: From First to Next 3

### ARTICLES

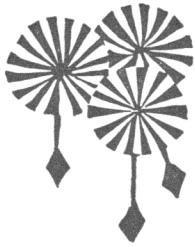
- ANDREW STUBBS  
The Politics of Art: Eli Mandel's "Journals" 10
- MANINA JONES  
"The Collected Works of Billy the Kid":  
Scripting the Docudrama 26
- ANNE ARCHER  
The Story of an Affinity: D. G. Jones, Archibald  
Lampman, and "Kate These Flowers" 42
- PATRICK LANE  
The Unyielding Phrase 57
- E. F. DYCK  
Place in the Poetry of John Newlove 69
- HEINZ TSCHACHLER  
The Cost of Story: Ideology and Ambivalence  
in the Verse Narratives of E. J. Pratt 93
- JOHN WHATLEY  
Readings of Nothing: Robert Bringhurst's  
"Hachadura" 108
- IRENE OORE  
Saint-Denys Garneau: L'itinéraire créateur 125

### POEMS

BY GERRY TURCOTTE (8), MONA ELAINE ADILMAN  
(25), ANNE M. KELLY (38, 123), BRIAN BURKE (41),  
JOHN BARTON (55), ROBERT BEUM (56), PETER  
BALTENSBERGER (65), ANDREW BROOKS (68), LORNA  
CROZIER (92), ALAN R. WILSON (107), ANNE  
MARRIOTT (124)

### BOOKS IN REVIEW

BY DAVID LATHAM (141), ROSS LABRIE (143), SUSAN  
GLICKMAN (148), LEN EARLY (150), AL PURDY (153),  
MARK BENSON (154), KENNETH W. MEADWELL (157),  
JO-ANNE ELDER (159), STEPHEN MORRISSEY (161),  
LAUREL BOONE (163), ELIZABETH R. EPPERLY (165),  
CHRIS ACKERLEY (167), STEFAN HAAG (168), LOLA  
LEMIRE TOSTEVIN (169), JON KERTZER (172),  
LINDA LAMONT-STEWART (174), BARBARA BELYEA  
(175), ROD ANDERSON (178), MARJORIE BODY (179),  
MARILYN BOWERING (181), JOANNE BUCKLEY (182),  
FRED COGSWELL (183), PATRICIA DEMERS (184),  
DAVID DOWLING (185), G. V. DOWNES (187), GILBERT  
DROLET (188), GRAHAM FORST (189), LOUISE H.  
FORSYTH (190), MARY JEAN GREEN (193), DAVID M.  
HAYNE (195), EDWARD A. HEINEMANN (196),



LYNETTE HUNTER (198), PATRICK IMBERT (199),  
ELEANOR JOHNSTON (200), KATHLEEN A. KELLET  
(202), MICHELE LACOMBE (203), RICHARD PAUL  
KNOWLES (206, 207), JOHN LENNOX (209), CHARLES  
LILLARD (211), JEANNETTE LYNES (212), MARY LU  
MACDONALD (215), FRANK MANLEY (216), MICHAEL  
MASON (218), TOM MCKEOWN (220), MARY MEIGS  
(222), ROBERT JAMES MERRETT (223), DOUGLAS  
MOFFAT (226), DON MURRAY (227), ERIC NICOL  
(228), PATRICIA MERIVALE (229), GERALD NOONAN  
(233), PETER O'BRIEN (236), GEORGE L. PARKER  
(237), PAUL MATTHEW ST. PIERRE (238), VALERIE  
RAOUL (241, 243), CATHERINE SHELDRICK ROSS  
(246), D. W. RUSSELL (247), FREDERICK SWEET  
(249), HILDI FROESE TIESSEN (251), MARGARET E.  
TURNER (253), CARLA VISSER (255), JERRY  
WASSERMAN (257), ALLAN WEISS (259), LYDIA  
WEVERS (260), J. R. WYTENBROEK (262, 279),  
DELORIS WILLIAMS (263), AGNÈS WHITFIELD (265),  
JULIE LEBLANC (268), TILL R. KUHNLE (270), NEIL  
B. BISHOP (272), MARK BENSON (273), GEORGE  
WOODCOCK (275), ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ (276,  
281), ROSALIND EVE CONWAY (278), CYNTHIA  
MESSENGER (282)

#### OPINIONS & NOTES

JOHN OWER

Bentley's Kate, Bachofen, & Psychology 288

GEORGE BOWERING

bpNichol: 1944-1988 294



## FROM FIRST TO NEXT

### *First families*

JUST BACK from a conference in England on post-colonial literature (read “Commonwealth,” read “New English Literatures”), I am aware once again of the Commonwealth as a kind of political long poem. It begins; and then it begins again, rewriting itself beyond the control of the originating premises, reaching for its next stage, always a next stage, of conceptual understanding. First there was Empire. Then came the decentralization that accompanies and serves notions of national identity. Then came region, gender, class, ethnicity, race, creed, desire: the signs of greater individuality, perhaps, or the terms of a new internationalism, a different empire. Always someone seeks to invoke closure on the reality, to define. Always the definitions fail finally to satisfy. (What does “Ethnicity” imply, basically, and how has it come to continue to mean the margins of power when it began by meaning the centre of an alternative authority? Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman, in *The New Diversity* [Penguin], persuasively demonstrate how the terms of a new pluralism in Australia — terms that are as relevant in Canada or New Zealand — are turning into a new orthodoxy of critical enclosure.) Always the idea “always” comes into dispute, shaping the space for other sets of connections.

The idea of *Empire* is a centred one, a version of authority (whether narrowly political or broadly cultural) that gives power to a single system (belief, code, structure, language) through assertions of norm and value. The idea of *Commonwealth* is inherently radical: resistant to lines of normative authority, though in practice it perennially constructs new norms and behaves (variously) as though they were always true and everywhere applicable. For example, when the European Empire began no longer to be the sole arbiter of Culture, what replaced it, in the “Commonwealth”? In the *settler* societies (Canada, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand) it was an idea of self, perpetuated through the twentieth century (in this sense, perhaps, the century indeed “belongs to Canada,” in Laurier’s always-misquoted words), perpetuated as a model for other societies, self seeking to shape the world in its own image, to justify its own existence by designing others to confirm itself. Yet among the *settled* — the colonized — societies, the settlers’ designs

were as foreign as those of the old Empire. Here self declared itself again, sometimes so resistantly that no truths were acceptable from beyond the borders of local tradition. In a way, Empire reversed itself. Denial became the servant of expression and another watchword of control. But connections still exist, if not identities, always. One challenge is to see the shape of connections, and of still other connections, as they're in the process of happening; for seeing them as absolutes and only when they've become history is already to be circumscribed.

### *Second thoughts*

*A Shaping of Connections* (a Festschrift for Norman Jeffares, released by Dangaroo Press at the twenty-fifth anniversary conference of the Commonwealth Literature and Language Association Studies, at the University of Kent, in August 1989) does more than simply chart the history of the association and of the changes that have taken place in conceptions of "Commonwealth." By turns anecdotal, analytical, and theoretical, the book brings together essays by several of the foremost commentators on the subject, both old and young, essays which (both severally and together) describe one of the contexts within which current Commonwealth literary connections are being made. Not the only one — American cultural and theoretical models are currently being applied to Commonwealth literatures, re-writing and redefining, according to binary United States norms, many of the plural paradigms that the "Commonwealth" has already given rise to. Such pluralities are evident in the comparative methodologies of Russell McDougall and Gillian Whitlock's *Australian/Canadian Literatures in English* (Methuen); in the intertextual readings of Andrew Taylor's effective *Reading Australian Poetry* (Univ. of Queensland); in the multiple categories of discourse that organize Laurie Hergenhan's instructively revisionist *The Penguin New History of Australia*. Another book from Dangaroo Press — *After Europe*, edited by Helen Tiffin and Stephen Slemon — adds to this picture. Emphasizing variety, it assembles a series of theoretical essays that might place contexts themselves in a literary/political perspective. "Orality," "periphery," "creolization," and "subject": these are the terms that come in for reflective analysis here. Even more valuable, especially as a challenge to misleading political binarism, is yet another recent work, one by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, significantly titled *The Empire Writes Back* (Routledge). Subtitled "Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures," this book resists the term "Commonwealth" intentionally, finding it a politically overcharged category, and probes and applies "post-colonial" instead. The authors recognize that their term has been used elsewhere for a variety of reasons, and that it, too, is not neutral. But they make a case, by means of this framing device, for the many paradigms and multiple processes by which — within "Commonwealth" literatures — language, text, and theory have all altered and, by altering, have resisted the canonical empire of "English" and "English studies" and freed what

they subversively call “english” to address experience with alternative priorities of value.

Altering the canon is not the sole prerogative of creative writing, of course, nor of theory, and a whole series of new anthologies on the market is trying both to challenge received norms of judgment and to capitalize on the desire — prevalent in a variety of quarters — for alternative hierarchies of value. “Standard” anthologies, such as the omnibus volumes of freshman surveys, have in recent years been expanding (on revision, usually) to include a requisite handful of black, Canadian, or women’s texts. “Special subject” anthologies — such as Lynne Spender’s *Her Selection* and Debra Adelaide’s *A Bright and Fiery Troop* (both Penguin, and both explicitly feminist) — deliberately set out to redefine the canon so that their subject is no longer “special” but now the “norm” against which other material is to be measured.

There are even some ongoing series, such as the recent five-volume set from Macmillan (London) — medieval to twentieth century — edited respectively by Michael Alexander and Felicity Riddy (the most innovative of the five), Gordon Campbell, Ian McGowan, Brian Martin, and Neil McEwan. There are some conventionalities here; the books neither question the usual temporal categories of English Department curricula nor (except in the case of Alexander and Riddy) do they include much in the way of writing by women. Yet they do (by excerpting repeatedly from novels and plays) question some conventions about genre and raise theoretically interesting questions about the art of the fragment and the validity of “wholeness.” So far this series is about English, not “english,” which describes rather than defines its use (though some would argue that these verbs are too close to distinguish, in this context). For retaining “national boundaries” around literature, which constitutes one alternative to the temporal boundaries of “literary periods,” only sometimes works to make “Commonwealth” texts, say, central in their own right, a process of “writing back”; sometimes it remains a strategic way of keeping them at a margin. But with various anthologies now out and underway, some useful alternatives to the resistantly canonical survey are becoming accessible, and that in itself is a substantial step in rethinking the inter-related questions of bias and value.

### *Third World*

For people tend to value that which they have already learned to value: rhyme and order, or freedom from rhyme or order; the speaking voice or the artifice of metaphor; the “*Great Men*” of custom and history or some version of “Other.” Apropos of this question, *The New Diversity* quotes the Australian novelist Robert Drewe on the limits of one of his own characters: “Cullen is committed to the proposition which Manning Clark [the historian] characterises as Australian: that there should be ‘no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy

wrong, not anything but a commonplace prosperity in broad and simple daylight.' Unfortunately the real world, the Third World . . . rejects this proposition. . . ." That is to say, it rejects the confident centrism that implicitly (even if not explicitly) denies alternatives to the status quo. But even the "Third World" is a mental construct — and "in the real world" it is neither monolithic nor uniform. Asked to define itself, moreover, "it" (no longer unitary) no longer uses the language that reconfirms the "First" (or is it "Second") World's versions of norm, tradition, or colony. It does something "other," often to retrieve self from a historical margin.

There are many versions of "otherness," most having to do with extrapolations of the self. All impinge on language. Michel de Certeau's *Heterologies* (Univ. of Minnesota) reflects on pluralities of discourse; Dick Hebdige's *Subculture* (Methuen) finds otherness at home in England, in connections between style and class; Govind Narain Sharma's *Literature and Commitment* (Tsar) assembles papers on "major" Commonwealth writers, in the process demonstrating some of the political ruptures that impel writers into creative (*because* political) stylistic ventures.

Mirko Jurak's *Cross-Cultural Studies* (Univ. of Ljubljana), the proceedings of a 1988 symposium, in Slovenia, in part on Commonwealth writers, asserts the growing interest in such writings in Europe; Dieter Riemenschneider's *Critical Approaches to the New Literatures in English* (Die Blaue Eule), at once less descriptive and more theoretical, surveys the limits of Marxist, Nationalist, and Post-Colonial approaches to Commonwealth writing, substituting the "Frankfurt strategy" in their place. The Frankfurt strategy turns out to be a *series* of binary oppositions (British *vs.* colonial, settler *vs.* native, minority *vs.* majority, etc.) which minimizes gender and class differences within these categories, though it does demonstrate how binary categories structure the "other," the alternative in each pair, in the very process of defining the subject for discussion. One more book from Europe, Jean-Pierre Durix's *The Writer Written* (Greenwood), probes by contrast the plural possibilities within a single (though complex) subject — the image of the artist in Commonwealth texts; surprisingly, but instructively, Durix finds numerous parallels between "Old" and "New" Commonwealth; he nonetheless demonstrates how the artist-figures in the writings of Harris and Rushdie, say, both result from and manage "bolder syntheses" of language than is characteristic of the leading novelists of the settler societies.

That said, the numerous books explicitly on *black* writing in the Commonwealth assert difference more than they admit to similarity. In the wake of Wole Soyinka's winning the Nobel Prize — and of the release of his *Mandela's Earth and other poems* (Random House), in part an adaptation of the traditional praise poem to contemporary political ends — it is no surprise to discover a spate of books on his work, from Obi Maduakor's *Wole Soyinka* (Garland) and Greta Coger's *Index of Subjects, Proverbs and Themes in the Writings of Wole Soyinka* (Greenwood)

to Ketu H. Katrak's illuminating account of Yoruba ritual action in the playwright's dramatic theory and practice, *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy* (Greenwood). But other books are more instructive for their general principles. Vernon February's *And Bid Him Sing* (Kegan Paul) asserts (androcentrically, it seems) that "in demythologizing the white world, the black man often forged his own language, his own symbolism." (As though to demonstrate the parodic impulse of much re-writing, one of his chapters is entitled "From Peau Noire to Po' White.") Robert Fraser's *West African Poetry* (Cambridge) emphasizes the historical changes that took poetry in Africa from oral paradigms to written ones and back again; Isidore Okpewho's anthology, *The Heritage of African Poetry* (Longman), brings both oral and written verse together, using critical notes and thematic links (designed for the reader unfamiliar with Africa) to insist on this poetry's particular contextual frames. Chidi Amuta's *The Theory of African Literature* (Humanities Press International) seeks to move beyond the notion of "decolonization" (with its intrinsic Eurocentrism) for a system of criticism that espouses humanity and nobility. This is a desire that must be heard within the cultural frame of its own production, a principle that is taken up also in Syed Amanuddin's *Creativity and Reception* (Peter Lang), subtitled "Toward a Theory of Third World Criticism." Extending the range of colonial enquiry, Jack Yeager, in *The Vietnamese Novel in French* (Univ. Press of New England), asserts that the works he is describing are neither French nor Vietnamese but something different. While this position seems premised on closed categories of initial definition, the quest for "difference" is, of course, another version of the fascination with "other" which through history has led both to conflict and contact. Like the enquiries into the distinctiveness of any group literature, it is a recognition of some shifting parameters of power — seen in terms of race, nationality, gender, and language: political all.

#### *Fourth estate*

Hence the role of journals in highlighting Commonwealth literary theory can never be neutral. Chidi Amuta is clear that the class position of a critic is not irrelevant to the critical method, or to the critical judgments to which any method leads. The institutional source of journals and the readership of journals consequently both affect whatever messages such media project; and while sometimes they address issues because the issues have become timely, sometimes they address issues because they have merely become faddish. The recent appearance of special issues on "Commonwealth" theory has to be read in this context, for some are written as though there were no Commonwealth, no writers, and no criticism within the Commonwealth, with a history of its own.

Fredric Jameson's "Third World Literature and Cultural Criticism" issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (1988) is, as expected, Marxist, arguing that neither formalism nor a concern for ethnicity is sufficiently progressive, because neither is

adequately dialectical. *Critical Exchange* (1986-87) comments on Theory and Strategy in the Third World; *Oxford Literary Review* (1987) addresses the Shapes of Colonialism; *Social Text* (1988) considers Colonial Discourse. *Discourse* (1986-87) focuses on gender, on “She, The Inappropriate/d Other,” referring to film and Gayatri Spivak, but fundamentally interpreting the image and experience of Third World women through a familiarity with American black literature. *College English* (1988) takes up the connection between rhetoric and identity — discussing Canada primarily for an American audience, though there is to found here a useful survey by Nan Johnson of the history of rhetoric in Canada — by examining the “cultural image” (national, dual, comparative, multicultural) that rhetorical use contrives to create. *Modern Fiction Studies* (1989) furthers this discussion by examining rhetorical structure as narrative (and vice versa): narrative becomes a critical method in some literatures, for a formally subversive purpose; collective publication becomes a subversive strategy for political minorities; “liberation” becomes a “theology”; testimonial narrative becomes a political act. So does publication. As Jenny Sharpe’s excellent article on English in India, in *MFS*, clearly demonstrates, the “english” language recurrently extends to alternative formulations, questioning received standards in the process of speaking different ones. Like the discontinuous long poem, perhaps, it resists conclusions in the process of beginning again.

*Next?*

Just forward into the future: What fifth business animates the process of change? What sixth sense guides writers and critics, creators and politicians, to choose one way of change rather than another? What political seventh heaven does critical theory determinedly place faith in and persistently, resolutely seek?

W.N.

## THE DOUBLE HOOK

*Gerry Turcotte*

This is not a handmaid’s tale  
of beautiful losers — or of rebel angels  
halting the progress of love.  
This is not a tale of man descending.  
And though it tells of the descant into the maelstrom,  
it is not about coming through slaughter  
behind the beyond.  
It is about the telling of lies.

In this world of wonders  
 the heart of a stranger  
 is but pride's fancy —  
 the self condemned  
 to the hidden mountain.  
 But the mountain and the valley  
 — earth and high heaven —  
 are as one. Last leaves dying above ground.  
 These are the fruits of the earth.

We are the disinherited  
 drinking burning water to slake our thirst.  
 In this, the cruellest month,  
 the wooden sword,  
 forged from the heart of the ancient wood,  
 pokes out from under the ribs of death.

This wind without rain leaves  
 the dust over the city unmoved,  
 like mist on the river.  
 Watching mad shadows on the wall  
 we pray for a voice from the attic.  
 Is there more joy in heaven?  
 or is it but the place from which  
 moonbeams from the larger lunacy  
 emerge? But wait. There *is* a voice.  
 Wild geese? The last of the curlews?  
 Or a jest of God?

Here, in the town below,  
 this house of hate,  
 the stone angel smiles.  
 Despair is but further foolishness,  
 a frenzied fiction,  
 or an omen  
 like a bird in the house.

At tide's turn  
 the harbour master  
 will drift back,  
 like Odysseus ever returning,  
 bringing hope to the Viking heart.

Famous last words?



# THE POLITICS OF ART

## *Eli Mandel's "Journals"*

Andrew Stubbs

WHAT MIGHT WELL BE the inaugural question of the “Journals” section of Eli Mandel’s *Life Sentence* is “When do language and place become identical?”<sup>1</sup> In response to this query, Smaro Kamboureli has remarked:

Although [Mandel] does not provide the answer, within the grammar of question there is already an implicit assertion: language and place can become identical. The convergence of these two orders of reality is a matter of time: ‘When do language and place become identical?’ Mandel also asks.<sup>2</sup>

The answer *to*, and, indeed, the answerability *of*, this question is exactly what I wish to concern myself with here because it touches on the political aspects of Mandel’s writing — which have frequently been overlooked by commentators.

Mandel, of course, intends *Life Sentence* to be taken as a “political” document, “something resonating out of dreams — dreams of examinations, trials, streets too ominous to walk down” (*Life Sentence*, 7). But what, precisely, does Mandel’s use of this term denote — if dreams, also, are “political” texts?

Let us start by noting that the question of when language and place become one is a mechanism for generating writing: it is the question of how to write given, as Mandel has elsewhere stated, “the impossibility of writing.”<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the question is a device, a tactic, an incantation designed to give the poet access to a universe of discourse. This is the “conservative” dimension of writing: what the poet commits to utterance is what he “saves,” which implies a war of words, or between words and silence. There is, however, more to it than this. There is also the problem of what the writer does not say, what he leaves, or casts, out, what he forgets, or for some other reason “fails” to speak. The question of how or, better, where to begin, is already for Mandel a subversive one because it verges on the memory of an exiled portion of existence, a memory not of presence, then, but of absence, death. While writing may be a form of recollection (as Freud tells us it is), it is also an instance of the uncanny: the writer is never at home; he is always in foreign territory.<sup>4</sup>

The uncanny begins with substitution, it may be the most powerful human capacity. Learn the connections of failure, ritual, magic: redundancy, reduplication. (The world begins to begin *elsewhere*.) (*Life Sentence*, 55)

The writer may feel closer to foreign places than to his "own" home, closer to the "other" (or what Mandel would call his "double") than himself: "May 1980, I hear Jack Hodgins say the sea that washes on the shore of his home is the same as the sea that washes on Marquez's and so South Africa is closer to him than Toronto" (*Life Sentence*, 56). Under such conditions of language, the writer is a secret agent. His place is not home itself, or anything which can be signified by the term "home," or, as a matter of fact, anything which can be determined by words themselves. At best, his home-place, or place of writing, is a mock-home, a "substitute" home. Contrary to Kamboureli's claim, then, the question of when language and place become identical contains not an "assertion," exactly, so much as a misprision. Language and place *cannot* become one, and *when* they do, they point to horror, bondage, catastrophe. They point to the ultimate destination of all remembering (for the writer, for the writer as Jew): to the death camp itself, to, say, the "Auschwitz" of Mandel's "memorial" poem.<sup>5</sup>

There is, perhaps, no place which is more verbally realized than Auschwitz; it is, as it were, a book-space, the "having spoken," as Robert Kroetsch would say.<sup>6</sup> It is the closure which makes all future statement unnecessary, redundant, which turns statement into mis-statement. In Mandel's "Auschwitz" poem (included in his earlier collection, *Stony Plain*), there is a sense above all that the death camp is a house of words, encyclopedic, aphoristic:

the name is hard  
 a German sound made out of  
 the gut guttural throat  
 y scream yell ing open  
 voice mouth growl  
  
and sweat  
 "the only way out of Auschwitz  
 is through the chimneys"  
  
of course  
 that's second hand      that's told  
 again

The word space which is Auschwitz is always "second hand," always "later," which tells us that the particular problem which the poet confronts, when setting out to write (to *place* language), is what Harold Bloom names as the anxiety of influence: the writer's initial sense that all his meanings have been spoken before, that meaning itself has become exhausted, that inscription itself ("Auschwitz / in GOTHIC lettering") is a shadow cast by the lingering dead.

That language is the after-life of history is endemic to all of Mandel's writing, and has to do with the paradisaical taint, so to speak, which attaches to words, even while he composes them into new abstractions. In his reflections on the writing of the "Auschwitz" poem ("Auschwitz: Poetry of Alienation") he has traced his generation as a poet back to the profane, to his reading, after the war, of Thomas

Mann's "Introduction" to *The Short Novels of Dostoevsky*, where "Mann is defending Nietzsche's position in *The Birth of Tragedy*":

The truth is that life has never been able to do without the morbid, and probably no adage is more inane than the one which says, that "only disease comes from the diseased." Life is not prudish and it is probably safe to say that life prefers creative genius-bestowing disease a thousand times over to prosaic health . . .<sup>7</sup>

Placed beside Mandel's "Auschwitz" poem, this passage provides a rationale of the irrational. At any rate, it hints at what Mandel would designate as the "unconscious" of art. The link between language and place becomes a metaphysics, or binding contract between the parts of speech, and also the sign of an agreement, a covenant, gone awry. In this way, for him, the Holocaust becomes the type, or theme, of "late" twentieth-century writing generally characterized as postmodern. It becomes a sort of repatriation of the deconstructive gesture itself.

Mandel is a writer for whom a theory of art or, at least, a theory of composition (what Bloom would call 'askesis') is necessary for any creative endeavour; i.e., such a hypothesis is foregrounded, is *consciously* present, in the *duration* of any linguistic act. His work, then, might be said to be a travesty of Frye's notion of a utopian literary universe inhabiting every unique verbal construction. For Mandel, then, Auschwitz is the palace of art itself; it is "tradition"; it is the place of fathers. The union of time and place, language and locality, is an economy of death. And it is one of the peculiarities of Mandel's style, necessitated by his use of the death camp as a metaphor for writing, that evil is domestic: Auschwitz is (uncannily) a suburb of the imagination. Indeed, if there is an "archetype" behind his symbolization of the (ancestral) past as the site of a catastrophe, of bondage and flight, it is Milton's Pandemonium, that structure of rhetoric whose being is presented in the depths of the abyss itself, but which can only ever be the parody of another heaven, "elsewhere." Mandel is a traveller through earth's ruins, and in the blending of locales both foreign and Canadian, renders the whole concept of home-space, self-space, ambiguous. Mandel's "Journals" are, in effect, spy stories (the poet is always crossing borders, always in enemy country).

WE MIGHT RECALL that Mandel's previous collection of poems, *Out of Place*, is the history of a return to the site/sight of his birth, Estevan, Saskatchewan, a journey, we might note, which is not completed, but which gives rise to strategies of evasion, delays, as if home is somehow a prohibited place, the one place the writer must not enter. The paradox, here, is that for Mandel going home is not a voyage to the centre but to the periphery, a movement "west," or, as he has called it, "writing west."<sup>8</sup> In other words, going home is a network of departures, not arrivals, a falling into, and through, the conflict-ridden schemas

of language itself. This, of course, is the overlying pattern of the "Journals," but what it tells us about all Mandel's travels is that they are camouflages — i.e., re-writings — of the family romance itself. Such an "over-writing" or retelling, in various forms, of the same story, suggests a narrative structure which both reveals and conceals: a structure thus remarkably akin to that of neurosis. Freud, as a matter of fact, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, posits, against the conservative character of the instincts, that organic development is due to the operation of "external, disruptive and diverting influences."<sup>9</sup> Repetition, then, is an outward momentum; and it is here that it becomes possible to say that the "redundancy" of Mandel's prose journals is an attempt to exteriorize writing, to (re-)enter language not introspectively, but as history. Samuel Weber, in *The Legend of Freud*, summarizes Freud's contentions in a manner which could be a gloss on Mandel's whole view of the writer's relation to his "telling":

In short, Freud must *depart* from his attempt to think repetition as a movement of identity — to think, in short, repetition as such — and instead attempt to think it as departure. To do this, he must partition the origin so that the walls of its Fort! are no longer impervious to an exteriority, without which Life can never depart. For it is only as the effect of a double or split origin, an origin that is dislocated and disrupted by "external" forces — influences which leave their mark upon us — that the drives can be conceived as repetition. What they repeat, however, is no longer simply the "same" — the Fort! that is Da! — but rather a *da* that is *fort*: elsewhere, and yet also here: the "modification" or "alteration" (*Veränderung*) which is repeated as the imprint, the Abdruck of an irreducible alterity. This Abdruck, then, is what gives the drives their distinctive character. In the final analysis, "im letzten Grunde," what the drives repeat is neither a ground nor an abyss, but a violent process of in-scription, alteration, and perhaps above all: narration.<sup>10</sup>

That this recapitulation may serve as the "epic" ground/plan of Mandel's "Journals" is indicated by the fact that memory, as it is crafted by the "small" space of the diary entry, is in effect a "diachronic" process. That is, between language and place which, taken together, herald the symmetry which is the shape of cognition itself, Mandel is working out a problem in dislocation. The major framework for this splitting, as it were, of his "origin," is provided by landscape: the environments through which he moves begin to take on the configurations of fathers (mountains) or mothers (India). Again, the worlds he enters for the "first" time, ostensibly, are commemorative of places he has known before. The point, though, is that the assertion of memory leads also to the dissolving of memory, which in turns sets up a kind of anxiety about what the writer is "really" seeing and what he is not, what remains hidden, silent. In this sense, narrative itself, its inventories of disaster, the world itself, becomes a forbidden place. It becomes the place of the dead: the death of time, of fathers. To cause this world to speak is the poet's task. In "Journal, Banff: The School of Fine Arts," Mandel writes: "The mountains still have nothing to

say to me, other than touristy notions of the picturesque" (*Life Sentence*, 59). Kroetsch speaks of male space as "the silence that needs to speak."<sup>11</sup> A world trapped in its own decorums, a rococo world of libidinal, vanishing forms: the kitsch world of the death camp. Accompanying all perception is a kind of un-itemized horror, unrelieved because unimaginable. Mandel talks about "The slow thinking of mountains. For some reason, I look to the Andes with apprehension" (*Life Sentence*, 59).

In fact we might say that the whole collision between landscape and language takes place as a meeting of the giant form and the miniature, so that what Mandel is concerned with is the essential vulgarity of his reduction of the world to a symbol system (mythopoeia) such as the family romance. Since this concern embraces the whole activity of (self-)inscription, in which he is engaged, the "Journals" present a manner of writing which calls writing itself, the efficacy, the truth-telling power of words, into doubt. This is the anxiety of the spy: how to transmit messages out of enemy territory; will his words arrive, be understood; will the necessary action be taken? The writer is trapped in an infinite regression, forever mining (Milton's Mammon) the depths of the abyss, constructing archetypes, in his search for a way back to a god who, as Bloom tells us, is dead.<sup>12</sup> What, then, is left to speak? Possibly, the end of the world itself: writing as an end-of-the-world scenerio.

Mandel's "Journals," then, are retracings: of self, of earlier writing. They tell the story of a story: "Emblem: encountering self in the mountains. Continue to write, redrafting 'Ghosts.'" Again and again we meet that insistence on naming, coding. The measurements that lead to memory:

"Meet Richard Lemm, red-bearded, sharp-eyed, ferret; Joanna Bochner, shy — especially about her family name." (*Life Sentence*, 59)

Writing seeks to institutionalize its own forms as codes which the reader is invited then to crack (open) spill. The code, then, is not information but disinformation. Still, we admire the poet's coolness, his effort to say, in detail, that he is "here," when he is not, to establish his alibi.

Mandel's univocity, monologue, is the containing form of his message, but it is also a form which readily divides into *non sequiturs* ("the connections of failure"), parallel lines which do not intersect, which can only give rise to more and more extravagant contexts (however benign, childlike) of the subversive:

Last night, Jon Whyte attempted to reassert his presence here by planning pirated or illicit readings. Curious distinction between legitimate and illegitimate readings. The secret poets of Canada. Yet who has a better right than Jon? He carries about a huge notebook of poems and drawings, a fictional world of the mountain country and a childhood kingdom. (*Life Sentence*, 61)

Mandel's names, we have said, are code names, secret names, short forms ("Jon,"

“Rick,” “Martin,” “Mike”). They minimize language in the presence of something enormous, grotesque, suffering: the mountains themselves (which cannot speak), suggestive of invisible continents (Atlantis), immemorial catastrophes.

**B**UT LANGUAGE MUST BE REDUCED in this way if it is to be “sent.” Only the miniature, which comes closest to the elemental, the pure form of the word itself, only the residual, the onomatopoeic, can defy gravity: “Paranoia. Big Miller’s jazz concert in the Blue Room, voices attempting to be heard over the sound of a band electronic, inflated. Murmur, murmur. Buzz, buzz” (*Life Sentence*, 63).

Writing begins in division, spoils: “The discovery of disaster itself and so the beginning of poetry” (*Life Sentence*, 63). This describes an iconography which repeats itself indefinitely (there is no horizon). Not just the crossing, but the un-crossing of borders as well. In effect, writing proceeds by constantly replacing within the currency of its descriptions an originary moment of destruction. History is a series of pitfalls. Such a view of writing puts a premium on the act of perception, it would seem, for speech itself is made nothing other than an exegesis of the senses: sight, sound, touch. What Mandel keeps envisioning, as we see repeatedly in “Journal, In the High Mountains, Peru, Ecuador, 1976,” is, as we have said, the world’s end: “From the hotel balcony, I look out at the city. White, decaying” (*Life Sentence*, 67). The unending catalogues of apocalypse are emblems of the after-life of words; language is the dead ground of the gods.

This is a reduplicating scene; over and over again here; day after day. Shoddy commerce. Anything to sell: buckles and belts, leather strips, trinkets, AeroPeru shoulder bags. Watches. Food wagons: chickens, oranges, corn, hot dogs, pineapples, melons, meats. Cripples appear. Indian women with children. The metaphors of poverty, of its structure. (*Life Sentence*, 67-68)

There are, here, curious temptations. The poet stands on his balcony, surveying the blank ruins of the city. He establishes his perspective; the eye is isolated, situated above the crowd. He adopts, in other words, an archetypally prescriptive stance, becomes his own ancestral voice, prophesying war. We might speak of an imperialism of the eye. But something else is happening as well. The poet is also putting on a mask, to hide his arrival from the world. He seeks, superficially, even consciously, to appear as immanence, to occupy the place of god in his silence. But his achievement is not the restoration of order. His listing of the parts of the world is itself truncated, a renewal of chaos. Forms inside forms. A world without syntax, causeless. The poet, like Satan, keeps entering landscapes which are already legendary, rumours in heaven, with the intention of writing new versions of human time.

Part of the poet's "longing," as Mandel reveals, is for "clarity — and order" (*Life Sentence*, 7). But we can now see that this longing borders on, and is thus intensified by, paranoia: the fear of death, mutilation, suffering, whose symbols are everywhere. On the one hand, his is the Lear-like impulse to give the kingdom of self away, to have it returned as discourse — and as love. On the other, there are the penalties the writer must pay for harbouring desires which cannot be attached to any permanent iconography. For Mandel (as for Blake), pity, or what he calls "the metaphors of poverty," is space, a constitutive self-negation which turns the "actual" world into contemplation. The poet's self-absenting is also an attempt to relocate the world outside time, to observe it at the instant of creation, as irreducibly, unalterably, its own form. This is accomplished by way of distancing: to perceive the world, in all its multi-layered detail, is to fill up gaps in the fabric of extension. (Space, Satan says, may produce new worlds.) Thus it is that description can seem to be a retracing, a magical and mystical duplication of what is "already" there, in the otherness and mystery of its "location":

Church of San Francisco: white stone, red tracing of geometric outlines with vaguely Moorish aspect, though the chapels are baroque and rather handsomely symmetrical. I want to suggest the jumble of styles so characteristic of this uncertain place. The ruins of empire and earthquake have left no balance. Supposedly, there is a three-ton monstrance here in the church; we don't find it. All the wealth of the church; the poverty elsewhere — on the hills, outside the city, the *favellas*; we have only glimpsed them. (*Life Sentence*, 69)

Geometry as pure form becomes the circlings of the eye around an object. Seeing becomes speech becomes endless circumlocation, a naming and an un-naming of what is there. The world is symptom, visible and invisible to the exteriorizing power of the eye: "we have only glimpsed them." Or, what the eye sees is its own gaze turned back on itself; it sees its own seeing, and therefore its own blindness. Thus, the outwardness of objects becomes infinitely hypnotic, incantatory. Mandel speaks in such terms of "The power of iconography": "How much does the full organization of iconography represent, sustain, or create the power of a state (church) institution (army)?" (*Life Sentence*, 70). Meanwhile writing expresses *its* power through connections of place and history: the overcrowding, the multiplication of styles, to which Mandel refers, is an image of time dissolving, moments jostling moments before their final plunge: "the shambles that is modern Lima, its street vendors, its rickety buses, its racket of busting and decaying Detroit models of the forties and fifties" (*Life Sentence*, 71). Present becomes past. Note how the familiar has become estranged. Endless scenes of near-recognition. Carnival. Every place, every stop-over, is a substitute homecoming, a non-arrival.

This, of course, is the essence of the uncanny: "I feel I am coming closer to a fate I know or *should* have known" (71-72). This sense of anticipation is everywhere in the "Journals," hinting at the curious problem which they denote in



increasingly elaborate terms: how to suggest that perception is closed, that perception itself is a type of romance. The eye of the poet turns the world into gesture. Seeing is a fusion of memory and silence. Seeing, therefore, as Bishop Berkeley would inform us (by way of W. O. Mitchell), is a mode of *feeling*. The mystique of lived, “felt” time, history as texture: “I remember a coloured man at dinner, alone, shabbily dressed but in cloth that was once good. Quiet dignity. Around me in the city, faces from Mochica ceramics, dark, haughty, sensual” (*Life Sentence*, 73).

The world, for Mandel, is reduced to an image and, at the same time, in the unifying power of his sight, pathos. This poses the problem of what the spectator, *qua* lover, “feels” towards objects. Derrida, commenting on Levi-Strauss, characterizes the two conditions of what he calls “the possibility of totemism in general” as, first,

*Pity*, that fundamental affection, as primitive as the love of self, which unites us to others naturally: to other human beings, certainly, but also to all living beings

and, second, “the *originarily metaphoric* — because it belongs to the passions, says Rousseau — essence of our *language*.”<sup>18</sup> The danger of totemism is duplicated in the poet’s anxiety about mountains. As with Satan, the path one may think of as upward (to freedom) and inward (to self) is in fact downward to greater destruction.

Mandel’s journey, then, in Blakean terms, is not that of the poet/prophet but, as it were, “downward” and “outward.” He keeps returning, in his blindness, to his failure to be an object of sight to himself. The writer not as creator but as creature, pariah: the rage of Caliban seeing and not seeing his face in the glass. Shrinking the world to an icon has to do with the whole transformation of pity as eros. The risk of all writing may be that death, the Holocaust itself, becomes love. To love one’s enemy, to take his place, write his speeches, is to “begin.” Mandel’s writing would seem to be a travesty of this very process and in that sense a movement between the sacred and the profane of “human” time. For whoever seeks to bind language in some elemental ritual for kinship ends by dispersing it: “the hills like some Babylonian version of Babel; the tower in Breughel’s painting; a demonic world” (*Life Sentence*, 73). It would seem, in short, that the visionary hero is the enemy. For Mandel, the very terms “language,” “community,” “freedom,” are attached to the forms of empire. The mask of reason, in its institutional form, is freedom — a technique by which the “primitive” (Derrida’s word) is inveigled into intercourse with the established, seemly, conventions of nature. How is this accomplished? We might think of Prospero (who started by turning the world into magic) and his contracting of Ariel on the basis of a promise of *eventual* liberation. Prospero turns the forces of nature into a moral agent, in keeping with his ultimate (always *about to be* revealed) ambitions to found a new society. Is

this not a model for Cartesian rationalism? Descartes, in his *First Meditation*, turns the sensible world into an appearance, as a preparation for his announcement of the *cogito* as the ground on which a “brave new world” of metaphysical truth can be erected. The point, of course, is that what may pass for philosophical reflection, or may be heralded as (belatedly) revolutionary, is just another deception, the creation of a new repression. What has this to do with Mandel’s characterization of writing as a political instrument? For one thing, if we were to glance at the poems in *Life Sentence* we would find that the identification of political repression has to do with the way in which the tyrant can appear to be a force of nature, a commander of the elements. In “Beware the Sick Lion,” for instance: “No one talks of the secret police activities of Somoza in Nicaragua. / Only the earthquake of anger, the typhoons of oppression.” Cognition itself is implicated in the mechanics of torture. The construction of propagandas, the nomination of enemies, the declarations of war are in the name of peace, plenty, truth. The cause of this may well be the establishment of freedom as a metaphysical convention, and the association of freedom with a future state of knowledge and action. We might think of Kant, and the way in which, *via* the categorical imperative, the mind is forever trying to keep its promise of freedom to a world of unformed, unborn, “objects,” doing so all along by constituting that world (noumena) as a negation, having already formulated its objects within the synthetic manifold of “experience.” For Freud, the super-ego is a repressive form of the radical energies of the id. For Frye, too, freedom is what the critic offers the poet: he liberates the latter into intelligibility, naturalizing his utterance as an artifact of community.

WE HAVE COME, PERHAPS, to Mandel’s ongoing dilemma: how to be in the role of writer in the midst of a language which has already been appropriated to hidden agendas. Part of the answer is that the writer at least tells the truth by revealing he is a writer. Does this imply some kind of phenomenology of healing? Consciousness, perhaps, is always consciousness (memory) of having been before. This drama is played out in “Journal, India: The Invisible Country, December 1976 to January 1977.” This “Journal” starts with an act of remembering which leads to closure: “Today, two books completed — finally” (*Life Sentence*, 93). But time is emptied inward by the over-concatenation of information which is also a process of doubling. The mind is carried back towards non-entity. Time is exposed in its sparest, storied outlines:

We pass the endless, confusing hours of the flight with books (Mike reads Paul Theroux’s *Great Railway Bazaar*, an account of a trip to India); papers (*New York Times*, *London Times*); movies (two); meals (repeatedly); wine (ceaselessly); all sequences lost. Occasionally, glimpses of a frozen, harsh world below, desert, moun-

tains. Other possibilities seem to me opening at every stage: London, Frankfurt, Tehran; I have no idea of what, no feeling for the world I should be connecting with. (*Life Sentence*, 93)

This flight becomes, again, a metaphor for a kind of regression, which means that it sets in motion the process of naming in order to erase its placements (“London, Frankfurt, Tehran”). Language itself is caught up in a cinematic fast-rewind. Mandel feels a lack of “connection” with the world over which he flies (“no feeling”). A world, then, emptied of romance. And landscape verging towards annihilation. To empty the world of time in this way has affinities with the Gothic technique of surrounding one’s story with an artificial antiquity which, in turn, the main line of narrative tries to approach and uncover.<sup>14</sup> There is, perhaps, a residuum of the Gothic in the mountains themselves. Landscape as genre. Mandel enters India looking for another version of the same, or not looking:

We are here and not here. The Conference of Commonwealth Literature records our presence but lists in its schedule of events only one Canadian on the reading schedule and he is virtually invisible since, so far as I am aware, he has never published poetry in Canada. Determined nonetheless to fulfil obligations, Mike arranges a showing of his *The Farm Show*. Bill New, who has arrived with Peggy via Singapore, gives a brilliant paper on dialect and fiction. (*Life Sentence*, 94)

The search for a territory to stand on, to occupy, is a search for words, the right words, a language *in place*. “There’s a deep — *cynicism* would be too strong a word — *despair, hopelessness*, might be better” (*Life Sentence*, 95). To open the self, unlock time, in the midst of its layering, to unmystify, is to record speech as a series of emptying movements that threaten to raise up something alien, aloof.

Somewhere in our exiles, that hopelessness, the feelings I have been suppressing, surge up. There, I glimpse the tide of my own life again, the absence that is presence. Then it’s gone. (*Life Sentence*, 95)

To possess a language that poses its own conjunctions as a form, not only of retreat, but absence, cleanses language, transforms it into pure line, pure border. Meanwhile, contact with what is not here, but there, horizon, is a strategy of unmasking that becomes, possibly, confession: “I find myself sullen and withdrawn. I stay away from seminars, prowl idly among book displays” (*Life Sentence*, 95).

How are South America and India different? The Andes exist in their encodings, symbolisms. The temptation they pose for the poet, which is also their anxiety, is a return to obsolete forms, sublimity, which derive their energy from what the self has felt and done, in and out of its various pasts, heroisms, pageants. India, however, *remains* invisible; the closure comes from outside. The poet is not even the receiver of text. Thus his dramas of return are impotent. India teaches no lessons. (Thus, his monologues, thrown back on himself, seem over-technical, auto-didactic.) Above all, it is under, not above, which leads him, *qua* westerner, to

make existential claims, to assert the power of abstraction, to impose the politics of metaphor, dream. (Still, it is not *his* dream.)

Or are the structures deeper still, something Martin Kinch (or George Walker) might write about: desire, anger, inner metaphors about the personal power politics we all play so that unconscious world can exist, not as a metaphor, but as a literal power, the *real* jungle, the *real* Bombay: India, as Mahatma Ghandi seems to have known, *is* the unconscious, forever demanding the absence of ego, hence a threat to Western man, and a mystery forever. (*Life Sentence*, 103)

India, at least to the western mind, exists beyond politics, beyond, that is, ownership, forever denying the presence of its observers. Castration. What remains of politics is the mere fact, thwarting all exegesis and relativism: "India will be ruled either by meditation *or* brute force and cunning" (*Life Sentence*, 103). In such a declaration we are free to detect a dissipation that borders, at first glance, on the reduction of thought to the opaque, to entropy, that state beyond savagery. As, perhaps, in Forster, melodrama is what we bring to our perception of the void. This sets up a need to recover evidence of having been here, a topicality, an interiority: what remains is an otherness outside human passion, that "is" (yet "existence" is also only a predicate).

That is, all memory systems, traditions of reading and writing, are not so much interrupted as returned to us, intact, as solipsisms. This state of non-change is Canadian Studies in India. Hence, Mandel's insistence on familiar schemas which are attached to the landscape in a kind of pursuit sequence. The absurdity is not in the writing but in the page, in the expansiveness of a country that can bear such signatures and still "exist," a goddess that sleeps through all our invented magic.

Once more the mystery of bountifulness in the midst of poverty: the sensual self satiated, all choices given, yielded, the body fully achieved in its desire. Once, I thought, this could mean only de Sade's vision of nature: hooks and whips and eyes. But here it rises like Dante's vision: aspiring shapes, circle over circle, each winding in a staircase toward the sky, itself a metaphor of the soul's and body's union and completeness. And yet, for me — Puritan and Jew (and western Canadian — so Victorian Jew as well), the metaphor is not an easy one, though any prairie boy, interested in centaurs, will admit it or else play Bob Kroetsch's games with it, insisting on inborn rowdiness, macho self, the horseman, the whoresman, the cowboy-boy. I am *unsatisfied*. Is it then the foreign structure I object to (these sensual figures caught in their sensual music, profound abstractions of copulation, their elegant perfectly remote figures involved profoundly in their involutions)? (*Life Sentence*, 97)

This choice Mandel has diagrammed before, countless times: the religious (Dante) *versus* the profane (de Sade) or, in this context, perhaps, the Classical *versus* the Romantic. Such a polarity takes us back, momentarily, to Goethe. India generates structure (hierarchy: hence the journey *extends* itself in heroic couplets: Bill and

Peggy, Mike and Kim, Clark and Bharati); South America, though, in its “founding” syntaxes, tempts him with feeling (thus its journey keeps returning to the domestic).

The problem centres on what constitutes a shared experience (Forster, again), on what the (transplanted) group “mind” can agree on as a body of knowledge. Mandel is “here” as a citizen of his society, carrying his household gods on his back. Kroetsch tells us there was no Aeneas on the prairies. Yet Mandel explicitly questions Kroetsch’s parenthetical free play with signifiers, the macho word. One of his choices, then (which, however, leads to no “satisfaction”), is a classical rendition of romance, a completion that is also not a completion: Keats’s Grecian Urn, say (“these sensual figures caught in their sensual music”). The question, finally, may be how to *end* (the question of the question). The answer: by re-imagining, re-entering the game-space of history. This may be a sacrifice of the writing ego, or an ultimate compromise between order and (creative) imagination. (Not “soul,” but “self”: to be “content,” in Yeats’s phrase, “to live it all again.”)

After a drive in heavy rain to the airport, through customs, to the 747, and a fifty minute delay. Tehran. More delays. It becomes unlikely I’ll be able to connect at Frankfurt for London. We pass formidable mountains, the Anatolian plain, Ararat is visible. The Austrian Alps — England spreading out from the Channel. History. Europe. I think of Paritosh’s last words to me: “Everything is linked to everything else. Only connect.” (*Life Sentence*, 109)

Is this a sublimation or reinscription? Are the connections vertical or horizontal? On the return flight Mandel wages intellectual warfare with his seat partner, and asks “What have we learned?” (*Life Sentence*, 109). The choice may not be an actual choice at all, but a choosing (to remain) between, or difference. One chooses twice, always. All Mandel’s journeys take him home, to starting points, to a country of divisions, of (magic) mountains and vast, invisible, interior plains. The word “beginning” is an impossible word, a covering cherub, and what must be faced is the possibility of never having left. Are all the poet’s departures really replacements, heralding the uncanny? At what stage does contact with the alien, Ulysses’ nostalgic longing to set out again, to be carried up, mystically, to new metaphors, to pronounce the message once and for all, yield to death-in-life, to freedom as the vestige, and parody, of everything we have thought to comprehend?

WE MIGHT END by noticing somewhat more explicitly a connection which underlies not only *Life Sentence* but, in various forms, all of Mandel’s writing: that between the institutionality of language (which is tied to Mandel’s status as an academic) and the operation of chance. If, as we have been saying, writing is politics, then every writing act is a game-space, the re-enactment

of a conflict whose outcome is not predictable: stochastic.<sup>15</sup> This is a way of saying that a word, which is also a location, such as “Estevan,” is not a location after all so much as the focus of a game of appropriation and dissemination: “Estevan” is, to paraphrase Margaret Atwood, a word in a foreign language. What kinds of dramatic formation might the writer employ to express his sense that language is implicated in this kind of uncertainty, the sense that language is not an instrument of truth, but a usurper, a de-naturing activity? We might think, perhaps, of Mandel’s earlier collection, *Black and Secret Man*, which, after all, is a re-staging of *Macbeth* which, in turn, is itself the self-perpetuating re-enactment of a crime, or series of crimes, which have already taken place — as the play is ending. (Thus, for *Macbeth*, the “future” — the events which follow from his actions — represent not the new time of the performance of the play, but the return of old time, the past, the dead: Banquo’s ghost. Birnam Wood has always already come to Dunsinane. For him, then, “nature” is a network of omens, foreshadowings, not “phenomena.” Nature is taboo. *Macbeth*’s “future” is the past: “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow . . .”)

The story which *Macbeth* tells is that of cognition itself: the whole drama of what is known versus what cannot be known, or told. Recall Lear on the heath, telling the winds to blow — they are “already” blowing. Michel Serres has described an identical situation as a founding myth of scientific thought itself:

If we define nature as the set of objects with which the exact sciences are concerned at a given moment in history, viewed synchronically (which is a restrictive but operational definition), the emergence of physics, in particular, can be thought of only in the global framework of our relations to nature. Now, ever since Francis Bacon’s work, these relations have been described, from the heights of his social situation, by the command-obedience couplet. One commands nature only by obeying it. This is probably a political ideology — betrayed by the prosopopeia — which implies practices of ruse, and subtlety: in short, a whole strategy. Since nature is stronger than we are, we must bend to its law, and it is through this subterfuge that we dominate it. We are under its orders and turn its forces back against order. This is the circle of ruse and productive hypocrisy: nature is a majorant; we try, ourselves, downstream, to majorize ourselves in relation to it. Here one finds again, intact, an ordered structure, a game, its rule (and how best to implement it), the struggle to seize power, and the closed cycle outlined by these moves.<sup>16</sup>

In effect, “Baconian physics,” Serres says, “made science into a duel, a combat, a struggle for domination; it gave it an agonistic model, proposing a form of ruse for it so that the *weak one* would triumph. It transformed science into a game of strategy, with its rules and its moves.”<sup>17</sup>

We find, here, a theory of history, and a theory of writing as the poet’s commemoration of his “strength against God.” This scenario also suggests an explanation for Mandel’s identification of the politics of language with dreams: not just history as dream, but, as in Freud, history *as* a history of dreaming. But if this is true, then

history is an anti-rationale. History is a history of outcast time. What the poet reads in nature is a signature of the random. Or, order is a form of chaos. (Again, in "Beware the Sick Lion": "A peasant activist found by police, his head bashed in, / both arms broken. Conclusion: train accident.")

Mandel is not dealing in his writing with the simple reduction of random events to a causal chain: this would imply tragedy, perhaps, or satire: the world as dystopia. Nor is he merely absenting ("authorial") intention (as a deliberate, calculated as opposed to purely ironic structure of narrative) from the organization of sequences — as, say, in the novels of Thomas Hardy. (With Hardy, it is still possible to suspect the existence of the hidden, the incalculable, the diabolical.) He is dealing, rather, with the political appropriation of chance: the tactics of the unpredictable, the *unpredictable*, a logic of chaos. We are close, then, to the invisible "companies" and their stranded expatriot agents in Conrad, to the "academies" of Robertson Davies, to the conspiratorial collectives in Timothy Findley. Borges has a story, "The Lottery in Babylon," which posits a "Company," under whose "beneficent influence . . . our customs are saturated with chance":

The Company, with divine modesty, avoids all publicity. Its agents, as is natural, are secret. The orders which it issues continually (perhaps incessantly) do not differ from those lavished by impostors. Moreover, who can brag about being a mere impostor? The drunkard who improvises an absurd order, the dreamer who awakens suddenly and strangles the woman who sleeps at his side, do they not execute, perhaps, a secret decision of the Company? That silent functioning, comparable to God's, gives rise to all sorts of conjectures. One abominably insinuates that the Company has not existed for centuries and that the sacred disorder of our lives is purely hereditary, traditional. Another judges it eternal and teaches that it will last until the last night, when the last god annihilates the world. Another declares that the Company is omnipotent, but that it only has influence in tiny things: in a bird's call, in the shadings of rust and of dust, in the half dreams of dawn. Another, in the words of masked heresiarchs, *that it has never existed and will not exist*. Another, no less vile, reasons that it is indifferent to affirm or deny the reality of the shadowy corporation, because Babylon is nothing else than an infinite game of chance.<sup>18</sup>

We might question whether, in a world which includes the Final Solution, the poet can be other than the director or manager of the random outcome. He is "centered" in a conflictual situation which is always threatening to break apart — and writing is renewed the moment it becomes the record of such tentative couplings followed by destructions. Writing becomes a pointing elsewhere — a series of potential histories, lineages whose endings may always be opened to new places and events. The "meanings" the poet finds on his travels may not be true meanings, but the residuum of meanings in appearances only. They are, perhaps, "intensities" — points of clarification, brilliance — which implies that language is a mode of second sight — only capable of reporting to the poet what he already knows, and



knows that he has lost. He can only go where he has been before. He can only write infinite variations of the same. All events, locales, become substitutions for that home, whose other name is the Holocaust itself.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Eli Mandel, "Journal, Victoria, B.C., 1980," *Life Sentence* (Toronto: Press Porcépic, 1981), 55. All other references to this edition.
- <sup>2</sup> Smaro Kamboureli, "Locality as Writing: A Preface to the 'Preface' of *Out of Place*," *Open Letter*, Sixth Series, Nos. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1985), 267.
- <sup>3</sup> Eli Mandel, "Auschwitz: Poetry of Alienation," *Canadian Literature* 100 (Spring 1984), 216.
- <sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Sigmund Freud, "A Note Upon The 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1953-1960):  
 If I distrust my memory — neurotics, as we know, do so to a remarkable extent, but normal people have every reason for doing so as well — I am able to supplement and guarantee its working by making a note in writing. In that case the surface upon which this note is preserved, the pocket-book or sheet of paper, is as it were a materialized portion of my mnemonic apparatus, which I otherwise carry about with me invisible. (xix:227)
- <sup>5</sup> See Eli Mandel, "On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz: Memorial Services, Toronto, January 25, 1970, УМНА, Bloor and Spadina," *Dreaming Backwards: The Selected Poetry of Eli Mandel* (Don Mills, Ont.: General, 1981), 74-76.
- <sup>6</sup> Robert Kroetsch, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space," *Open Letter*, Fifth Series, No. 4 (Spring 1983), 47.
- <sup>7</sup> Thomas Mann, "Introduction" to *The Short Novels of Dostoevsky*, quoted in Mandel, "Auschwitz: Poetry of Alienation," 214. (Mandel also cited this passage in *Criticism: The Silent-Speaking Words* [Toronto: CBC Publications, 1966], 24.)
- <sup>8</sup> Writing, Mandel tells us, in "Writing West: On the Road to Wood Mountain," *Another Time* (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcépic, 1977), is "a direction, an attraction — something like the movement of a compass needle" (69).
- <sup>9</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, S. E. xviii, 37-38, quoted in Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud*, with a Foreword by Joseph H. Smith, M.D. (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), 139.
- <sup>10</sup> Weber, *The Legend of Freud*, 139.
- <sup>11</sup> Kroetsch, "The Fear of Women in Prairie Fiction: An Erotics of Space," 47.
- <sup>12</sup> See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 20.
- <sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Violence of the Letter: From Levi-Straus to Rousseau," *Of Grammatology*, trans. with a Preface by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), 105.
- <sup>14</sup> See Geoffrey Hartman, *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1981, rep. 1982):  
 Every literary narrative contains another narrative: however continuous or full the one seems to be, the other is discontinuous and lacunary. Jean-Luc Nancy has called this "other" narrative the "discours de la syncope." Given that our minds tend to overestimate, even

when wary or ashamed of it, fictional writing, the reader is usually forced into the position of having to recover the "discours de la syncope," that is, the precariousness of all transitions, or the undecideability of fiction's truth. Every story is like Isabel's in Melville's *Pierre*, and every authoritative title or naming should be treated on the analogy of *Pierre*, or *The Ambiguities*. (107)

- <sup>15</sup> See Gregory Bateson's definition of "stochastic" in *Mind and Nature*, quoted in Alan Davies and Nick Piombino, "The Indeterminate Interval: From History to Blur," *Open Letter*, Fifth Series, No. 1, Vol. 4 (Winter 1982):

Stochastic: (Greek, *stochazein*, to shoot with a bow at a target; that is, to scatter events in a partially random manner, some of which achieve a preferred outcome.) If a sequence of events combines a random component with a selective process so that only certain outcomes of the random are allowed to endure, that sequence is said to be *stochastic*. (32)

- <sup>16</sup> Michael Serres, "The Algebra of Literature: The Wolf's Game," *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), 267-68.

- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

- <sup>18</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Lottery in Babylon," *Labyrinths*, trans. John M. Fein (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, rep. 1974), 60-61.

## PETTING ZOO

*Mona Elaine Adilman*

The blind pony walks in darkness,  
his orbit a lunar path of sawdust.  
His ears ring with the clamor of children,  
the din and snarl of loudspeakers.

Paunched and unshaven, the handler  
licks a dirty index finger  
with his tobacco-stained tongue,  
counts off a wad of sweaty bills.

Christmas manger in the shopping mall.  
The crowd bleats at the baby lamb,  
brays at the moth-eaten dromedary,  
coos at the mangy ring-necked doves.

A pair of Hansel and Gretel geese  
blink in bewilderment. Their keeper,  
the witch, is shredding documents,  
a secret recipe for marinated goose.

# THE COLLECTED WORKS OF BILLY THE KID

## *Scripting the Docudrama*

Manna Jones

7. FABLE, EDMUND, JR. *The True Life of Billy the Kid*. Denver: Denver Publishing Co.

This title was recorded with the Copyright Office of the Library of Congress on September 7, 1881, but there is no record that the copyright deposit copies were received by the Library. Was this item ever printed? If so, is there a copy extant? (13)

— from J. C. Dykes, *Billy the Kid: The Bibliography of a Legend*

**I**N HER 1969 ARTICLE, “The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre,” Dorothy Livesay announced the existence of a class of Canadian poetry she called, alluding to a tradition of Canadian non-fiction film and radio, the “documentary.” This genre, Livesay argued, uses particularized historical and geographical data, is based on research, focuses on a theme or precept and a representative protagonist rather than an individualized hero, and is marked by dramatic and didactic presentation (280). “What interests me in these developments,” Livesay wrote, “is the evidence they present of a conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet” (267). A factual, historical situation, in other words, gives rise to the poet’s fictional, creative musings.

Fifteen years after the publication of Livesay’s article, Stephen Scobie’s survey of numerous examples of recent writing in the genre, “Amelia, or: Who Do You Think You Are? Documentary and Identity in Canadian Literature,” demonstrated the prophetic nature of Livesay’s observations.<sup>1</sup> Scobie extends Livesay’s discussion, and modifies it in light of developments in contemporary literary theory and Canadian writing. While he agrees with Livesay that “The documentary poem appeals to the authoritativeness of fact” (“Amelia,” 270), he notes that the very idea of “objective fact” or “historical reality” that provides the basis for Livesay’s subjective-objective distinction is now being rethought:

The whole notion of 'fact' may itself be no more than a fiction, a linguistic construct — and thus subject, like all linguistic constructs, to the deconstructive play of Derridean 'différance'. . . . So, while the attraction of the documentary may begin with an appeal to the authoritativeness of fact, consideration of the difficulties involved in ever satisfactorily *writing* fact leads quickly to that borderblur area between fact and fiction, in which the categories collapse into each other. ("Amelia," 272)

It is significant to this discussion that both Scobie and Livesay comment on the importance of the document, not just as a source for, but as an active component of the documentary. In the first paragraph of Livesay's essay she observes that "Today we find, linked with the use of documentary material as the basis for poetry, the employment of *the actual data itself*, rearranged for the eye and ear" (267; emphasis added). Her first — and, it might be argued, prototypical — examples of documentary poetry are John Robert Colombo's *The Mackenzie Poems* and F. R. Scott's *Trouvailles*, both instances of "found poetry," a genre whose central gesture is the (re)presentation of non-fiction documents in poetic form. Scobie notes that under his definition, "The idea of the 'document' remains within the poems, as a source of historical fact, as an element of intertextuality" ("Amelia," 269). The documentary poem, then, literally takes written "evidence" of the historical situation into (its) account.

I would argue for a class of documentary writing that takes this principle literally, not simply by sustaining the *idea* of the document, but by self-consciously transcribing "outside" non-fiction documents into a poetic context. This version of the documentary — we might provisionally call it the "documentary-collage" — would include such works as Lionel Kearns's *Convergences*, Robert Kroetsch's *The Ledger* and *Seed Catalogue*, Don Gutteridge's *A True History of Lambton County*, Birk Sproxtton's *Headframe*, Don McKay's *Lependu*, Fred Wah's *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* and Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, all of which quote historical records of one sort or another.

In these works, Livesay's "dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet" is recast as a dialectic between the status of the document as an authoritative univocal "representative" of some "outside" reality, and its status as text, which *constructs* a dialogic historical reality subject to interpretive instabilities and contradictions. This dialectic corresponds to Dominick LaCapra's distinction between the uncritically "documentary model" of history in which "the basis of research is 'hard' fact derived from the critical sifting of sources" and which "is limited to plausibly filling gaps in the record" (18), and the "rhetorical model," which emphasizes "the way 'documents' are themselves texts that 'process' or rework 'reality' and require a critical reading" (19-20). Linda Hutcheon corroborates LaCapra's historical argument in her consideration of the "head-on" meeting in contemporary Canadian fiction of "the documentary impulse of realism" and

“the problematizing of reference begun by self-reflexive modernism” (24). She writes that

If we only have access to the past today through its traces — documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials — then in a way we only have other representations of the past from which to construct our own narrative representations or explanations. Postmodernism nevertheless tries to understand present culture as the product of previous codings and representations. (23)

The documentary-collage enacts exactly the process Hutcheon describes. Rather than ignoring the textual nature of unquestioned “sources” as do LaCapra’s “documentary history” and Hutcheon’s “documentary realism,” the documentary-collage requires that we engage in a self-conscious re-reading of the documents of the past in a present context. Both (realistically or representationally) documentary and (self-reflexively) document-ary, it participates in the process by which, as Hutcheon puts it, “The representation of history becomes the history of representation too” (23).

MICHAEL ONDAATJE’S LONG POEM *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, published in 1970, is a work of documentary-collage. It is a “collected works,” an assembled group of writings linked to the historical-legendary figure of Billy the Kid. Rather than functioning simply as “documentary evidence” of objective, verifiable events, these writings themselves compose a series of self-consciously textual events. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is, therefore, a kind of “docudrama,” a drama of documents, a play of texts that perversely fulfils Livesay’s requirement that the documentary poem be dramatic. The work’s central figure — or, perhaps more appropriately, *de*-centred figure — Billy the Kid, is, as Livesay also requires, a “representative hero.” He is a hero of representation, for these documents are his “collected works” not because he composed them, but because he is composed *of* them. The signifier “Billy the Kid” becomes the shifting locus of their intersection, the place where problems of documentation become unavoidable.

Ondaatje, of course, has the advantage of working with a figure of legend, one which is obviously already filtered through layers of story and whose “true character” is therefore problematic. The poem reveals, however, that history too is “legendary,” always already subject to such filterings. The root of the word legend, *legenda*, means “what is to be read”; Billy the Kid is a legendary figure in the rhetorical sense, constructed in readings and in writings. Because of the multiple, unstable and potentially contradictory nature of readings and writings (and readings *as* writings), however, Billy the Kid is subject to a kind of *de*-constructive

drama that the text also enacts: he is both encoded by it and refuses to stick to the script.

While LaCapra's totalizing "documentary history" is engaged in "plausibly filling gaps in the record," then, Ondaatje's poem asks its readers to seek them out. It approaches the problem of beginnings, for example, by addressing the reader directly: "Find the beginning, the slight silver key to unlock it, to dig it out. Here then is a maze to begin, be in" (20). Finding a beginning involves the reader in examining her own orientation in relation to the text, in finding a place for herself. This discursive positioning may be seen in grammatical terms. In the passage quoted above, for example, "here" is a spatial deictic, and "then" is a temporal deictic, as well as a conjunction. Both are examples of what Émile Benveniste calls "pronomial" forms that "do not refer to 'reality' or to 'objective' positions in space or time," but rather to a "reality of discourse" established by the "utterances that contain them" (218-19). "Billy the Kid" is, I would argue, the poem's central "pronomial" form, since his character is not a simple fixed entity that exists independently of its representations, but is, rather, continually placed and displaced by the reading of "his" collected works. In the invitation "Here then is a place to begin . . .," the shifting relationship between the reader's proximate position "here" and a temporally distant "then" becomes a function of the poem's present reading, which gives past writings a "new beginning" in our "finding" of them as "a maze to begin, be in."

"Be in" is "begin" with a gap, a letter left out. As readers we are looking less for keys than keyholes, entrance not into a teleological structure that terminates in a single exit, but through and into uncertainties. We might recall in this regard the poem's description of the entrance to the Boot Hill cemetery, literally a place one might enter to visit those who have passed/past away:

. . . There is an elaborate gate  
but the path keeps to no main route for it tangles  
like branches of a tree among the gravestones. (9)

The tangled path, which might be associated with "a maze to begin" leads, not directly to the dead themselves, but "among the gravestones," *signs* of the dead, markers of their absence, memorials to them. Later, the poem uses the path metaphor again, this time to mock the kind of literalist biographical "graverobbing" that would attempt to resurrect its subject, but in fact issues in a kind of dead end:

Imagine if you dug him up and brought him out. You'd see very little. There'd be the buck teeth. Perhaps Garret's bullet no longer in thick wet flesh would roll in the skull like a marble. From the head there'd be a *trail* of vertebrae like a row of pearl buttons. . . . (97; emphasis added)

Ondaatje's introduction to *The Long Poem Anthology* quotes a comment on documentary cinema by film-maker Jean-Luc Godard that sends us again to the figure

of the “tangled path.” Typical of Godard, the quotation reverses conventional wisdom on documentary film, but in a way which is quite appropriate to Ondaatje’s re-versing of prosaic documentary material and methods. Godard notes that the documentary is “a road leading to fiction, but it’s still not a road, it’s bushes and trees” (cited in “What is in the Pot,” 16).

Photographic and cinematic patterns in *The Collected Works* have been thoroughly and usefully traced by other critics.<sup>2</sup> The poem’s near obsession with poetic images of photographic images suggests the layering of documentary evidence, as well as a concern with writing as a problematic method of documenting Billy’s career, of showing it by telling it. Godard’s comment on documentary cinema implicates fiction in the process of investigation and interpretation involved in “scripting” the documentary. In this light, we might consider *The Collected Works* as a kind of documentary “screen-play.” It begins, after all, with an empty frame, a blank screen (5), and ends with a list of “CREDITS” which identify the poem’s documentary sources (110). The quotation that appears below the open frame is taken from one such source, the credits tell us, L. A. Huffman’s book *Huffman, Frontier Photographer*:

I send you a picture of Billy made with the Perry shutter as quick as it can be worked — Pyro and soda developer. I am making daily experiments now and find I am able to take passing horses at a lively trot square across the line of fire. . . . I will send you proofs sometime. I shall show you what can be done from the saddle without ground glass or tripod — please notice when you get the specimens that they were made with the lense wide open and many of the best exposed when my horse was in motion. (5)

The very act of quotation, notes Victor Li, “disperses meaning, first, by transgressing the protective limits of the ‘univocal’ or ‘autonomous’ text,” and then, by citing it in a different context, destroying its apparent univocality, “multiplying and scattering its single voice” (297). This is exactly the case for the Huffman quotation. Its ostensibly simple, referentially documentary quality is first and most clearly ruptured by the absence of the photograph in question, signalled by an open frame. As the title of Judith Owens’s paper on the poem, “‘I Send You a Picture’: Ondaatje’s Portrait of Billy the Kid,” implies, the document’s “new” context shifts it from the apparently historical and factual reference of the photograph to an obviously fictional, poetic referent (the poem as a whole), a shift which also changes the pronomial reference of “I” to Ondaatje’s as the text’s “compiler” or “editor,” if not, strictly speaking, its author. The quotation’s reference is further multiplied if we decide *not* to treat the poem as a whole, but as a collection of documents — themselves neither “univocal” nor “autonomous” — successively “projected” like the frames of a film, onto the blank space from which Billy as photograph and referent is absent.

The diction of the passage “speaks to” several other contexts relevant to our



consideration of the poem. Its language is not just that of photography, for example, but of photography as scientific experimentation: "I am making daily *experiments* . . . I will send you *proofs* sometime . . . when you get the *specimens*" (5; emphasis added). Frank Davey writes that "much of the impulse in the twentieth-century documentary long poem begins . . . in the modernist envy of the scientist's access to self evident testimony and precise measurement" (34). It is no coincidence that a lexicon similar to Huffman's (and Davey's) relates to two other related "truth-seeking" activities: the detective's investigation of a crime, and the process of legally trying a criminal, where, as E. L. Doctorow puts it, "society arranges with all its investigative apparatus to apprehend factual reality" (227). The aim of such a process, after all, is to reach a *verdict*, both a conclusive finding and, literally, a "true saying."

IT IS PRECISELY THESE THREE AREAS — scientific experimentation, criminal investigation and legal trial — that Parker Tyler brings together in his discussion of documentary film. He, for example, calls the detective story "a method paralleling the experimental method of science itself; a tentative, and not always successful search for the relevant, conclusive facts" (261). He later notes that in the detective story,

if the crimes treated are, literally or symbolically, already on the books, the verisimilitude tends to compass the fiction itself. For this simple reason: the murderer as individual is technically a fiction until legally convicted; even a suspect . . . is a legal-fiction criminal only, as anxious as a certain group is to consider him a real one. This theoretically imbeds fiction in the chosen theme of fact. Crime detection is therefore allied to the method of scientific knowledge already mentioned as a category of documentary. The whole process of apprehension and trial is an experiment conducted to make a present hypothesis secure in a past fact by connecting, beyond any reasonable doubt, the doer with the deed. (263-64)

The realist documentary must present the evidence necessary to prove its case, to demonstrate that it is the one true story — history. Success, to continue the legal trope, is based on the strength of its conviction. Ondaatje, however, objects to what he calls the "CBC kind of documentary" because in it the element of fiction or uncertainty is not sustained, or indeed was never entertained in the first place. According to Ondaatje, this is the kind of documentary that "knows what it is going to say before the actual filming begins" (Solecki interview, 15). The "documentary method" of *The Collected Works*, on the other hand, ensures that Billy the Kid remains a "legal-fiction criminal only" by, in effect, trying the evidence without settling on a verdict. Like the documentary described by Godard, textual evidence becomes a kind of road to fiction; the document, like the found poem, is a "finding," but not a conclusive finding.

Billy the Kid's crimes are, quite literally, on the books, as the bibliographical credits and J. C. Dykes's *Bibliography of a Legend* indicate: they are part of the historical record. They are also in the book *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*: it contains an itemized list of "the killed / (by me)" (6). When, in that book, we return to the *scenes* of the crimes, then, we should not be surprised to find that they are also scenes of writing. For example, a passage midway through the poem asks about "A motive? some reasoning we can give to explain all this violence. Was there a source for all this? yup—" (54). Stephen Scobie suggests that "simplistic psychological 'explanations' of the source of Billy's violence" are being mocked here ("Two Authors," 194). It should be added that the above-quoted passage is followed by an italicized account describing the savage murder of Tunstall. The documentary "source" of all *this* violence is Walter Noble Burns's book *The Saga of Billy the Kid* which the passage quotes verbatim (see Burns, 48). We are turned away, then, from psychologically rooted clues that require a present psyche to interpret, to intertextual ones, which send us "elsewhere." Jean Weisgarber points out of quotation in general that it both invokes questions of significance and sends us "elsewhere" to investigate them: "It is rather like a question mark, a marginal note, a signpost directing us to some unexplored ground and arousing our curiosity" (143). The question posed by *The Collected Works* is not, therefore, What made Billy the Kid so mean? but rather, What makes him *mean*? That is, How does his figure acquire significance?

Paulita Maxwell's testimony allots her the role of "character" witness in the fictional trial. She explains the absence of another photograph in judicial terms: "I never liked the picture. I don't think it does Billy justice" (19). Her account describes the way the excluded photograph "constructs" Billy: "The picture *makes him* rough and uncouth" (19; emphasis added). Her own version of Billy is quite different, and, as an "eyewitness account," seems at first to supersede the photograph: "his face *was really* boyish and pleasant" (19; emphasis added). That testimony is itself, however, equivocal, subject to its own interpretive agenda. The phrasing of the complete quotation draws attention to the fact that it is not the objective, unmediated expression *on* Billy's face that was boyish and pleasant, but "The expression *of* his face," Paulita's expression of it in her own description (19; emphasis added). In fact, Ondaatje's use of the quotation (taken from Burns, 194-95) stresses that this is not really even "Paulita's" testimony, since it is appropriated first by Burns and then re-cited by *The Collected Works*, which rends it into lines and renders it "poetic." As Victor Li comments, "Quotation makes intertextuality visible" (297). The quotation's meaning is not simply transplanted from one citation to another, but is determined by successive contextualizations.

Another of the alternative stories *The Collected Works* presents is the comic book tale "Billy the Kid and the Princess." In the comic book story the Princess (a "real princess" — a real comic book princess) tells Billy, "I must not go

on being formal with you" (102). In a sense she states Ondaatje's mandate, too: he must avoid the marks of formal closure that denote the completion of story. The comic book tale, for example, while it is formally set off by a page border (page 20, we might note, tells us how Billy and Charlie Bowdre "criss-cross" borders), defies that frame by ending with an ellipsis and a conjunction: "Before Billy the Kid can defend himself, La Princesa Marguerita has taken him in her arms and. . . ." (102). In a film, of course, the two would fade off into the sunset, indicating that the story continues beyond the confines of its present telling.

In a related passage — and relationships among stories are another way of violating closure — Paulita Maxwell sets out to put an end to the proliferating stories about her relationship with Billy, stories which she, ironically, perpetuates by *relating* them, laying the groundwork for the comic book legend, not to mention Burns's and Ondaatje's tellings:

An old story that identifies me as Billy the Kid's sweetheart has been going the rounds for many years. . . . But I was not Billy the Kid's sweetheart. . . . There was a story that Billy and I had laid our plans to elope to old Mexico. . . . There was another tale that we proposed to elope riding double on one horse. Neither story was true. . . . (96)

One place that promises to give us a first-hand, and therefore genuinely *true*, story is the "Exclusive Interview" with *The Texas Star* in which, we are told in a bold headline, "THE KID TELLS ALL" (81). The interview, however (invented by Ondaatje), is more a justification of the failure of the experimental/legal trial than a verdict in itself. When the interviewer asks Billy "Did you have any reason for going on living, or were you just experimenting?" Billy replies that "in the end that is all that's important — that you keep testing yourself, as you say — experimenting on how good you are, and you can't do that when you want to lose" (83). The experiment, in other words, is not directed toward completion, but is an ongoing activity in which Billy the Kid's character is only ever offered on a "trial" basis.

The Kid explains that "I could only be arrested if they had proof, definite proof, not just stories" (81). The Huffman quote that "opens" the volume tells us "I will send you [photographic] proofs sometime" (5). The arrival of conclusive "proofs," however, is infinitely deferred by the poem since, as Billy says in the interview, "there is no legal proof to all this later stuff. The evidence used was unconstitutional" (83). That is, it fails to constitute him conclusively. When Judge Houston offers Billy amnesty, he refuses: "All Houston was offering me was protection from the law, and at that time the law had no quarrels with me, so it seemed rather silly" (81). The judge proposes to give Billy the Kid what he already has; Houston offers him *parole*. In French, of course, *parole* means "word," or, more particularly as defined by structuralist linguistics, it means *individual* utterances as opposed to *langue*, the language system as a whole (Culler, 8). As we have seen,

it is in the contentious, provisional utterances or “works” on/of Billy the Kid that he is both described and de-scripted.

These works do violence to the principle of identity that is central to the project of “connecting the doer with the deed.” When a description in the poem is given from two perspectives, both apparently Billy’s, Dennis Cooley asks “how can Billy know what he doesn’t know, be privileged with two visions?” (225). One answer is that Billy is not “at one with himself”; his eye-witness/I-witness account is dubious indeed, and the lyric I itself comes under suspicion. In order to avoid the law, Billy says, “All I had to do was ride off in the opposite direction” (81). And that is exactly what “he” (the pronoun itself clearly becomes equivocal) does, since the documents in *The Collected Works* both conflict with each other and gesture outward to other intertextual “sources.” Françoise Gaillard comments that opposed to the logic of identity is a “logic of juxtaposition,” which fosters conflicting meanings:

Here there is no ‘right place’ of meaning, simply an infinite number of positions no sooner occupied than abandoned. Every act of judgement takes on a shifting, fluctuating, unstable form. This general indecision entails the destruction of the monadic subject. (145)

Patrick Garrett, we might note in this regard, tells us that Billy “could never remain in one position more than five minutes” (44). In film, if all the images projected on the screen are identical, the effect is stasis, a “freeze frame.” The differential, juxtapositional logic of *The Collected Works* ensures that such recuperation to stasis or “arrested” movement is not possible.

Indeed, in several places “I,” the pronoun that would at least theoretically identify Billy as a self-conscious, self-present speaker, is, like the photographs, omitted altogether, as if in recognition that “he” escapes the integration it seems to signify. The “pronomial form,” literally flickers between presence and absence. One instance of this “disappearing I” occurs after an introduction that draws attention to Billy as a character on the move whose “performance” in reading is likely to be self-revealing — but self-revealing less in a confessional sense than in the sense that it causes his *audience* to “expose” themselves in their roles as producers rather than passive consumers of Billy’s character and story:

Up with the curtain  
down with your pants  
William Bonney  
is going to dance. (63)

Billy’s address to the audience significantly “avoids the subject”: “Hlo folks — ’d liketa sing my song about the lady Miss A D . . .” (64). Further, when Billy’s lover Angie attempts an unusual sexual position at the Chisum home, this “indecisive” dialogue occurs: “Come on Angie I’m drunk ’m not a trapeze artist. Yes you are.

No" (68). As the exchange implies, Billy's identity swings between contradictions; it violates identity itself. Finally, the absent pronoun is equated with a dartboard, literally a field of play which once again invokes audience/participants: "Am the dartboard / for your midnight blood" (85). In the same poem an attempted representation elliptically disintegrates before our eyes: "a pencil, harnessing my face / goes stumbling into dots" (85).

Billy describes himself as "locked inside my sensitive skin," but even that boundary breaks down. Just as Billy cannot be located linguistically as a unified entity, and is formally disintegrated through the fragmentation of his collected works, so he is physically "opened up." Even the human frame does not contain him. Pat Garrett's bullet enters Billy in a poem:

leaving skin in a puff  
behind and the slow  
as if fire pours out  
red grey brain the hair slow  
startled by it all pour (73)

The effect of such a brutal violation is not what one might think. The game is not up: this is not the end either of Billy the Kid or *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. When Billy is asked what happens after you die he replies, "I guess they'll just put you in a box and you will stay there forever" (83). If that guess is right, a coffin becomes the ultimate frame-up, the final case against him, but *The Collected Works* is resistant to such simplistic conclusions. To quote Robert Kroetsch, it "resists endings, violently" (57).

IT IS NO WONDER THEN, in light of all this inconclusive evidence, that deputy John W. Poe has last-minute doubts about the man Garrett shot. *The Collected Works* quotes his version of an exchange that takes place after the shooting: "'It was the Kid who came in there on to me,' Garrett told Poe, 'and I think I got him.' 'Pat,' replied Poe, 'I believe you have killed the wrong man'" (103). *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* depends on the apprehended Billy *always* being the "wrong man." In T. D. McLulich's article, "Ondaatje's Mechanical Boy: Portrait of the Artist as Photographer," he states that "Billy is simply *there*, his existence a fact to be neutrally recorded by the author" (116). The opposite case might also be maintained: that Billy is *never* simply *there*, that his recording in both past and present documents is never neutral, based as it is on both acknowledged and unacknowledged pre-texts.

Terry Gilliam's recent "science-fiction" film *Brazil* provides a suggestive analogy for the docudramatic process of *The Collected Works*. The film's hero, Buttle, is a renegade heating engineer who subverts the department system by "freelancing."

In one of *Brazil's* closing sequences, Buttle finally escapes the government representatives who pursue him. As he walks calmly down a city street, the wind stirs stray pieces of paper around his feet. Gradually, as the number of papers increases, the wind picks up and blows them against his body. He can't remove them. As more and more papers stick he is completely covered; he becomes a paper mummy. Finally, Buttle falls struggling to the ground. A friend rushes to help him, but as he begins to pull the papers off he discovers only more papers. Nothing lies beneath them. The papers disperse. There is, one might say, no Buttle, only re-Buttle. Like Buttle, Billy the Kid is seen as a body of texts; he becomes documentary material. Ondaatje's "documentary history," to its credit, leaves something to be desired: Billy the Kid remains . . . WANTED.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> In a recent issue of *Event*, Susan Glickman objects to the fact that "there has been so much blather about the use of documentary sources in Canadian poetry as something new and in some way especially 'Canadian' . . . What I am dubious about is the claim that this tradition is in any significant way *new*" (107). Glickman's latter point, if taken to its logical end, is certainly a valid one. Indeed, Susan Rudy Dorscht observes of Eli Mandel's "The Long Poem: Journal and Origin" that the poem/essay demonstrates "that there are no poems that are not documentary: that the poems that we write are constructed out of what Livesay called the 'actual data itself.'" What distinguishes much of contemporary documentary poetry, and particularly the documentary-collage, is its self-conscious violation of the inside-text/outside-text distinction and its interrogation of those texts that "prescribe" it.
- <sup>2</sup> Perry Nodelman and T. D. MacLulich, for example, both see the volume as a kind of photograph album which assembles a series of still images (Nodelman, 68; MacLulich, 108), and the latter reads it as "a warning against the dehumanizing consequences of photographic voyeurism" (109). Lorraine York similarly sees the image of the photo as a metaphor both for Billy's destructive attempt to control and fix his own world, and for Ondaatje's attempt to fix Billy's character (104, 106), while Dennis Cooley conducts an engaging analysis of the contrast between still photography and cinematic reference in the poem as representative of controlled modern and archaic postmodern perspectives, respectively. Stephen Tatum, finally, sees a parallel between the poem's "violent manipulations of time and ideas" and rapid editing techniques in cinema and television, commenting that this style "usefully parallel[s] the violence in the outlaw's life (and death)" (152).

## WORKS CITED

- Benveniste, Émile. "The Nature of Pronouns," *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Fla.: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971), 219-22.
- Burns, Walter Noble. *The Saga of Billy the Kid* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1926).
- Cooley, Dennis. "'I am here on the edge': Modern Hero/Postmodern Poetics in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*," in *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*, ed. Sam Solecki (Montreal: Véhicule, 1985), 211-39.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1975).

- Davey, Frank. "Countertextuality in the Long Poem," *Open Letter* 6th series, nos. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1985), 33-44.
- Doctorow, E. L. "False Documents," *American Review* 26 (November 1977), 215-32.
- Dorscht, Susan Rudy. "A Way of Writing I(t) Again: The Concept of Agency in Eli Mandel's 'The Long Poem: Journal and Origin.'" Paper delivered at "The Politics of Art: Eli Mandel's Poetry and Criticism," a conference held jointly by Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Guelph, October 20-21, 1988.
- Dykes, J. C. *Billy the Kid: The Bibliography of a Legend* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1951).
- Gaillard, Françoise. "An Unspeakable (Hi)story," *Yale French Studies* 59 (1980), 137-54.
- Glickman, Susan. "The Ring and the Book: Fact and Fiction in Canadian Poetry," *Event* 17.3 (Fall 1988), 105-09.
- Hutcheon, Linda. "The Politics of Representation in Canadian Art and Literature," *Robarts Centre Working Papers* (North York: York University, 1988).
- Kroetsch, Robert. "The Exploding Porcupine: Violence of Form in English-Canadian Fiction," *Open Letter* 5th series, no. 4 (1983), 57-64.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *History & Criticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985).
- Li, Victor. "The Rhetoric of Presence: Reading Pound's *Cantos* I to III," *English Studies in Canada* 14.3 (September 1988), 296-309.
- Livesay, Dorothy. "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), 267-81.
- MacLulich, T. D. "Ondaatje's Mechanical Boy: Portrait of the Artist as Photographer," *Mosaic* 14.2 (1981), 107-19.
- Nodleman, Perry M. "The Collected Photographs of Billy the Kid," *Canadian Literature* 87 (Winter 1980), 68-79.
- Ondaatje, Michael. *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (Toronto: Anansi, 1970).
- . "What is in the Pot." Introduction to *The Long Poem Anthology*, ed. Michael Ondaatje (Toronto: Coach House, 1979), 11-18.
- Owens, Judith. "'I Send You a Picture': Ondaatje's Portrait of Billy the Kid," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 8.1 (1983), 117-39.
- Scobie, Stephen. "Amelia, or: Who Do You Think You Are? Documentary and Identity in Canadian Literature," *Canadian Literature* 100 (Spring 1984), 264-85.
- . "Two Authors in Search of a Character: bpNichol and Michael Ondaatje," in *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*, ed. Sam Solecki (Montreal: Véhicule, 1985), 185-210.
- Solecki, Sam. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje," in *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*, ed. Sam Solecki (Montreal: Véhicule, 1985), 13-27.
- Tatum, Stephen. *Inventing Billy the Kid: Visions of the Outlaw in America, 1881-1981* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1982).
- Tyler, Parker. "Documentary Technique in Film Fiction," in *The Documentary Tradition: From Nanook to Woodstock*, ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1974), 251-66.

Weisgerber, Jean. "The Use of Quotations in Recent Literature," *Comparative Literature* 22 (1970), 30-45.

York, Lorraine M. "Making and Destroying": The Photographic Image in Michael Ondaatje's Works," in her *"The Other Side of Dailiness": Photography in the Works of Alice Munro, Timothy Findley, Michael Ondaatje, and Margaret Laurence* (Downsview, Ont.: ECW, 1988), 93-120.

\*

*The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council during the preparation of this paper.*

## GLOSSOLALIA

*Anne M. Kelly*

### I

Tongue: blunt-tipped,  
slippery organ  
of muscle and tastebuds;  
homo sapiens use it  
for declarations  
of lingual sounds — in English,  
the 'l' of love, or the 't'  
of hate.

It is often kept hidden  
behind a row of teeth.

### II

In most supermarkets, you can buy a tongue.

Look for a nice fresh one.  
If it is discoloured  
or bruised, the animal  
to whom it belonged  
may have been butchered  
incorrectly.

Do not listen to old wives' tales.  
You need not cover your ears  
when you cook a tongue. The tongue  
cannot say anything;



that dull flapping you hear  
 coming from the pot  
 is *not* a reproach.  
 Neither is it prophecy.

## III

A Chilean torturer  
 on a television show  
 said you learn torture exactly  
 like little children learn A-B-Cs;  
 progress is slow, uncertain — then one day,  
 the whole process suddenly becomes automatic:  
 The hand no longer hesitates before  
 it grinds the lit cigarette out  
 on a woman's nipple; the bile doesn't  
 rise when a man is slowly drowned  
 in a bucket of excrement.

The camera focused on his mouth while he spoke.

He had an ordinary tongue.

## IV

A woman versed in the Kama Sutra has a nimble tongue

She knows tongues  
 are instruments  
 to be played upon the nerve-ends  
 of skin; she knows the sinuous art  
 of tongues can shape

words that widen the pupil,  
 allowing her to gaze  
 all the way in-  
 to the unshuttered eye  
 of a lover.

Before congress, she sweetens her tongue  
 with betel leaves; after breakfast,  
 she practises the ancient art  
 of teaching starlings  
 to speak Sanskrit: they whisper

among the flowers of the Kadamba tree  
 in their liquid voices, pronouncing  
 the difficult syllables  
 of 'beloved' for her  
 with the small, pointed tongues of birds.

V

In English, 'love' begins on the tip  
 of the tongue, and ends  
 somewhere  
 in the throat.

VI

Shoes are dumb, having tongues but being incapable  
 of speech. But once, I heard them speak  
 at a funeral.

At first the church was dead  
 quiet, but the priest wore spanking-new oxfords,  
 and the stiff, black tongues  
 of those shoes squeaked loud  
 inside the shiny black leather,  
 and the squeak echoed back  
 from the incensed  
 upper air  
 of that vast-  
 domed ceiling.

The dead man lay dead  
 in an elaborate white coffin  
 surrounded by violet and apricot spikes  
 of gladiola, and the priest walked,  
 slowly, solemnly, back  
 and forth  
 in front of the dead man  
 to dramatize  
 the meaning of the twenty-third psalm:

*"Yea, [squeak] though I walk [squeak]  
 through the valley of the shadow of [squeak]  
 death, I will fear no [squeak] evil: for thou  
 [squeak] art with me. . . ."*

and the young children watched the priest's feet  
and wriggled on the pews with delight;

and the parents bent the children's heads back down  
to a pious slant, and whispered, *Hush!*

and the priest's face was red.

But the dead man was unperturbed,  
and I thought it might not be such a bad idea

to walk through that valley  
in shiny new shoes with tongues that squeak

loud, in case a little mortal fear  
lingers . . .

## SAPLING

*Brian Burke*

you stand in the hole we've dug  
me with my shovel      you with your hands  
to plant a sapling

& as quickly as I can scoop you out  
& up in my arms  
from crumbling earth to the lightness of air  
spinning  
until you're giggling as a thousand other daughters  
& I'm a second or two from tumbling into that hole  
dizzy  
    to the earth  
                            (or am I just trembling?)  
my equilibrium gone

I will be the one to watch this tree grow old  
planted between your bedroom window & the barn

& I want the sky blue again

# THE STORY OF AN AFFINITY

*D. G. Jones, Archibald Lampman, and  
“Kate These Flowers”*

*Anne Archer*

*(To the memory of Chuck Steele)*

A CURIOUS SILENCE SURROUNDS the poetry and criticism of D. G. Jones. Though a colleague writes of Jones in *Ellipse* (1983) that he “est aujourd’hui un des noms le mieux connus de la poésie et de la critique littéraire canadiennes,”<sup>1</sup> his supporters tend to be a quiet lot. With the exception of ECW Press, who recently added Jones to its monograph series, and *Canadian Literature*, which can boast publication of two substantial articles on Jones, no other major publisher or journal has yet tackled an examination of Jones’s canon. Given his influence as poet, critic, editor, teacher, and translator, such reticence is surprising. What may account for the dearth of criticism, however, is the fact that Jones’s first three books of poetry have elicited a rather lukewarm response from key reviewers. These critics seem unduly wary of Jones’s technical mastery. Both Eli Mandel and Milton Wilson, for instance, indicate that Jones’s concern with form is a sort of liability, that the well-wrought constructions of a volume such as *Phrases from Orpheus* are somehow evidence of a limited imaginative range. As Wilson, who damns with faint praise, argues:

[Jones] does his best work on the vivid edge of dullness. . . . A thin blade of perception and a wise tolerance of the limits of the possible: these are his riches of mind and body. We can expect from him no religious ultimatums, no violent moral struggles, no sensual ecstasies, just a nice balance of sense and sensibility, pierced now and then by splinters of brightness or grief.<sup>2</sup>

Publication of *Under the Thunder*, which earned Jones the Governor General’s Award in 1977, helped to stem but not to eradicate such less than flattering remarks. For on *Under the Thunder* Mandel writes: “The final sense is that it may be politeness at fault here. Not enough was risked. Though it was a daring attempt.”<sup>3</sup>

I would like to explicate this “daring attempt” by focusing on the long-poem sequence that lies at the heart of *Under the Thunder*, “Kate These Flowers” (The

Lampman Poems).” The irony in my choice is that of all Jones’s poems to date, “The Lampman Poems” has been the most enthusiastically received. With characteristic zeal, Douglas Barbour considers them to be “love lyrics of an extraordinary power in which the natural and erotic worlds are fused in a myriad of ways,”<sup>4</sup> and even Robert Kroetsch, whose poetic preferences tend to be Western Canadian, is compelled to devote a page in his study of the contemporary Canadian long poem, “For Play and Entrance,” to Jones’s sequence. Indeed, Kroetsch’s comments serve well as a springboard for my approach to “Kate These Flowers,” for it is within the context of the long poem that Jones’s sequence warrants special investigation. Kroetsch, for example, ascribes the strength of “The Lampman Poems” to the tension between “the erotic and [the] erratic erotic.” He elaborates:

Jones: the wonderful temptation to read nature as woman: behold (but cannot, quite) the sweet cunt of the world. The man as word-monger (remembering Archibald Lampman, remembering Shakespeare, writing versions of the sonnet). . . .<sup>5</sup>

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN in recent years on the contemporary Canadian long poem. Though the plethora of articles on this phenomenon suggest that it is a nebulous item, Stephen Scobie, in “*Amelia*, or: Who Do You Think You Are . . .,” provides us with one of the best working definitions of the long poem. To Scobie, the long poem or poem sequence is a manifestation of the documentary impulse. It is

usually of book length, and narrative in structure. The events which make up this narrative are documented, historical happenings, although the poet will frequently modify or shuffle those events, or add to them purely fictional incidents. The poem often focuses on a single character who took part in those events . . . [and many] of the poems adopt the persona or speaking voice of this central character. The idea of the “document” remains within the poems, as a source of historical fact, and as an element of intertextuality: the central characters are frequently artists (writers or painters), or else keep journals, draw maps, or in some other way produce “collected works” which the poem may either quote directly or else refer to.<sup>6</sup>

Like Margaret Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* or Michael Ondaatje’s *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Jones’s “The Lampman Poems” also fits Scobie’s paradigm. Not only is “Kate These Flowers” seminal with regard to Jones’s canon, but it is indicative of Canadian experiments with the long poem in general.

In the thirteen short, filigreed lyrics of which Jones’s poem consists, Archibald Lampman and his mistress, Katherine Waddell, appear as two moderate Anglicans trying to preserve their passion in a land part “arctic,” part “temperate” — “this country where / desire becomes restraint.”<sup>7</sup> They move through a love which, like

Jones's poetic universe itself, is both creative and destructive. Nursing a "kind of spare / wordless joy," Archie and Kate advance through sex (a "ransacking," "a carnal music" amid the "elementary joys" of their "Arcadia" [81]) and separation ("loneliness becomes us" [85]) to an acceptance of the "absurdity" of their love which "fits out an underground / resistance" (87).

For Archie and Kate, the fragility of their love and their sexual uneasiness rest in an unstable balance. Poised against their loss — as "the last high / hail and farewell of birds / arrow south / wilderness / waste fields become us" (85) — is the promise of spring. In the final phrase, wherein "heaven" becomes a "mortal-flower," Jones presents us, as he does throughout *Under the Thunder*, with the tension between paradise lost and paradise regained. It is "some mixed thing" Archie and Kate "care about," "not this or that" but the weathering of their garden of love. As Jones (Archie) reveals in a single bitter-sweet, layered image:

it is, under all pain, silent  
 laughter  
                     bird, flower  
 you, Kate, briefly on a day in June. (75)

Though Kroetsch's playfully candid adumbration of the poet's concerns is somewhat clumsy next to Jones's exquisite delicacy, it nevertheless alerts us to the central problematics in Jones's sequence. 'Man as word-monger beholds (but cannot, quite) the sweet cunt of the world.' Archie and Kate lack "the stomach to be real / animals" (81). Lampman admits, "we wished / noetic clouds, a marble frieze" (81). For the world of sheer sensuality is a wilderness, a "windswept" underworld. To Archie, whose sensibility is akin to Hawthorne's Arthur Dimmesdale, love-making can signify an act of destruction:

Guard yourself, Kate, like the wild  
 orchid, with neglect, with worse  
 loneliness  
                     what can escape  
 destructiveness, man's damage  
 emu, dodo, wild pigeon  
 numerous herds and flocks  
  
 secret places of themselves invite  
 lovers, and new violence  
                                     flowers  
 in deep woods, beside  
 pools, moist rocky soil  
 petals twisted like brown hair  
  
 even I could not resist  
 ransacking the rare, delicate purse. (80)

Archie wonders, perhaps somewhat prudently: "Who foresaw? / increasing violence accompanies / technique?" (87).

But the rich sensuality of Jones's language counters or subverts the ostensible failure of his lovers. "Kate These Flowers" rewrites *The Scarlet Letter* on Canadian soil. To Archie and Kate, joy and pain rest in an uneasy equilibrium; reluctance becomes desire, while desire becomes restraint. As Barbour suggests, the fusion of the natural and erotic worlds reflects the constantly shifting relationship between success and failure, between the lovers and the landscape. The following segment reveals such duplicity:

Puritan or paradox? This land  
arctic, temperate  
                    white  
like your small breasts, yet  
explosive to the sun. (79)

Or, as "formal and informal, classical and contemporary [combine] together in urgent speech,"<sup>8</sup> to borrow from Jones's own *Butterfly on Rock*:

. . . in the hyaline  
night I recognize  
Thale's [*sic*] world  
                    anchored among  
hyacinth, and moist curls. (78)

And in what remains the most directly sensual of Archie's declarations, Jones uses words to caress, to suggest the fullness of sexual intimacy and the corresponding potential for a radically new language:

Kisses are knowledge, Kate  
aphasia confounds us with a new  
tongue. (76)

Mandel notes that the "transformative power" in the sequence is "language, syntax, image."<sup>9</sup> Though Jones may allow his persona to indulge occasionally in an all too precious manipulation of words, as in the play on "purse," he generally prefers to let language expose itself, so to speak. Note the "transformative power" in the following lines:

thistles matted with their own seed  
haggard thorn trees  
originals  
                    ourselves, or mere  
reticulations of the wind  
nameless  
                    bright precipitates of our desire  
scattered in grass. (85)

Such a passage is vintage Jones: this taut juxtaposition of images combined with a slippery syntax may bear witness to a thwarted sexuality (“thistles matted with their own seed”) or to a suppressed but potent vitality (“reticulations of the wind”). The sequence relies on this ambiguity.

IT APPEARS, THEN, that Jones’s experiments with language, syntax, and image are double-edged, in that they convey his (and Lampman’s) “perverse” propensity to order as well as his delight in the word (world) made flesh. Neither Jones nor Lampman (rather, Jones’s Lampman) can abandon himself fully to process or flux. Archie picks and arranges his wildflowers. Initials of lines spell the names of various flowers, and this conceit, which leads us to accept the poem as a bouquet, is the work of what George Bowering calls an “intelligence noetic.”<sup>10</sup> That is, here as in his earlier volumes of poetry, Jones seems to want to observe rather than participate completely in the minute and often hazardous particulars of his world. In such long poems as “Little Night Journey” and “Soliloquy to Absent Friends” from *The Sun is Axeman*, “Phrases from Orpheus” from the volume of the same title, and “Sequence of Night,” published discretely (and discreetly) in *The Tamarack Review* (1969), his attitude toward raw as opposed to domesticated nature and experience is ambivalent and duplicitous. (This, by the way, is less evidence of a limited imaginative range than it is proof of a sensibility almost too susceptible to the possibilities of darkness and disaster.) And though we may sense a movement in Jones’s canon from an “intelligence noetic” to an “intelligence heuristic”<sup>11</sup> — an intelligence that is open, receptive, vulnerable, and sometimes careless — it seems, to appropriate again the language of *Butterfly on Rock*, that the old Adam in Archie and Jones dies hard.

Aside from the virtuosity of Jones’s performance in “Kate These Flowers,” what impels the sequence is Jones’s sympathy for the figure of Archibald Lampman. Jones does not simply articulate Archie’s concerns, as he does for David Milne (“A Garland of Milne”) and Alex Colville (“Pictures from Colville”), but he becomes Lampman. This adoption of a persona follows the lines traced by Scobie in “*Amelia*, or: Who Do You Think You Are?”: to “dare to get away with it,” to borrow someone else’s identity, is synonymous with “alterity” or the “self-defining aspect of the documentary.” It signifies “the attempt to define the identity of the self by a dialectic process of contrast to the other,”<sup>12</sup> where the other or *alter ego* or double is someone “who is / is not yourself.”<sup>13</sup> That is, in a documentary poem, the poet “calls to his or her own opposite” (we think of Phyllis Webb and Peter Kropotkin in *The Kropotkin Poems*) and/or communes with his or her “secret sharer” (we recall the bond between Scobie and Robert McAlmon in *McAlmon’s Chinese Opera*).



*Butterfly on Rock* contains the seeds of Jones's affinity for Lampman. According to Jones, "Lampman's attempt to escape from boredom and sterility [i.e., his Ottawa life as a civil servant] led him to search for the vital in nature and language" (96); he "knew that the life of the spirit arose from an inner vitality, not from an external order" (97). This vitality, moreover, was to be found not "in the active impulse to dominate nature" but "in nature's embrace" (98). Thus Lampman, who emphasizes in his poetry a "primal energy" rooted in "the irrational vitality of nature,"

becomes a spokesman for the God of Job, who recommends all his creatures are equally good. . . . At the centre of his poetry we may find a celebration of the abundant well of universal energy and of its embodiment or epiphany in the manifold variety of life. (99)

But, notes Jones, regardless of Lampman's apparent acceptance of "nature's embrace," he stresses "the white-throat and the calm of windless days" rather than "the hawk and . . . the hours of storm" (102).

Just as *Butterfly on Rock* in general doubles as a prose gloss for Jones's development as a poet, the poet's assessment of Lampman, in particular, echoes Jones's own aesthetic. Lampman's "primal energy," for instance, has a counterpart in a statement Jones uses as a preface to *Frost on the Sun*. Jones writes, in 1957, that his own poems are

attempts to apprehend and understand fragments of experience . . . to capture and suggest that the universe is a vast pool, globe, or continuum of energy — mysterious and potent — in which the individual thing or creature participates, changes, or dies.<sup>14</sup>

Both poets build on the sun as a symbol for cosmic energy (while Lampman sometimes associates the sun and its energy with the divine, Jones is less specifically religious), and both are concerned with how "the individual thing or creature" manifests this energy. And Lampman and Jones, both of whom possess a "painter's eye for detail," are nature poets who express a common attitude toward the world. It is significant that both poets, when confronting the "Problem of Job" — how "to affirm, to live, and celebrate a world that sooner or later demands of [us] the sacrifice of [our] lives" (8) — favour light over darkness. Indeed, this preference and its ramifications ("we wished / noetic clouds, a marble frieze") inform "Kate These Flowers."

As Kroetsch reminds us, "The Lampman Poems" is also "a book on books": Jones as "word-monger (remembering Archibald Lampman, remembering Shakespeare, writing versions of the sonnet)." In terms of such intertextuality, Jones's love sequence is a sort of sequel to the love poetry written by Lampman to Katherine Waddell. During the last decade of his life, Lampman wrote a number of poems in which Kate figures either directly or indirectly as subject. While Lamp-

man actually presented Kate with “A Portrait in Six Sonnets” (a stylized picture of his beloved), his recently collected late love poems and a long narrative poem, *The Story of an Affinity*, also trace his relationship or “friendship” with his fellow civil servant.

Despite what emerges as a conventional portrait of a grey-eyed woman, “beautiful” and “wise,” Lampman’s sonnet sequence contains several passages worthy of note. In Sonnet III we witness, as in Jones’s sequence, the fusion of the natural and the erotic. Woman becomes nature; nature is woman:

For when I think of her I seem to see  
 April herself among the sunny woods  
 With laughing brooks and little clouds that pass,  
 I dream of bluebirds and hepaticas.<sup>15</sup>

As L. R. Early notes, Lampman’s “imaginative responses to nature, and the meaning of romantic love” merge “in an apparition of April in human form.”<sup>16</sup> The lines by which Lampman brings his sequence to a graceful close are also significant:

Touched by her,  
 A world of finer vision I have found;  
 Less heedful of the common fret and stir,  
 I tread, grave-hearted, upon loftier ground.<sup>17</sup>

Albeit inspired by his beloved, the poet is curiously made more melancholy. This paradox imbues not just “A Portrait in Six Sonnets” but Lampman’s love poetry in general, and is an issue to which Jones responds. As we have seen, Jones treats this conundrum and Lampman’s “dream” of Kate in a single conflated image. To repeat, in a new context:

like grave eyes in the afternoon  
 it is, under all pain, silent  
 laughter  
                   bird, flower  
 You, Kate, briefly on a day in June. (75)

Against the formal, decorous sketch of a friendship in “A Portrait in Six Sonnets” is the more open, less circumscribed account of the poet’s love in a set of poems also written in the 1890’s, collected and edited by Margaret Coulby Whitridge. Granted, Lampman’s previously unpublished lyrics also bear marks of poetic conventions; his “tender stoic,” Kate, is still “beautiful and bright” like “the spirit of a star.”<sup>18</sup> But the poet’s response to his beloved is rather more uncertain here. Plagued by a “restless heart,” Lampman pays homage to a friendship which, while doubtless full of “value” and “purpose,” is essentially problematic. The bond which the poet seeks — a meeting of “kindred spirits” in which lover and beloved are “companions of the soul, and mates / Devoted by the same instinctive need” (45) — seems more an illusion than a deeply held truth. Lampman’s assertion regarding

the oneness of himself and Kate frequently rings with a false bravado: "Between us lives, I know — you know — / The deepest likeness of the heart" (51). The repetition ("I know — you know") undercuts rather than reinforces a conviction of "mutuality."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, a semi-pleading note informs the following lines: "It cannot fail; it must endure, / The friendship that we value most" (51). That Lampman uses a negative construction followed by "must" instead of "will" is, of course, telling. His friendship with Katherine may be the stuff of which dreams are made (*cf.* "A Summer Dream," where the sleeping poet derives "speechless bliss" from a slight caress from his beloved) but its basis in reality seems tenuous indeed. Driven by "fate" and "nature's own decree," the poet appears caught in the maelstrom of a one-sided passion. As he admits:

I travail in great grief for you, my friend,  
My dearest friend and comrade, whom, suited so,  
I may not love, and yet must love, I know,  
With blind and sad persistence to the end. (45)

Emotional and sexual frustration permeate Lampman's love lyrics of the late 1890's; on the other hand, fulfilment is the dominant note in *The Story of an Affinity* (1894). Following D. M. R. Bentley, who suggests that Lampman's narrative poem is "vicarious autobiography,"<sup>20</sup> I would suggest that while the late love poems form a reading of what was, *The Story of an Affinity* concerns what should have been. The eventual and inevitable union of Richard Stahlberg and Margaret Hawthorne is, to a large extent, a prophetic recasting of Lampman's uncertain relationship with Katherine Waddell.

In *The Story of an Affinity*, Lampman, as the title suggests, elaborates on his notion of mutuality. When Richard returns to his family and Margaret after a lengthy hiatus in the "great city," Lampman writes:

When Richard passed that evening through the lanes,  
And up the well-remembered orchard path,  
He had the sense of one that went with power  
To claim a fortune given by destiny.  
He could not think that that mysterious spell —  
He deemed its source to be affinity —  
Whose touch had spurred his clouded soul to life,  
Would miss its fated goal, and not demand  
Reaction on the heart from which it sprang. (53)

Richard and Margaret are soul-mates, doubles, both *alter egos* and secret sharers. As Lampman emphasizes, Richard's passion for Margaret — a passion which guides him to a state of spiritual and intellectual enlightenment — is both cause and effect of an affinity. What the poet could only tentatively proffer in his love poetry to Kate, Richard asserts with conviction. Richard cries to Margaret:

This light, I know, could never have flashed forth  
 With such quick charm, such fruitful potency,  
 Unless our answering spirits had been charged  
 With a like force, and fated sympathy. (59)

The love that Richard and Margaret share is “sacred,” a “law” which overrides any previous commitment, such as Margaret’s imminent marriage to the lawyer, John Vantassel.<sup>21</sup>

This narcissistic union of Richard and Margaret, self with self, so vital to nineteenth-century literature as a whole, seems to signal lasting bliss rather than impending doom. Yet Margaret’s response to Richard’s ardour is equivocal, and reminds us of Lampman’s own response to his beloved in the late love poems:

. . . A strange light broke in upon her soul,  
 A rushing thought, so sudden, so enforced,  
 It robbed her of control, and made her sense  
 A trembling tumult, whereat joy and pain  
 Were equal parts. (54)

Correspondingly, the conclusion of *The Story of an Affinity* is double-edged. The deliberate echo of *Paradise Lost*, in addition to the somewhat odd description of the delirious couple, simultaneously affirms and belies the lovers’ happiness:

. . . without a word  
 They took each other’s hands, and turned and passed  
 Up the cool path between the orchard trees,  
 Wrapt in such thoughts as only they can know,  
 Whose hearts through tears and effort have attained  
 The portals of the perfect fields of life,  
 And thence, half-dazzled by the glow, perceive  
 The endless road before them, clear and free. (68)

Early’s following remark helps to explain such duplicity: “*The Story of an Affinity* deals . . . with an issue at the centre of Lampman’s love poetry: the potential in sexual energy for creation or destruction, in relation to the social order.”<sup>22</sup>

THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN Lampman’s three related tributes to Kate and Jones’s “The Lampman Poems” is not one-to-one. Though Jones appropriates the guise of an “idle poem-maker” addressing a fellow “wander-spirit” who manages to keep above a “world of dreamless vision” (*LK*, 25), his borrowings from Lampman are more indirect than direct. In much the same manner as Atwood subverts the text of *Roughing it in the Bush* to produce in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* a twentieth-century, “fictionalized” picture of Mrs. Moodie (and, for that matter, as Lampman reworks his liaison with Katherine

Waddell), so Jones rewrites the love affair between Archie and Kate. But Jones has clearly assimilated Lampman; fascinated by Lampman's portrait of poet and beloved spirits, Jones extrapolates on the sexual potential of this bond. As Lampman's double, Jones attempts to explore the enigma of Lampman and Kate, of their "strange likeness of heart," and of the ambivalence Lampman himself refers to in "Magic":

Some magic about you, above you  
Increases and will not die.  
I feel you, I dread you, I love you —  
And I know not why. (LK, 32)

In both Lampman's poetry and Jones's sequence, joy and pain, restraint and desire rest in an uneasy balance. The final quatrain of Lampman's poem, "Memories," illustrates such tension:

Though but dreams and memories unsleeping  
Must she give,  
Some for joy and much for weeping,  
By these I live. (LK, 39)

Though Lampman is Jones's *alter ego* and secret sharer, it may be argued that Jones triumphs where Archie falters. As Tom Marshall contends, Jones, in "Kate These Flowers," writes "for Lampman the kind of love poems he could not manage himself."<sup>23</sup> Moving freely in the language of "the petalled flesh" (*Under the Thunder*, 79) — the language that Lampman only dreamed of using — Jones renders "silence" an "orator" for his nineteenth-century mentor and his "Lady." As well, in both "The Lampman Poems" in particular and in *Under the Thunder* in general, Jones "appears as a rueful survivor, aware and ironic, able to continue in his love for an unobliging and shifty world."<sup>24</sup> Jones might have it otherwise, but lacking in Lampman's poetry is a genuine celebration of such a "shifty world." Even Richard Stahlberg, Lampman's own double and an ostensibly invincible protagonist, is marked by a debilitating fear of a recurring darkness, or what he terms the return of his "former impotent cloud-life" (61). Charles Steele, whose comments pertain not just to Lampman's "In November" and "In October" but to his "Kate poems" as well, suggests:

Nature, on the whole, was not for Lampman a convenient and simple environment providing cure and compensation for his sense of social alienation. His first person personae find themselves fundamentally isolated there too, even at the best of times. . . . Finally, the only thing to be done about the conviction of one's isolation may be simply to accept it, and consequently, to make of that stoic gesture some quiet virtue.<sup>25</sup>

While critics may level the same sort of criticism at Jones's poetry, the poet of *Under the Thunder* is not content with such stoicism. Despite a lingering reluctance

to soil his feet in the “fertile muck” of experience, Jones advocates engagement, active participation. A “Preface to *Mainstream: An Unpublished Anthology*,” like *Butterfly on Rock*, delineates Jones’s bias:

Beyond the desire to preserve nature, there is a need to recognize a world beyond human intelligence, beyond man’s capacity to preserve or destroy. . . . [In] its extreme form [it] demands an *encounter* with the world, not for the sake of harmony, not certainly for the sake of comfort, and not even for the sake of survival, but — at the risk of death — to feel absolutely real under the touch of the *other*.<sup>26</sup>

The “other” may be the wilderness or it may be woman or it may be the wilderness as woman as it is in “The Lampman Poems” wherein Lampman, Jones’s double, confronts his other — the world as it is embodied in Kate. As in *The Scarlet Letter*, where Dimmesdale quakes in the arms of his other or opposite, Hester Prynne, the doubling here has its negative as well as positive aspects. (As Mandel points out and as I have already suggested with regard to Lampman’s Richard and Margaret, the encounter with one’s double may signify destruction or the onset of prophecy.<sup>27</sup>) That Jones emphasizes the sexual nature of the bond between Archie and Kate is significant, for it heightens the sense of urgency. Jones’s Lampman confesses: “Truth, Kate, all your virtues / harrow my flesh” (83). As Kroetsch cautions, “*Danger*: deferral (delay deferred) of the encounter.”<sup>28</sup> Or, as Jones remarks in a comment which is particularly resonant in view of the story of his affinity for Lampman: “As long as this dream of earth and this hunger for the naked encounter with it remains inarticulate, unconscious or underground, it will remain sinister, perverse, a crazy distorting force in our lives.”<sup>29</sup> There are, however, no guarantees; whether voiced or consummated, the encounter may still leave us lonely. Jones’s Lampman realizes:

Gone, love’s body, like a field  
reclaimed by winter  
all its flowers, exhausted  
sick of passion, flesh itself  
surrendered to the uniform  
Euclidian space. (84)

More importantly, however, this confrontation has the potential to leave us, as it does in Jones’s account of the union of Archie and Kate, “each more nakedly alive” (82). Unlike the doomed Arthur Dimmesdale, unlike Lampman himself, Jones’s Lampman, like Jones himself, is indeed a “rueful survivor.” In a segment which reminds us of the historical context of the lovers, as well as the close connection between the process/progress of love and of poetry, Archie notes:

Milkweed unpacks itself  
riddling the wind with packaged  
roots, parachutes, poems  
ordnance for a spring offensive. (87)

As Jones-*qua*-Lampman indicates, then, desire to be touched by the other (wilderness, woman) and fear of submitting to this encounter form a shifting relation, a relation characteristic not only of “Kate These Flowers” and the other sequences which comprise *Under the Thunder* but of Jones’s entire canon. For the key to Jones’s poetry is metamorphosis. Antinomies are not fixed and rigid but fluid and protean; self becomes other, other becomes self in a constantly changing dialogue. Though Jones (like Lampman before him) seems to draw on a dualistic, heirarchical, patriarchal system (i.e., self *versus* other), his impulse is towards the abolition of these polarities. To support this approach to experience, Jones and his personae must learn to forego knowledge and certainty (any totalizing vision) for a “constant/reintegration.” Jones may write with a gentle irony of our paradoxical propensity to control change, shape metamorphosis — we think, for instance, of Archie’s floral arrangement; in “Winter Comes Hardly” from *Under the Thunder*, Jones comments similarly on “policy,” the “five-year plan,” and the fact that “who expects, though Bacon wrote ‘Of Gardens’ / roses at Cape Kennedy” (109) — but he also stresses, more convincingly than his nineteenth-century counterpart, the need to relish the wild rose and to accept the worm within the rose. Throughout his numerous poem sequences and by means of his documentaries or retailorings of historical figures like Archibald Lampman and Katherine Waddell, Jones is almost at home with the notion that

the world keeps  
dismantling the syntax, escaping  
a final sentence  
Penelope weaving  
and unweaving, night, day, to  
avoid closure. (98)

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Ellipse* 13 (1983), 4.
- <sup>2</sup> M. Wilson, [Review of *The Sun is Axeman*,] *University of Toronto Quarterly* 31 (1961-62), 437.
- <sup>3</sup> E. Mandel, [Review of *Under the Thunder*,] *Queen’s Quarterly* 86 (Spring 1979), 171.
- <sup>4</sup> D. Barbour, [Review of *Under the Thunder*,] *The Dalhousie Review* 58 (Autumn 1978), 575.
- <sup>5</sup> R. Kroetsch, “For Play and Entrance: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem,” *Dandelion* 8, no. 1 (1981), 75.
- <sup>6</sup> S. Scobie, “*Amelia*, or: Who Do You Think You Are? Documentary and Identity in Canadian Literature,” *Canadian Literature* 100 (Spring 1984), 269.
- <sup>7</sup> D. G. Jones, *Under the Thunder The Flowers Light Up the Earth* (Toronto: Coach House, 1977), 79. All future references to *Under the Thunder* are to this edition, and page numbers are included (within parentheses) in the text.

- <sup>8</sup> D. G. Jones, *Butterfly on Rock* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1979), 181. All future references to *Butterfly on Rock* are to this edition, and page numbers are included (within parentheses) in the text.
- <sup>9</sup> Mandel, 172.
- <sup>10</sup> G. Bowering, "Coming Home to the World," *Canadian Literature* 58 (Spring 1962), 7.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>12</sup> Scobie, 270.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.
- <sup>14</sup> D. G. Jones, *Frost on the Sun* (Toronto: Contact, 1957), dust-jacket notes. Lampman, in fact, uses the phrase "universal energy" in his poem, "Man," from *Lampman's Kate: The Late Love Poems of Archibald Lampman, 1887-1897*, ed. M. C. Whitridge (Ottawa: Borealis, 1975), 38.
- <sup>15</sup> A. Lampman, *The Poems of Archibald Lampman* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1974), 44.
- <sup>16</sup> L. R. Early, "Lampman's Love Poetry," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 27 (Winter 1983-84), 140. Early also directs us to Lampman's poem, "A Vision of April."
- <sup>17</sup> Lampman, *The Poems of Archibald Lampman*, 45.
- <sup>18</sup> Lampman, *Lampman's Kate*, 48. All future references to *Lampman's Kate* are to this edition, and page numbers are included (within parentheses) in the text.
- <sup>19</sup> This is a term used by Early, "Lampman's Love Poetry," 133.
- <sup>20</sup> D. M. R. Bentley, ed., *The Story of an Affinity* (London: Canadian Poetry Press, 1986), xiv. All future references to *The Story of an Affinity* are to this edition, and page numbers are included (within parentheses) in the text.
- <sup>21</sup> *Shades of The Scarlet Letters* also colour *The Story of an Affinity*. Before the natural bond that exists between Richard and Margaret (Hawthorne!), the man-made tie between Margaret and Vantassel dissolves. In Hawthorne's novel, Hester places her faith in the laws of nature (i.e., her union with Dimmesdale), not in the laws of man, as exemplified in her union with the doctor, Roger Chillingworth.
- <sup>22</sup> Early, 134.
- <sup>23</sup> T. Marshall, [Review of *The Lampman Symposium* and *The E. J. Pratt Symposium*.] *English Studies in Canada* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1979), 371.
- <sup>24</sup> T. Marshall, *Harsh and Lovely Land* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1979), 116.
- <sup>25</sup> C. Steele, "The Isolate 'I' (Eye) : Lampman's Persona," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 16 (Fall-Winter 1979-80), 68.
- <sup>26</sup> D. G. Jones, "Preface to *Mainstream: An Unpublished Anthology*," *The Insecurity of Art: Essays on Poetics*, ed. K. Norris, P. Van Toorn (Montreal: Véhicule, 1982), 65.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. E. Mandel, *Another Time* (Erin: Press Porcépic, 1977), 143.
- <sup>28</sup> Kroetsch, 72.
- <sup>29</sup> Jones, "Preface to *Mainstream*," 64.



# THE DEATH OF A TAXPAYER

*John Barton*

“To find a person inexhaustible is simply  
the definition of love.”

— Iris Murdoch

If only it could be this pragmatic,  
a manual advising an efficient settling  
of accounts with the clarity of filed statements,  
the retention of key records  
that in eight years the government  
permits you to destroy.

Almost a year since her death  
and everything remains  
disordered: tax literature, piling up,  
insinuates a way in  
between memories that take you unawares,  
nudges through gaps in the papers  
you shuffle across your desk:

pictures of a quiet wedding that joined  
you so complexly to her being,  
a sudden glimpse of her when barely pregnant;  
of a child's first birthday marked  
by tiny hands smearing  
shit across the nursery walls.

Form letters from Revenue Canada  
remind you that the country  
expects its fair and final share —  
not of your grief or your son's silence,  
or the cooking and the laundry,  
the care of a garden  
you and Kate made  
from nothing, tearing up  
a yard of asphalt, planting mountain ash  
and pink flamingoes, seeding  
a herbaceous border, setting patio stones.

For you death crops up like a beggar  
reappearing on the street,

who hordes money  
tossed into his hat by strangers,  
saves it for a reconciliation that may never come.  
Abandonment persists, a creditor  
with a stacked agenda  
you keep hoping to elude.

Your ribs against your shirt  
are incandescent with loss,  
ribs that have come to shape you,  
ribs under skin that would even now  
respond to her touch.  
Sitting in a chair, I watch you  
haphazardly file and sort,  
uncertain from your face what you read  
suggests tax shelters or reminiscence.  
You talk at random of capital gains  
and your first weeks together,  
of the phantom knots of cancer  
that form hysterically in your thoughts.

I ask questions to reassure you,  
marvel at your laugh,  
can say only now, after months I have known you,  
that in dying she never wanted to leave  
you in her debt.  
Those who really love us are tenacious.  
It was something she could not help.

## APRIL MORNING

*Robert Beum*

Wet sun — honey  
on full forsythia:

after the storm  
a gold storm.

# THE UNYIELDING PHRASE

*Patrick Lane*

**M**Y FATHER WAS BORN ON A FARM near Fort McLeod, Alberta, in 1908. He was not an educated man. My grandfather took him out of school when he was nine or ten and made him work in the fields until, at thirteen, he ran away to make a life for himself. In the next ten years he worked in a warehouse as a handyman, as a rigger in the oil-fields, and as a rodeo cowboy on the small-town circuit of the western plains. His rodeo name was *The McLeod Kid*. I was born in 1939. In 1941 my father went to fight in the Second World War. I never saw him again until 1945. What little I knew of him is what I have told you. He was my hero then. I appropriated his nickname, using it in my boyhood games of Cowboys-and-Indians. In 1978, ten years after his death, I wrote a poem called "The Witnesses":

To know as the word is known, to know little  
or less than little, nothing, to contemplate  
the setting sun and sit for hours, the world  
turning you into the sun as day begins again

To remember words, to remember nothing  
but words and make out of nothing the past,  
to remember my father, The McLeod Kid  
carrying the beat, riding against time

On the rodeo circuit of fifty years ago  
the prairie, stretched wet hide  
scraped by a knife, disappearing everywhere  
to know The McLeod Kid was defeated

To know these things  
to climb into the confusions  
which are only words, to climb into desire  
to ride in the sun, to ride against time

The McLeod Kid raking his spurs on the mare  
the cheers from the wagon-backs  
where the people sit to watch the local  
boy ride against the riders from Calgary

To spit melon seeds into the dust  
to roll cigarettes, to leave them hanging  
from the lip, to tip your hat back and grin  
to laugh or not laugh, to climb into darkness

Below the stands and touch Erla's breast  
to eat corn or melons, to roll cigarettes  
to drink beer, bottles hidden in paper bags  
to grin at the RCMP, horseless, dust on their boots

To watch or not watch, to surround the spectacle  
horses asleep in their harness, tails switching  
bees swarming on melon rinds, flies buzzing  
and what if my words are their voices

What if I try to capture an ecstasy that is not  
mine, what if these are only words saying  
this was or this was not, a story told to me  
until I now no longer believe it was told to me

The witnesses dead? What if I create a past  
that never was, make out of nothing  
a history of my people whether in pain  
or ecstasy, my father riding in the McLeod Rodeo

The hours before dawn when in the last of darkness  
I make out of nothing a man riding against time  
and thus my agony, the mare twisted sideways  
muscles bunched in knots beneath her hide

Her mane, black hair feathered in the wind  
that I believe I see caked mud in her eyes  
the breath broken from her body and The McLeod Kid  
in the air, falling, the clock stopped?

I called that poem "The Witnesses" because that's what I was doing, witnessing an event out of oral history, writing down what I imagined. I took the images of small-town rodeos from my own experience, building out of them the possible history of my father. He was one of those who drew his name when he signed it, a man who sat with a book in his lap in the evening and read it so slowly I believed he could only love single words. Now I know he couldn't read at all, but only imitated the ritual of reading. Was he ashamed? I don't know. I know that my becoming a writer is part of his illiteracy, my witnessing the events of his past and my past and the past of my own people something so crucial I can barely talk about it.

That's why I've started this paper with a piece of my personal history. It's because that's what history is to me, something personal. Just as I can't separate the content from the form of my poems, so I can't separate history from my life. Poets and novelists use history differently from scholars, academics, and historians.

The worlds poets create are imaginary ones. They are worlds designed to instruct both the intellect and the spirit, guides leading toward a new perception of people and things. They work against the abstract, and against what a scientific mind might call the facts.

**T**HE TRUTH FOR A WRITER is not factual truth, but truth as it is imagined to be. A writer like Margaret Atwood can take Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It In The Bush*, first published in England in 1852 and purporting to be a "true" account of life in the wilderness of back-country Upper Canada, and transform it into a sequence of poems called *The Journals Of Susanna Moodie*. Atwood has replaced one fiction with another, she has re-imagined it. No one, of course, believes that the original book was anything more than a fiction although it purported to be an autobiography using fictional techniques, characters, and anecdotes used to represent what Moodie's life was like at the time. Susanna Moodie felt that she was telling the truth. As she herself said on the title page of *Roughing It In The Bush*:

I sketch from nature, and the pictures true;  
Whate'er the subject, whether grave or gay,  
Painful experience in a distant land  
Made it mine own.

The distant painful land she spoke of is my own though for years I thought I lived somewhere else, that Canada was only a temporary place, somewhere I had been dropped off by accident. I was one of those children who believed he must have had another beginning, people more real, and not these ordinary folk who lived in a non-existent place, a place out of time. My people came to North America in 1632 landing at Jamestown, Virginia. They fought on both sides of the American Revolutionary War, my side of the family defeated and drifting north to Upper Canada as Loyalists to the mad King George III of England. That is what my family remembered, that was their pride. The place where we did this remembering was another place altogether, the far West of Canada on the edge of the Monashee mountains in a valley known only to ourselves.

For the generation of writers who came of age during the post-War years Canadian history became an obsession. Their desire was to write it into existence. As they explored their imagined place they created a new image of Canada. This remaking or reimagining transformed the official record, the facts as they were known. To these writers history had to be revised. Of course, that's what writers have always done, bringing history into the immediate world, making it accessible through the medium of art and language. In the early sixties John Newlove says in "The Pride," a poem from his book *Black Night Window*,

we seize on  
 what has happened before,  
 one line only  
 will be enough,  
 a single line  
 and then the sunlit brilliant image suddenly floods us  
 with understanding, shocks our  
 attentions, and all desire  
 stops, stands alone;  
 we are no longer lonely

we stand alone,  
 but have roots,  
 and the rooted words  
 recur in the mind

It is that shock to our attention, the flood of understanding, that the writer tries to achieve. In both Newlove and Atwood, as in all writers, it's that immanent moment they seek. In the case of history it is to have roots, or as Newlove goes on to say in "The Pride,"

the knowledge of  
 our origins, and where  
 we are in truth,  
 whose land this is  
 and is to be.

But it is not only a knowledge of the factual roots of our history he is speaking of. He is speaking about the way a phrase or a line of poetry can change us by its cadence and by its measure, "the unyielding phrase, / in tune with the epoch," which is a quote from an obscure pamphlet by Leon Trotsky. As Newlove has it, "it springs upon us / out of our own mouths, / unconsidered, overwhelming / in its knowledge, complete—." He is speaking of the heightened response we associate with words when they are said in such a way as to move us deeply. What Newlove and Atwood and so many others did in their poems was to shock a whole generation of readers with a sudden recognition of place. A great American poet, William Carlos Williams, called this "a local pride." It was this new pride of place that writers wanted to create. Suddenly there was an emotional, a spiritual pride in what it was to be a Canadian. Who we were became legitimate within the framework of art, an articulated present that questioned what had gone before, and questioned what was to come. But the questions were raised in a new and distinctive voice, a voice never heard before, cadences and measures that were our own, separate and unique.

In the forties and fifties Canada seemed to be a history-less place, particularly in the West. The town where I grew up did not exist a hundred years ago. What Canadian history there was always paled against the history of other nations and

other times. What there was of it also seemed to have happened somewhere else, the mysterious East of Ontario or Quebec, the Maritimes, or even farther away, England and Europe. Even the America below us had a history. The mythography of their West was everywhere in books, films and magazines. A Canadian writer like Howard O'Hagan, the author of *Tay John*, a brilliant and illuminating novel of the Northwest, wrote endless short stories for the American pulps of the thirties and forties. He had to change all the place names in his work before they could be published. The editors knew that American readers needed their own particular identity of place. So Alberta became Montana, Saskatchewan became Utah or Oklahoma, British Columbia became Oregon. The Cree and the Blackfoot Indians became Sioux or Cherokee or Apache and the RCMP became Texas Rangers. It was a legitimate demand. The American reader was an American after all. The great loss to the Canadian reader of those same magazines was that he never knew his own world was being revealed to him, sub-textual, hidden behind another people's nouns and verbs.

WHEN I WAS A BOY GROWING INTO A MAN, everywhere I looked there were only mountains with a few small towns and villages in the valleys. There were still a few people alive who could remember when it began. And then there were the Indians. They could remember what it was like before though they never told us and we never asked. I remember as a boy wanting desperately to go West where I could see real cowboys and Indians. This, in a town which still had hitching rails, buckboards, and enough cattle ranches, cowboys and Indians to make a thousand books. But it was the imagined past I wanted, not the real one I saw everywhere around me.

I remember reading through the popular histories of the time trying to find myself in them, trying to locate my place among the many words. That I didn't exist and that no one else around me did either seemed very important. The town I lived in wasn't mentioned, the valley wasn't, even the mountains didn't exist, the Monashee Range an absence, the Cariboo country non-existent. The newspapers we read came from Vancouver and arrived a day late. Even the present was the past and we weren't there either. All our movies came from America along with all our books and magazines. There was no evidence to suggest we were real. There was no present, past, or future, except in the oral stories of the people, men and women who talked of the old days in other countries, other places, other times.

It's very difficult for most people to understand what it is to live outside of history. It's not only your geography that doesn't exist, you don't either. Andrew Suknaski, a poet from Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan, a tiny, almost deserted town north of the Montana border near where Sitting Bull spent his last safe days after his Pyrrhic

victory over Custer, wrote his town into existence in the book *Wood Mountain Poems* published in the mid-seventies. In the poem, "Indian Site On The Edge Of Tonita Pasture," he writes about the discovery of Indian Tent Rings on the land. He says:

where I grew up — i claim these things  
and this ancestral space to move through and beyond  
stapled to the four cardinal directions  
this is my right  
to chronicle the meaning of these vast plains  
in a geography of blood  
and failure  
making them live

It's important to understand what Suknaski means by "a geography of blood / and failure." For Suknaski and for Newlove and so many others a great loss was suffered when the continent was subdued by Europeans. The "ancestral space" is spiritual space, a spirit represented by the original inhabitants, not only the Indians of our imagination, but the land itself, its animals and plants, its wind and stones.

Margaret Atwood writes of this when she rewrote Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It In The Bush*. Atwood's *The Journals Of Susanna Moodie* was a re-imagined text, a revision of the original seen from a place one hundred and twenty years forward in time, Upper Canada of the 1970's. Atwood writes about the essential failure of our first immigrants to come to an understanding of the new world they had entered. In the poem, "Further Arrivals," she says:

We left behind one by one  
the cities rotting with cholera,  
one by one our civilized  
distinctions  
and entered a large darkness.

It was our own  
ignorance we entered.

That "large darkness" was a continent as well as the back-country of nineteenth-century Upper Canada. It was the edge of European civilization, a place populated by Scots and Irish settlers, some of them the unwashed rejects of another world and others petit-bourgeoisie like the Moodies who could not live at the accustomed level their class demanded of them in England. In the 1830's Susanna was living in the interface, on one side the unknown world of the wilderness with all its perceived barbarity, and on the other her memory of England and Europe, civilization with its rituals and customs of the known world. For Atwood, Susanna Moodie's failure is her inability to cross over, her inability to change, to be transformed. What happens to Moodie is a failure of the imagination. It is this failure and the resultant loss Atwood laments.



In "Departure From The Bush," Atwood writes of a Moodie as a kind of Noah's ark inhabited by the landscape, the plants and animals of her imagination. But Moodie cannot accept them, she cannot give up her imagined history and allow it to be replaced by the new. For Atwood, Moodie is living in an Edenic world where consciousness must be radically altered in order to adjust. Atwood writes in this poem:

He wrote, We are leaving. I said  
I have no clothes  
left I can wear

The snow came. The sleigh was a relief;  
its track lengthened behind,  
pushing me towards the city  
and rounding the first hill, I was  
(instantaneous)  
unlived in: they had gone.

There was something they almost taught me  
I came away not having learned.

The loss is a North American one, the failure to re-imagine a world. Instead, for Atwood, the immigrants imposed upon Canada a European consciousness, refusing to give up the baggage of their past. She ends *The Journals Of Susanna Moodie* with an admonition, a kind of biblical imperative: "Turn, look down: / there is no city; / this is the center of a forest / your place is empty." She tells us we carried an alien history and imposed it upon Eden, corrupting and destroying a possible innocence we might have achieved had we had the imagination to risk it. On the surface this seems simple romanticism but it is really a demand for identity. It is a refusal of the past in favour of the present, a new beginning, another Canada.

Al Purdy writes of this same place, Susanna Moodie's place, the rocky inhospitable country on the edge of the Canadian Shield. It is a place of abandoned Loyalist farms, a land the wilderness has taken back. In his poem "The Country North Of Belleville," from his book, *Being Alive*, Purdy says this land is

a little adjacent to where the world is  
a little north of where the cities are and  
sometime  
we may go back there  
to the country of our defeat

\* \* \*

But it's been a long time since  
and we must enquire the way  
of strangers —

But it was not the land that defeated us, it was ourselves. It was our memory that defeated us, our loss of dreamed original place, and our desire to impose it upon

what we saw as an alien world. Our farms, our cities, towns, and villages, were re-creations of European space and time. Our language itself imposed forms and structures upon this new place, an architecture of sound whose echoes were of England and France. We wanted what we had lost, not what we had found. William Carlos Williams's frustration with Pound and Eliot was based upon what he saw as a betrayal of the American voice in favour of a European one. What Williams demanded was a cadence and a measure uniquely American, a poetry built of "a local pride." In that sense his poetic was as great as Whitman's. It is the same for Purdy, Newlove, Atwood, Suknaski, and others. Theirs has been a new making, something never seen before, done at great risk.

Geographically we are the second largest country in the world but we are a small place with a population huddled along the border of the United States. There are those who think it is because we are afraid of our own space, but the truth is it's as close to the sun as we can get. Behind our backs a great land stretches north to the pole and Russia. It is a sere place of great and remarkable beauty but it is not empty. It is a land full of legend and myth, a place whose history is as old as the world itself, but it is also a new land just as all the Americas are new lands still. John Newlove affirms this in his poem, "The Pride," when he says:

they are all ready  
to be found, the legends  
and the people, or  
all their ghosts and memories,  
whatever is strong enough  
to be remembered.

This is what is needed, a memory, for place does not exist unless we imagine it. My father and mother and the fathers and mothers before them have a right to exist in our imaginations. It is not to refuse our ancient heritage of civilization, but to see it from where we are, not where we were. My father was an ordinary man, just plain folks, but he is as real as my mind, this thing inside that still sees him in his chair pretending to read Zane Grey. His illiteracy was mine. His pretence and his shame my own. It took me forty years to see with new eyes and to speak with a new voice. When I was a young poet in my twenties my father asked me what it was I intended to do to make a living. I told him that was what I was doing, *making* a living. I still believe that. I spoke of that belief in "Rivers Never Seen," a poem from a book of mine called *Old Mother*:

Outside, the new  
land waits for history, a people  
whose past is here, whose first pain  
is the river seen and cupped  
in hands that know no other place,  
the new look in first eyes  
knowing no other face.

# LAKE HURON SUITE

*Peter Baltensperger*

## *The Letter*

Winter is almost upon us:  
the howl of an icy wind,  
and we need more wood.  
We always need more wood,  
comfort or not.

Only the thought is real,  
not the concept, the form.

There's a light at the end of these letters,  
the details, to quote Sartre,  
becoming too much;  
wind-shapes and leaves,  
the fingers of a tree clawing at clouds.

Phone number?  
Quieter than the patterns,  
the transience of change.

Diana has been busy as well,  
working with voice.  
She's often away on Sundays,  
the cats fending for themselves.

You can come in out of the wind,  
gather the splinters of chaos,  
collect multiplicity into compartments,  
and still feel the cold.  
The fires will keep burning,  
ashes or not.

We still need more wood.

## *The Sunset*

Look, there are footprints in the sand.  
Listen to the footprints in the sand.

There's talk of the moon  
not rising,  
talk of waves,  
the scent of cyclamens softer than colour.

Perhaps if the trails were longer,  
random fires along the beach,  
the leaves would not have disappeared,  
and we could have grasped their meaning.  
The terror of not being able to see.

Come in out of the wind,  
the howl of the icy wind:  
there's comfort in chaos,  
solidity among the forms.  
Come in out of the wind.

And the lake looks bored,  
sunset after sunset after sunset,  
blinded eyes squinting,  
frozen hands.

The sky is empty now,  
waiting for the moon.  
Next time, the questions will be precise.

### *The Transition*

Here's a map of the world:  
the sun sets over Lake Huron once a day,  
summer and winter,  
icy winds or not.

To the north,  
there are footprints in the sand,  
leading south.  
To the south,  
there are footprints leading north.  
The cyclamens are in the east.  
You are coming from the west,  
where the sun sets once a day.

Oceans are not important here,  
 nor the waves,  
 though there's talk of the waves.

The green shape out in the lake  
 is an island of questions,  
 the black dot a boat.  
 Just follow the directions;  
 others have lost their way before.

At the end of the letter,  
 arrows.  
 Hope to hear from you soon.

### *The Wind*

In the end,  
 the wind answers the questions:  
 we are born in confusion.  
 A map held against the wind  
 provides new interpretations:  
 either the sun is setting,  
 or the moon not rising.  
 The waves remain,  
 coming and going, like cats.  
 Like Sunday afternoons.

So it is with the wind.  
 Sometimes,  
 the details are too much.

Form is a simplification of chaos,  
 systems artificial structures  
 progressing,  
 products of what we think.  
 No map is large enough  
 to hold what we think,  
 directions or not,  
 not even by boat.

*Summation by Rote*

This, then, is the perception:  
arrows on a map,  
the lake representing the end.

Somewhere,  
logs are burning on a hearth.  
Not for long:  
we, too, need more wood.

Somewhere,  
an echo becomes a wave.  
So it is with the lake.

The letter,  
the sunset,  
the transition,  
the wind.

SWEETMEATS

*Andrew Brooks*

What it all comes down to:  
a pile of humbugs, bought half price  
for a chance at a trip for two;  
a pound of kisses — “love” licked off —  
more colours than neon;  
twelve candy canes, some snapped;  
brown Santas and orange-eyed bunnies;  
a creek of sticky sugar;  
chocolates chewed only by machine,  
stamped date and number;  
jellybeans; allsorts; marshmallows;  
licorice dried over Mongol fires;  
a sweet drink brought for Xerxes  
as his sailors drowned at Salamis.

# PLACE IN THE POETRY OF JOHN NEWLOVE

*E. F. Dyck*

## *Introduction*

This paper studies the role of *place* (especially prairie) in the poetry of John Newlove. Although prairie poetry seems particularly obsessed with place, no study of that poetry treats place otherwise than literally or referentially. Yet *place-as-topos* is a central concept in the rhetoric of invention for both composition and reading. The argument in this paper is that *place* in prairie poetry (represented by the work of Newlove) is a *topos* of invention of both argument and style (figure).

That prairie writing is preoccupied with place has been a critical cliché since the 1950's. Edward McCourt, in a seminal definition, stated that "True regional literature is above all distinctive in that it illustrates the effect of particular, rather than general, physical, economic, and radical features upon the lives of ordinary men and women" (*The Canadian West in Fiction*, 56). McCourt was speaking of course of prose fiction, not poetry, but he might as well have been speaking of both. Carlyle King, trying to avoid the fallacy of regional environmentalism, fell nevertheless into a variant, which might be called the fallacy of regional subjectism: "there are [for example] no Saskatchewan writers; there are only writers," said Professor King, and very sensibly — in view of this assumption — collected an anthology of "writing about Saskatchewan" (*Saskatchewan Harvest*, 1955) which included writers from the prairies (Sinclair Ross) as well as from Newfoundland (E. J. Pratt), all writing about the same place. Both of these examples, in different ways, attest to the effect of place on writers of that place. When that place is the prairie, the effect is most often due to the landscape. As Wallace Stegner puts it, "The drama of this landscape is in the sky, pouring with light and always moving. The earth is passive. . . . These prairies are quiescent, close to static; looked at for any length of time, they begin to impose their awful perfection on the observer's mind. Eternity is a penplain" (*Wolf Willow*, 7).

In the 1970's, Laurence Ricou did for poetry what McCourt had done for prose: exercising his prerogative as an editor, he assembled a collection of the work of prairie poets that showed that "the prairie is a prominent, and often persistent, focus of the poet's work" (*Twelve Prairie Poets*, 7). It has been suggested that this

demonstration was effected as much by Ricou's editorial bias as by the works of the poets, but no one has suggested that Ricou was not at least partly right. Ten years later, Dennis Cooley introduced a new (for prairie literature) reading of the effect of place on poetry. Instead of arguing from the extended reference to place, and relying heavily on the practice and theories of Robert Kroetsch, Cooley argued from the voice of place: "These [prairie] poets . . . wrote out of an increasingly vernacular voice found in the people and events around them" (*ECW*, 1980, 15). But the voice of place is still linked to the environment, including the physical: prairie poems are written in "open forms and rhythms," the models are "idiomatic, open-ended" (17). Significantly, for the argument here being advanced, the reprint of Cooley's special issue of *ECW* was entitled *RePlacing*. (Cooley's later study of the vernacular includes its rhetorical functions — see *Prairie Fire* 8.1 [Spring 1987] — without, however, identifying them as such.)

There is no question that these readings of prairie poetry and fiction, extending over thirty years, have identified a central preoccupation of that literature. Even Eli Mandel, whose perception of place in prairie poetry is somewhat different from those cited above, does not omit reference and literality. Noting that "[t]he theoretical basis of literary regionalism is weaker than the historical or geographical," Mandel offers his "image for the prairie writer" as "the one who returns," that is, as "a man [woman] not so much in place, as one out of place and so one endlessly trying to get back, to find his [her] way home, to return, to write himself [herself] into existence, writing west" (*Canadian Forum*, 1977, 25-26). The place that interests Mandel is a state of mind, "a tension between place and culture, a doubleness or duplicity," a state that is grounded not in "[n]ostalgia, sadness, memory, even affection" of place, but in language and form.

Mandel's image of the prairie poet is an image of a "resident" in the legal and metaphorical sense; his notion of this poet's doubleness manifested in language and form verges on contemporary notions of figure as a "gap" between the signifier and the signified, between "what the poet has written and what he thought" (Genette, "Figures," 47). In Mandel's conception, the poet himself (herself) is a figure of gap-ness in the text: because the figure of the "poet" (ethos) represented in the text (logos) is an instrument of appeal to the reader (pathos), this comes close (as Godard has pointed out, though inadvertently, in "Epi(pro)logue," *Open Letter*, 1985) to grounding poetics in rhetoric. But there is still a great resistance to *naming* the context of all that passes as reading and writing by its traditional name (rhetoric), and Mandel, sensitive as he is to the tradition of which poetry is necessarily a part, cannot bring himself to "eff the ineffable" (the phrase is Robert Kroetsch's, echoing Eliot's delightful "Effanineffable" from "The Naming of Cats" [*Complete Poems*, 209]).

It is well known that even classical rhetoric extended beyond oratory to include reading and writing (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 89; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1404b18; Cicero,



*De Oratore*, 1.150; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book x). In the Middle Ages (see Murphy, 1974, for a full history), Geoffrey de Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* (c. 1208-1214) is an eminent example of rhetoric applied to (written) poetic composition; and by the time of the Renaissance, rhetoric had become a model for "the production of the text" (Plett, 356), as the stylistic rhetorics amply demonstrate (Henry Peacham's *Garden of Eloquence* [1577] is only one example). The equation of the aims and techniques of rhetoric and poetics in the eighteenth century (Stone, Chapters 1 and 3) and the development of "belles-lettres rhetoric" (George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* 1776) continue to be felt, despite the Romantic revolt, through to our own time (Perelman, *The New Rhetoric*).

Through a continuing tradition, then, of over two thousand years, rhetoric has been the art of persuasion in writing as well as in speaking. The notion of *topos* (Gk., "place"; see Lanham's *Handlist* for convenient summaries of the meanings of the terms used here and below) has been a central element in both the art and the tradition. A review of this term, from Aristotle to Perelman, reveals that one definition covers all the known meanings, applications, and instances of a rather ubiquitous concept:

A topos is a *partial ordering*, that is, a binary relation  $\langle -, - \rangle$  such that whenever  $\langle x, y \rangle$  and  $\langle y, z \rangle$  then  $\langle x, z \rangle$ . ("Chapter 1. Toward a Definition of Topos," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation 1988)

This definition says that a topos has two features: it is a binary relation which is transitive. These two features make the definition a model of the role of topos in rhetorical argument, narrowly conceived. Aristotle's "arguments common to all oratory" (for example, "the greater and the lesser") are *topoi* in the sense of the definition above, as are his twenty-eight valid "general commonplaces" (*Rhetoric*, 1392a5 ff. and 1397a5 ff.). Following Grimaldi, the so-called "special commonplaces" may be treated as statements of relevant matters of fact to which the "general commonplaces" are applied (178, 182, 186).

But the rhetorical tradition shows also that topos and rhetorical argument encompass much more than enthymematic reasoning. Regarding the range of topos in the classical era, Bornscheuer notes that "almost any formal or thematic viewpoint, logical or psychological tactic of disputation, objective fact or fictional image, concrete example or symbolic code may attain the rank of a topos" (208; my translation). Historically, the range of topos extends even to the figures of rhetoric, as the following summary indicates:

- (1) classical rhetors speak of both metaphor and the later figures as techniques for the "invention" of style (*Rhetoric*, 1410b5-15; *De Oratore*, III.156); metaphor, in particular, is based on the topos of analogy of similarity;
- (2) in the Renaissance, rhetoric is reduced to stylistics; the stylistic manuals list most of the classical *topoi* as figures (Peacham's list includes *aporia*, *paradox*, *sylogismus*, *climax*, *antithesis*, *distributio*, *partitio*, *divisio*, *et cetera*); the tropes,

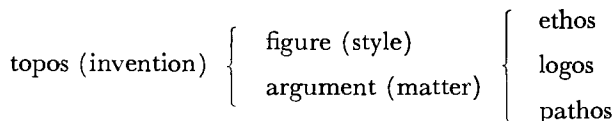
furthermore, are grounded ever more clearly on the classical topoi (see Fenner's Ramistic *The Artes of Logike and Rhetorike*, 1584);

(3) in the twentieth century, a full explication of all the classical figures is achieved using the Saussurean binary, sign = <signifier, signified>. (Group Mu *A General Rhetoric*, 1981, 25-45).

In short, the figures function as places where style is invented; they are bases for rhetorical arguments, broadly conceived, because they either are or are based on classical topoi; and they have the same formal structure as the topoi. To consider a figure as a topos is to recognize this tradition.

A few remarks on trope as topos may help to clarify this point. Traditional definitions of metaphor from Aristotle to Richards have consistently exhibited a binary structure (e.g., metaphor as vehicle/tenor in Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 97) which lends itself readily to treatments derived from the Saussurean notion of sign. Similarly, the symbol, which is synecdochic in nature (Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 30-31), may be treated as an iterated series of binaries using the work of C. S. Peirce (*The Collected Works*, 2.222, 2.230, 2.295, and *passim*). Metonymy is a substitution, hence also binary; and irony (two meanings) shares this structure. That the tropes' binary structure is transitive is obvious (Group Mu).

In the two major models of rhetoric, topos (in the sense of the definition and the tradition) occupies a central position. Aristotle favours a triad, ethos / logos / pathos, in which the topoi (his sense) and the figures are located in logos (*The Rhetoric*, 1355b, 1356a, 1358a, 1382a-1393a, 1397a-1400b); rhetors following Cicero employ the first three elements of a five-part division, invention / arrangement / style (omitting memory / delivery), with the topoi (his sense) embedded centrally in the first and the figures in the last (*De Oratore*, 1.142-43). A combination of the two with the above definition of topos forms the model of reading for this study (arrangement is omitted because the genre studied is predominantly the lyric):



Such a scheme, incorporating more than two thousand years of the practice and theory of reading and writing, suggests that the topoi play similar roles for readers and for writers. If one thinks of composition as a movement from invention to arrangement to style (the Ciceronian model), then the topoi provide the arguments, the forms, and even the figures, approximately in that order (Sloan, "Read-into Milton Rhetorically"; Murphy, *Renaissance Eloquence*, 1983). Reading reverses this movement: beginning with the "finished text," the reader likely perceives

the figures first, notices the larger form next (as in, say, genre), and gets the argument last, moving therefore from style to arrangement to invention. Writing and reading do *not* of course proceed this simply, but if a general heuristics of the writing/reading acts is wanted, then rhetoric provides a model. As Thomas Sloan notes, “invention in rhetorical reading . . . mean[s] exactly what it meant in rhetorical composition, finding the thought already present in the materials” (397). Alternatively (the Aristotelian model), the text (logos, poem) establishes an ethos by representing within itself a narrator who has been much studied in the poetics of fiction (on narratology, see Chatman, *Story and Discourse*). This narrator may be overt (“I”) or covert (the “consciousness” behind the poem or its overt narrator), and his use of particular topoi determines his ethos. Similarly, the topoi presuppose and appeal to a reader (pathos), either overtly (a named addressee or “you”) or covertly (anything in the text is “readable”).

A topos of particular relevance to prairie poetry is literal “place” itself. This topos, which derives from Cicero’s *De Inventione*, appears most clearly in Quintilian under both “arguments drawn from persons” and “things” (*Institutio Oratoria*, v.x.23-31 and 37). Curtius notes its wide use in epideictic poetry (narrative and lyric) in the Middle Ages (*European and Latin Literature in the Middle Ages*, 153-59); Wilson discusses its role in the praise or dispraise of men and their deeds in the Renaissance (*The Arte of Rhetorique*, 24 ff.); and the topographical element in Romantic poetry attests to its continuing influence. In brief, this topos is a relation between a place and the things (persons, deeds, objects) belonging to or associated with that place: if the place is praiseworthy, valued, or preferred, then so is the thing; the attributes of place transfer to the thing in place. Whether considered as an instance of <place, thing> or <if, then>, whether technically a trope or a figure, this topos is a partial ordering in the sense of the definition above.

### *An Early Example*

Direct references to the prairie abound in John Newlove’s poetry. From his earliest published book (*Grave Sirs*, 1962) to his latest (*The Night the Dog Smiled*, 1986), Newlove grounds his work in a referential space and time: a boyhood in the Verigin, Saskatchewan, home of Doukhobors; growing up in Regina; leaving, endlessly crossing, and finally returning to the plains of Saskatchewan. Hundreds of literal references to person, place, and thing combine with occurrences of the words *prairie* or *plain* to establish a symbol of the poet’s imagination, a symbol whose values include despair and hope, the multiple extremes of the human condition, and the desire for and loathing toward home. Newlove and prairie are as inseparable as Newlove and the personae he adopts — the sad-funny-thin-grey man and his double, the fat man.

It is pointless to list here the poems in which “prairie” occurs as a place of reference, either as literal word, or as “plain,” or as generic term for specific words,

or for that matter as symbol with a great range of values. All the poems usually considered to be Newlove's "major poems" contains the word "prairie" — with one exception: "The Fat Man" (1968) is set in a city beside the ocean which, because prairie has by this time been equated to the sea and because the fat man's double is the thin man, is a trope of prairie. Significantly, the three arguably most important works in the Newlove canon — "Ride Off Any Horizon," "The Pride," and *The Green Plain* — are set in the prairie, contain the word "prairie," and are about the prairie. The critical cliché that Newlove is a prairie poet is therefore well founded even if it is not sufficiently grounded (see Barbour, "John Newlove," *ECW*, 1980). If such a grounding were undertaken, it would demonstrate that "prairie" serves a rhetorical function in the poetry: it is a fundamental topos which generates the invention of Newlove's argument, constitutes an essential figure in that argument, and establishes an ethos and a pathos. My argument, in other words, is that Newlove is a prairie poet in a rhetorical sense: his major topos is a binary pair  $\langle x, y \rangle$  of which one term is or belongs to "prairie."

A book such as *Elephants, Mothers & Others* (1963) is heavily and obviously indebted to the prairie as place and experience, but as early as *Moving In Alone* (1965) Newlove uses prairie as a topos. "East from the Mountains" (*The Fat Man*, 1977, 28; for ease of reference, all citations, unless otherwise indicated, will be taken from this collection), for example, situates its narrator away from the prairie on the west coast looking east and back in time. A stanza by stanza summary:

(1) a "single, faltering, tenuous line of melody" is "displayed by a thin man's lungs" in winter (introducing a sound/sight synaesthesia into the poem);

(2) an abstract question — "what to say?" — is answered by "Oh, say nothing. / But listen to the . . . wind" (replacing the thin singer by the wind);

(3-4) the wind's song, however, is silence, snow, the white land, the cold, shining sun (synaesthesia);

(5-6) the injunction "To listen to the . . . wind" is repeated, and this act yields several visual effects: it removes "the idea" of hills and reveals "the real geometry of the land"; this geometry has "no single distinction to ruin / the total wholeness of sweep / of the earth" but follows "the tentative line of a gully" to become "lost at last" in Qu'Appelle where it disappears in perspective like "the tentative line" of the railway;

(7-8) the wind indicates the spaces between cities and covers the sounds of rural and town speech;

(9) this speech ("so hard / to hear what someone is saying," stanza 8) is compared to the singer's weak melody;

(10) and the poem ends with "o tired and halting song!"

The larger figure in this poem is synaesthesia — wind-sound turns into prairie-sight — but this figure is based on two synecdoches:  $\langle \text{wind, sound} \rangle$  is a synec-

doche in which “sound” is part of the whole, “wind”; and <sight, prairie> represents those visual images in the poem that are parts of the seen prairie. Because they share middle terms drawn from the senses, these synecdoches combine transitively to yield <wind, prairie>. This transition more or less expresses the poem’s argument, part of which is the evident intervention of the *narrator* and an appeal to the *reader* (marked by the “senses”). But the argument is enhanced by the references to the singer’s breath (first and last stanzas), which suggest that the pair <singer, breath> may combine with the pair <wind, prairie>, since both breath and wind are air-in-motion, to yield <singer, prairie>. Putting the two together, we obtain the following analysis of the poem’s fuller argument:

<singer, breath> and <breath, wind> and <wind, sound> and <sound, sight>  
and <sight, prairie> together imply <singer, prairie>.

The argument proceeds entirely by figure: in order, these figures are synecdoche, metonymy, synecdoche, metonymy, and synecdoche, yielding the concluding metaphor. That the association of this singer with the prairie proceeds paradoxically by way of the wind which overpowers both speech and song, yet is made the vehicle of both, is countered by the naturalness of each element of the series. The reader who (intuitively) follows each step in this association, that is, who accepts this series of conventional, figurative relationships, will conclude with the poem that the “thin man” sings “prairie.” In so doing, the thin man (Newlove) draws upon a traditional topos of the lyric: poem-as-song or <poem, song>.

### *Three Major Poems*

It has been said that “Ride Off Any Horizon” (*Black Night Window*, 1968; *Fat Man*, 41) is one of the two quintessential prairie poems in Newlove’s work (Wah, “Contemporary Saskatchewan Poetry,” 1986, 216). A rhetorical analysis of this poem not only justifies this judgment but reveals why the judgment is correct. The title is itself a powerful combination of two symbols, a particularizing synecdoche followed by a generalizing synecdoche, repeated six times within the poem. “Ride off” is *pars pro toto* for “leaving”; “horizon” is *toto pro pars* for “prairie.” Both individually and together, these two synecdoches are very rich: ride suggests several modes of travel including train and horse; horse suggests Sidney’s imagination and Wallace Stevens’s noble rider; horizon evokes the mythic union of earth and sky; it also suggests “any direction will do,” circularity, and the end of the world (falling off the horizon is specifically noted in the poem’s third part).

A triplet is repeated (more or less) at the beginning of each of the six parts of the poem: “Ride off any horizon / and let the measure fall / where it may.” The second line of this triplet places one highly charged word in six contexts redolent with inevitability. “Measure” is judgment (and the larger trope of the whole

triplet suggests a reading like “leave the prairie any way you can and let your judgement of it be what it is”), a musical term (recalling the musical analogy in “East From The Mountains”), and a poetical term (in prosody, measure is a rhythmical period, that is, a repeated structure of stress patterns). Measure presupposes repetition; “measure” is part of a refrain; measure therefore serves a reflexive as well as a referential function in the poem. This “measure” is inevitable, for the context established by the phrase “let [it] fall where it may” is *que sera sera* (note the ethical shrug, as in “I’m not responsible”).

Yet, the measure hardly falls randomly. One of the delights in reading Newlove is his employment of the larger trope of irony (including, as it does, a continuing doubleness and duplicity): it was seen in “East” (one is enjoined to “listen” and ends up “seeing”), it occurs here again in the contrast between apparent chance and actual selection, and it will form the basis of his third major collection, *Lies* (1972). The places where the measure falls in this poem are “on” childhood memories, “among” the detritus of prairie history, “off” the edge of the known, childhood world, “on” (a night in) a prairie town, against the British in the Riel rebellion, and finally on the prairie’s “other,” namely, the cities elsewhere. The structure of this list of places is a movement from the general to the specific in two kinds of history — personal (moving from general memory to specific fear and specific sexuality) and public (moving from prairie history to native history) — concluded by a movement away from the prairie altogether. Each “fall” is a harsh measure indeed: the memory is hot, bad, dirty, cheap, and narrow; prairie history includes death, loss, depression, dryness, emptiness, dust, wreckage, defeat, and sadness; a childhood fear is black and annihilating; the night in town is hot and poised on the edge of wariness; the British are damned for their murder of the native peoples in the Riel uprising; and the cities are cold and empty, their inhabitants staring fixedly at the blockage of their visions. These negative judgments of prairie would have to be called mere escapism were it not for the concluding judgment of the cities. By comparison, the prairie is judged much less harshly than the city: on the prairie, it is at least possible to have a vision of an infinity of choices suggested by riding off imaginatively in any direction whatsoever; in the city, this premise simply does not obtain, for “the concrete horizon, definite, / . . . / stop[s] vision visibly.”

The figures in “Ride Off Any Horizon” are four: first, the combined synecdoche in the opening triplet; second, the multiple-valued synecdoche “measure”; third, the repetition of this triplet; fourth, the amplification through repeated application of this triplet to the two kinds of prairie history (personal and public) described above. But this poem’s argument is very different from the argument in “East,” which moved forward by a series of carefully controlled conventional figures: here the reader is moved forward by repetition and amplification, lulled into believing the poem’s appeal to chance and its apparent condemnation of prairie life, only

to be awakened by the last stanza's surprising shift to an even more severe condemnation of the city. Perhaps, we say, the prairie wasn't so bad after all; perhaps, we say, here in the last stanza is the rhetorical reason for the poet's use of repetition (it makes shock possible); certainly, we agree, the vision, measured by its extension, is very bleak and becoming even bleaker. Finally, the poem contains, within these four major figures, a number of lesser figures, one of the most important of which occurs in part three:

off the edge  
of the black prairie

as you thought you could fall,  
a boy at sunset

not watching the sun  
set but watching the black earth,

never-ending they said in school,  
round: but you saw it ending,

finished, definite, precise —  
visible only miles away.

This is a topos of apocalypse, figured by a boyhood fear of falling off the edge of the prairie where it meets the sky at the horizon. Its larger connotation includes the sailor's fear of sailing off the edge of the sea, an apt fear certainly for a migrant poet who judges the place which he escaped *from* less harshly than the place he escaped *to*. That this is a crucial, imagined-yet-real event for Newlove will become clear below.

It is fairly evident, then, that the landscape of the prairie is the locus of the early Newlove's imagination. In fact, it is landscape generally, not specifically prairie, that comprises this locus, and it is the imaginative not the "real" landscape that is rhetorically important. "The Double-Headed Snake" (48) is Newlove's clearest, early statement about "the natural sublime," that is, about the relation of the landscape to the imagination (Barbour, 277). This poem is an exercise in enthymematic reasoning based on the topos "greater and lesser." Its only lines suggest that the "feel" of the mountains and the "feel" of the prairies are somehow opposed; they move to a statement of a major premise — "What's lovely / is whatever makes the adrenalin run"; and, omitting the minor premise, they conclude "therefore I count terror and fear among / the greatest beauty." But "the greatest beauty" (applying the topos) is "to be alive," and this beauty is related to "remembrance," though it "hurts" and is "foolish."

Stanza two repeats the major premise ("Beauty's whatever / makes the adrenalin run") and substantiates the unstated minor premise by an example — "Fear / in the mountains," engendered not by cold and place but by remembrance of the

Indians' stories of "the double-headed snake," makes the adrenalin run. Part of the conclusion of stanza one (that fear is a beauty) follows. Stanza three, again repeating the premise, provides another example of "fear at night on the level plains," again engendered not by cold and place but by "no horizon / and the stars too bright" and by the remembrance of winter's blowing snow brought on by the "wind bitter / even in June." By this time the opposition in similarity between mountain and plain is rather strong, and it is explicitly stated in the fourth stanza: "And one beauty cancels another." This stanza gives three examples of such cancellations: in the mountains, the plains "seem" safe; in Saskatchewan, the mountains "are comforting to think of"; and in the foothills, both "seem easy to endure." One fear (that is, beauty) may cancel another when its place is absent. Remembrance without place inspires no fear or terror.

The last stanza therefore concludes the argument for remembrance in place as the greatest beauty (which was suggested in stanza one, is implicitly argued by each example of beauty so far given, and is clarified by the stanza on cancellation):

As one beauty  
cancels another . . . ,

[like, or because, fear (experienced in mountains or plains) cancels fear (remembered away from plains or mountains)]

. . . remembrance  
is a foolish act, a double-headed snake  
striking in both directions

[so, or therefore, remembrance alone is foolish in both places].

Thus, *remembrance in place*, which inspires fear and terror (which are beauty), is the greatest beauty. And what is this *remembrance*? The poem does not tell us, of course, but it is evidently an active, deep, imaginative response to the landscape, involving place as experience, place as memory, but clearly going beyond both. What the poem does say, does argue, is that remembrance in place is the greatest beauty.

Beauties, in other words, may be ranked: mountains and plains are less beautiful than the fear and terror they inspire; fear and terror are less beautiful than remembrance evoked in place; remembrance in place (being alive, forgetting nothing) is the greatest beauty. The topos "greater or lesser" therefore argues strongly for the priority of the imagination in place over place itself, over feelings inspired by place, and over mere memory.

"The Double-Headed Snake" explicitly argues what is implicit in "Ride Off Any Horizon" — that the escape from an entrapment in mere place is imaginative. Contra Atwood (*Open Letter*, 1973), Newlove knows very well how to escape; and it is not surprising that she discusses neither "Ride" nor "Snake" in her early and important article. A closer reading of Newlove is Jan Bartley's amendment of



Atwood (*Open Letter*, 1974). She reads Newlove as a mixer of “positives and negatives,” a poet who sees what is, despairs, and offers some hope nevertheless. Bartley claims that Newlove’s hope is seen in his “courage,” his “craftsmanship,” and his “versatility” (47); she gives pride of place, at least thematically, to “The Pride,” Newlove’s second most important prairie poem, because it offers a positive vision.

“The Pride” (1977, 67), despite its technical achievement, is flawed by naïveté (at best) or racism (at worst). It is Newlove’s personal ride on a troika of “image,” “ghost,” and “story” to a dubious affirmation of “this land is my land.” Part 1 employs the by-now-familiar technique of repeating a generic term (image) amplified by specific images of the native peoples in their empty land (pawnees, teton sioux, arikaras, cree, athabaskans). Part 2 fills the spaces with the ghosts (legends) of Indians from the coast to the plains: ethlinga, raven, thunderbird, and d’sonogua the wild woman. The distinction between memory and remembrance (see “Snake”) is evoked, for the “ghosts and memories” are waiting “to be remembered.” Part 3 raises a distinctly Eliotian question: “But what image, bewildered / son of all men / under the sun” is yours to worship and to make you whole? Part 4, very short, presents an image of the western country moving quickly through time from the past to the present. Part 5 gives us an image of early eighteenth-century warrior life as remembered by an old Cree and told to David Thompson, followed by the narrator’s meditation on the nomadic ways of the plains peoples, moving restlessly with the wind, following the buffalo, and “wheeling in their pride / on the sweating horses, their pride.” The word *pride* turns the poem sharply from its ostensible subject (the Indian on the plains) to its real subject (the narrator’s attitude to the Indian and the plains, namely, pride of place). This subject is developed in Part 6 as a poem, not a story:

Those are all stories;  
the pride, the grand poem  
of our land, of the earth itself,  
will come, welcome, and  
sought for, and found,  
in a line of running verse,  
sweating, our pride.

More specifically, “a single line” with its “sunlit brilliant image” will shock us beyond desire into the recognition that, alone but not lonely, we “have roots,” and by dwelling on these “rooted words,” by formulating and contemplating “the unyielding phrase / in tune with the epoch,” we will achieve “the [desired] knowledge of / our origins, and where / we are in truth, / and whose land this is / and is to be.” The knowledge is now unequivocally spelled out in the seventh and last part. We are the new Indians: they “still ride the soil in us”; “we become them”;

“they / become our true forbears”; and “we / are their people, come back to life again.”

The technical achievement is stunning: twentieth-century poetics (image, phrase, line) becomes the basis of a claim to the land; the implicit argument of the first six parts is revealed with consummate clarity in the last part (the images have all been “of” the Indian and “by” the poet, the “unyielding phrase” is also coloured white, and the “line of running verse” is Newlove’s very own). Indeed, the proof of the truth of the claim in the seventh part is parts one to six. At the centre of that argument is a sequence of synecdoches:

images (of plains Indians) → image (as an element of poetics)  
→ poem (of the land).

These synecdoches carry the argument forward to its conclusion, though they do not appear in the poem in exactly this order. In the poem, the generic term “image” comes first; it is followed by specific images of “Indian”; next, a specializing synecdoche, “ghosts,” reduces native legend and mythology and prepares us for the generalized “image” and Christian overtones of the narrator’s question; specific images are now replaced by the general image of “the country” from which its native peoples are absent; when a specific image of “Indian” is introduced, the poem turns, on the general term “pride,” away from the Indian’s false pride in the horse (a legacy of the white man) toward the true pride in the white man’s poem of the land; most importantly, “image,” which previously functioned as a generalizing synecdoche (as a general term for many specific images), now becomes particularizing (it is a specific part of that whole called poetry). The poet’s claim to the land, in other words, is precisely that he is able to write the poem of the land by incorporating many specific instances of “image” within an abstract, general term and by changing that abstraction into a particularity within the larger context of poetry. Shelley’s “unacknowledged legislator” here manipulates a take-over of the land with a sequence of binary topoi which constitute the poem’s argument:

<[poet], specific images> and <specific images, image> and <image, poem>  
and <poem, land> imply <poet, land>.

This rhetorical analysis (“finding the thought already present in the materials,” Sloan) hardly needs to be made by the reader: it is sufficient, rhetorically speaking, that s/he feels the force of the poem’s argument; indeed, it is better that the force be felt and not examined, for analysis reveals the argument is naïve, is perhaps too generous: the argument is a “poetic” version of a popular response to Indian land-claims (“at least we did something with the land”). The Indian never turned the land into a poem, whereas “The Pride” does exactly that. The great technical achievement, then, seems blighted by the latent racism that Monkman sees lurking in almost every literary appropriation of Indian history by Euro-Canadian writers (*A Native Heritage*, Conclusion). Assimilation, my native students continually

remind me, is but the other face of appropriation. As Lenore Keeshig-Tobias writes in a recent review of W. P. Kinsella's "Indian" writings, "Maybe now it is time for him [the narrator, Silas Ermineskin, but by simple extension also his creator] to melt back into the prairie bush" (*Books in Canada*, 1987, 25).

### *Some General Places*

*Black Night Window*, then, reveals Newlove as an already skilled rhetorician, employing *figure* (chiefly synecdoche) as a *topos of place* in argument. Newlove himself has indicated his preference for symbol and synecdoche (though he did not put it quite that way, echoing Pound instead with "I try to produce the thing itself," Bartley, "An Interview with John Newlove," *ECW*, 1982, 149). The care and intensity with which Newlove persuades also undercuts the second half of Cooley's suggestion that Newlove was "the first to produce a large collection of impressive Prairie poems, written in open forms and rhythms — structures that evidently suit a large part of Prairie experience" (17). Exactly the opposite is the case: the forms are traditional, rhetorical, and can hardly be called "open," whatever that means. Nor does "Newlove's style exhibit a strong distrust of rhetoric and conventional form" (Denham, 248); it exhibits rather a profound use of both rhetoric and form. Similarly, the rhythms are classical and tightly controlled, as the second major collection (*The Cave*, 1970) demonstrates. Newlove does not think that some structures "suit the Prairie experience": his starting point is rhythm — "The first thing that brought me to poetry was rhythm" (Bartley, 1982, 141); and "It [the poem] mostly starts with sound. Rhythms for me" (143). One rhythmical device that Newlove uses is of course simple repetition (and it may be noted that repetition is the basis of all prosody), but there are others, equally potent. Off-rhyme is a favourite device: the line of melody becomes "lost at last" in Qu'Appelle ("East from the Mountains"); the sought-for poem "will come, welcome" ("The Pride"). And one poem, "The Prairie" (*Fat Man*, 80), bases part of its appeal on "figures of words" (metaplasms), or sound-play.

"The Prairie" is a poem about prairie poetry. It develops its argument by figuring words as excrementa (stanza 1), the prairie as food-source that animals transform into words (stanza 2) which turn out to be insufficient for both history and scene for the alienated narrator (stanza 3) who therefore becomes a perpetual migrant, a seeker of "god or food or earth or word" (stanza 4). The poem admits tacitly that the vision of "The Pride" has failed — but the ability of the prairie to generate poems continues unabated. The words that the poet "compiles, piles, piles" (1970; "compiles, piles, plies," 1977) are so many "dried chips / of buffalo dung" excreted by the "beasts / / the prairie fed." The buffalo roam, men roam as beasts, and the poet too roams endlessly: this is an argument for authentic belonging, but the poet knows he does not belong, that "bred / on the same earth [he] wishes himself / something different, the other's / twin, impossible thing." The migrant

poet, in other words, figures *both* authenticity (the native animals and peoples are nomads) and alienation (he is “never to be at ease,” that is, he is not native).

As noted above, however, one topos in “The Prairie” is sound-play. Besides the “compiles, piles, plies” of the first stanza, the poem features masses/massifs/mastiffs; “words, verbs”; “fed, foddered, / food . . . fostered” in stanza two; a string of -ing sounds (barking, meaning, roaming, something, thing, twining, meaning, migrating, seeking); and the concluding sounds of god/food/earth/word. The overt figuring of the poem as music (“East from the Mountains”) has become actualized as sound distributed throughout the poem; and the sounds of the key words of the poem are repeated in the concluding line. The poem’s sound points to its thought: for the poem is in effect a *distributio* of “word” (piles of excrement, derived from the prairie, insufficient to establish authentic belonging or being-in place, and a cause of endless searching) followed by a *recapitulatio* (or summary). Sound, the basis of this poem’s rhythm, is closely modulated to thought, and it seems that Newlove’s rhythms are not open, either.

“The Prairie” is prototypical of *The Cave* because it foregrounds the basis of any topos, the binary or “double.” Not only is the double the measure of the narrator’s impossible desire (“Desire is what I write about, mostly” (Bartley, 1982, 146)), but it is a major characteristic of the language used to express that desire. Thus, “the words do not suffice” is an *inexpressibility topos* (Curtius, 159-62), expressing what is ostensibly inexpressible (<expressible, inexpressible>). The “lie” emerges strongly as a motif in *The Cave* and becomes a theme as well as a technique in Newlove’s next book (*Lies*, 1972). Lie and truth (<lie, not-lie> or <truth, not-truth>) are contrasted, compared, and explored in a great many poems in *The Cave*: some use the word “lie” in its double sense (“You,” 14; “You Told Me,” 16; “Any Place I Look At,” 22; “Take These Three Months,” 23; “Strand by Strand,” 24; “Remembering Christopher Smart,” 57); others play on the differences and similarities between “lie” and “truth” — here are poems of despair in love, of beauty within despair, of the un-reality of reality. Indeed, the title poem deals with the dichotomy of appearance and reality which is one of many variations on the doubleness of truth and falsehood.

“The Last Event,” a poem about death and war (not reprinted in *Fat Man*), may show how doubleness is incorporated into the topos of place. Much of the underlying imagery is prairie: “Great heaps of captivating skulls, stretched tents of our human / skin, filling the dark plain with mementos” sets the scene. Men have searched everywhere and have departed, learning nothing. War and sickness and death are all that is left in the desolate plain, but situated in this place is a series of duplicities or paradoxes: knowledge, which kills, of course, or is born of misery and surpasses understanding to become “the consummate poise of / a falsified death”; “hands carefully searching for the slack lax vaccine / of warring

love”; “fever . . . and a desire for fever”; and, everywhere too, the play on sound, manipulated to make order out of the “Black chaos . . . below.”

*The Cave* marks a lessening in Newlove’s overt use of prairie as topos. The topos has gone underground, so to speak, and is now recognized as the same topos as the sea: “The flat sea and the prairie that was a sea contain them [the men waiting in the cities]” (“The Engine and the Sea,” *Fat Man*, 76). At the same time, the topos continues to function, ever more subtly, in both figure and argument. “The flower / is not in its colour, / but in the seed” (“The Flower,” 97), for example, uses an organic figure particularly applicable to wheat (whose flower is the colour of the rest of the plant) to make a statement about rhetoric and poetry. It argues that the colour (of rhetoric) is not as appropriate a synecdoche for its flower (poetry) as is the seed (invention or thought) which generates it. The *flower* is in the *seed*, and not vice versa, just as invention precedes style, just as style is more than the mere dress of thought.

*Lies* (1972), a fuller exploration of the binary structure of topos via the double doubleness of “lie” and “truth,” locates the exploration in the prairie in only a few poems, one of which is (nearly) the title poem. The speaker in “White Lies” (*Fat Man*, 101) is away from “home” (prairie) in a rainy place where the atmosphere is “Glum glue.” It is “summer,” and he “seem[s] to remember those winters”:

The hard-surfaced snow  
would have stretched tightly  
over the low hills, vast pearls  
glowing in the night of five o’clock,  
white lies.

The question, evidently, is *what white lies?* The snow? The pearled hills (its sounds — pearls, lies — evoking Shakespeare’s “Those are the pearls that were his eyes” in *The Tempest*)? The too-early night? Or, the winter, or even the whole lot of memories? The recapitulatory position of “white lies” at the end of the stanza suggests they refer ultimately to all these memories and therefore to memory itself. The white lie of mere memory is therefore *not* the imaginative “remembrance in place” of “The Double-Headed Snake” which, we recall, was “the greatest beauty.” There is no run of adrenalin in a narrator who says “The winter shines, I think.”

Two other poems in *Lies*, “If You Would Walk” and “Like A River,” modulate several of Newlove’s concerns. “Walk” (1972, 50) recovers the horizon of “Ride Off Any Horizon” — “One long look down the undulating line of prairie / leads to the horizon”; a hypothetical walk through the fields is repeated to evoke black-birds flying up, dust-devils swirling behind you, and an endless search for the once-seen horizon; and the walk is recapitulated in the “return through the swaying fields and rattling birds / to your own known house, of which you are the core, / more easy as you close the rasping door,” recalling and changing the dis-ease of the

speaker in "The Prairie." This poem has some lovely rhymes and employs a very long line, two features found also in "River" (1972, 51) which contains, in my opinion, Newlove's finest off-rhyme: "we will go on, until we are gone." This rhyme occurs appropriately in a poem in which a plane leaves one city for another as "the sunset flows like a river into the blackening sky." A plane/plain rhyme is implied, for the scene is a "prairie sunset" in a land once peopled by "raiders" and "nomads" who have now been replaced by jet-setting wanderers. An earlier identification between the plains Indian and the wandering poet is here repeated; an earlier identification between prairie and sea is here narrowed in the simile linking river and sky.

Sea and land provide the binary structure of "Why Do You Hate Me?" (*Fat Man*, 117). Briefly, the opposition between sea and land is developed as an opposition between "you" (swimming fish, curving trajectories of blood) and "I" (dull grain, planted in rows), and concluded by "you's" hearing ("hate") the opposite of "I's" saying ("love"). A fine, little poem, "Party" (1972, 69), uses the implicit opposition in a very different manner. At a party, "you" is berated by a speaker (an implicit "I") in such a way as to make clear that you/I are the warring halves of Richard Lanham's bifurcated Western self, that uneasy pair called *homo seriusus/rhetoricus* (*Motives of Eloquence*, Chapter 1). The speaker takes the opportunity for full rhetorical flight in a rhetorical question of great seriousness:

How, trapped in rhetoric's parabola, now constrained  
to faster and faster invention, what lie  
can you explain?

It is hard to free myth (seriousness) from reality (rhetoric).

### *The Green Plain*

Nineteen seventy-seven saw the publication of selected poems from 1962 to 1972 (*The Fat Man*), and Newlove's deliberate choice of the thin man's double for the title only emphasizes the binary topos discussed above. He published no books of new poems between 1972 and 1981 when *The Green Plain* appeared. That book (with Preface, 1981; reprinted without preface, *The Night the Dog Smiled*, 1986, 19-23) is John Newlove's master prairie-poem. The Preface, "An Accidental Life," is helpful in understanding his thematics (but not his poetics); the poem itself is a coming-home to the prairie; and the prairie is both an altogether imaginative and a completely literal place. Technically, *The Green Plain* is more accomplished than "The Pride"; philosophically, it is unmarred by questionable social assumptions; formally, it is a long lyric which places itself in direct opposition to that locus of modern poetry, *The Waste Land*, whose title it parodies. Whereas Eliot celebrated (in a mournful way) loss, Newlove celebrates (in a mournful way) recovery;

where *The Waste Land* marked an apogee of poetic despair, *The Green Plain* marks a perigee of muted hope.

In his Preface to the poem, Newlove articulates the centrality for him of a childhood vision of loss obliquely noted in "Ride Off Any Horizon": "a crystal image" of "a tangible vision of paradise" which "was broken, ruined abruptly after an eternity" by himself as a very young child. As he points out, "Most of what I write seems to me to go back eventually to that day: to the real knowledge of the existence of a veritable paradise and the real knowledge of the tiny monster, the ogre, lurking in like a shadow in that greenness" (Preface). This Blakean vision of experience within innocence, realized in the marriage of heaven and hell that is represented by his work before 1981, is now re-examined in the garden called the green plain.

Because *The Green Plain* comes at the top of a poetic cycle, one expects (and finds) that it re-interprets much of what has come before, both in Newlove's and others' works. Stanzas 1-3 restate the "crowded world" motif of "In the Crammed World" (*Fat Man*, 126): filled with humans and monsters, the world surrounds the narrator with dreams and rain; he wonders whether "civilization / [is not] only an ant-heap at last." Stanza 4 reiterates one of Newlove's central claims to authenticity in place — "Even the nomads roaming the green plain, for them / at last no land was ever enough." Escape — riding off any horizon, in other words — seems impossible and doesn't really solve anything: we prefer "small farms" to "stars," and "all the places we go / space is distorted [by us]" making "the symmetry of the universe" which is our own symmetry seem unsalvageable (stanzas 5-6). Stanza 7 asks again the question in "The Pride," but now in even more general, cosmic terms: "Which myths / should capture us, . . . / or are they the same, all of them?" In stanzas 8-10, the narrator re-dreams a figure evoking Blake's "Nobodaddy," Stevens's "major man," Pratt's "truant [Panjandrum]," and tentatively identified with "Gulliver": this "giant sprawled among stars" is a "huge, image of us" — stupid, slow to learn, capable of delight, ending in hatred. But he is "an image only," an image of a disaster which never happens though "we [do] lose joy and die." The rhetorical questions of meaning in stanza 11 include the image of "the ruined crystal" of the Preface; stanza 12 counters with an image of forests, beautiful in their own being; and 13 corrects Heraklitos: "It is not time that flows but the world." This ceaseless flow of the world moves poets (stanza 14) to speak of spring (stanza 15), and here occurs the poem's first overt reference to prairie — the flowers' perfumes and colours are "rural as the hairy crocus or urban as a waxy tulip." Stanza 16 — by its fragmented sentences, its staccato questions — suggests that the prolonged meditation is leading to the despair implied by the poem's opening lines on the meaning of civilization and echoed in stanza 17 ("Fly-speck, fly-speck"). Then comes the poem's turn and centre (stanza 18):

And the land around us green and happy,  
 waiting as you wait for a killer to spring,  
 a full-sized blur,  
 waiting like a tree in southern Saskatchewan,  
 remarked on, lonely and famous as a saint.

Stanzas 19-22 (the last) state the poem's answer to the question of civilization and meaning: "we live / inside the stars," but "the mechanisms by which the stars generate invention / live all over and around us" and constitute "this only world." The world — varied and spreading, happy and flowing — flows also "through the climate of intelligence" which is a "beautiful confusion," seeing and marvelling. The last words are a lament: "O Memory. . ."

The key stanza (18) of this central prairie poem situates all of "us" as well as "you" (the narrator and the reader) on a "green and happy" plain, "waiting for a killer to spring" (the killer will not spring, however), "waiting like a tree" in Saskatchewan. The topoi <poet, tree> and <tree, prairie> again yield <poet, prairie>; but the middle term *tree* measures the last of several developments in the narrative ethos: the poet was first a singer whose voice was the wind which overcame it, then a wanderer like the plains Indian, and now a rooted, remarkable tree. Such a development is insignificant unless the prairie changes from brown to green as it becomes a garden: <prairie, brown> and <brown, green> and <green, garden>, however, do imply <prairie, garden>.

Newlove's prairie garden is a peculiar and astonishing place. It is raining, but the rain is "arguments and dreams." It is crowded with "small human figures and fanciful monsters," with "forests [of people?] between us." Time's arrow circles back on itself in this garden: prehistoric animals ("dinosaurs") jostle for place with the plains Indian ("nomads"), the citizens of India, and all of us ("Fly-speck, flyspeck"). The garden is "spreading" and "flowing" and "burning." Overhead shine the cold stars.

There are many possible readings of this garden. It is first of all a centre-piece of Christian mythology, post-Edenic, and redolent with revision (the tree is the most obvious instance; the motif of immanent fall is another). It is also a contemporary version of Spenser's "Garden of Adonis" (*Faerie Queen*, III, Canto vi) with its theme of cycles of generation and regeneration presaging his later and more secular vision of mutability (VII, vi, vii, and especially vii.58). It is Blake's "Argument" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* — "Roses are planted where thorns grew, / And on the barren heath / Sing the honey bees. / / Then the perilous path was planted . . ." — and Pound's "*paradiso terrestre*" ("Notes for Canto cxvii et seq."), that "green world" that pulls down man's vanity (Canto LXXXI). But most of all, the garden that is a green plain is Eliot's waste land, radically challenged and updated.

Fortunately for us, Newlove has not attempted to mirror the five parts of *The*



*Waste Land*, though there are many structural parallels between the two poems. Eliot's bored *belladonna* is matched by Newlove's doltish "Gulliver." The flow of *time* marked by the seasonal movement in the parts of Eliot's poem is replaced by the flow of the *world* in Newlove's. Both poems employ sharp shifts in rhetorical situation — compare Eliot's "Winter surprised us" and Newlove's "Rain surrounds us" to the subsequent individualizations of "I think we are in rats' alley" (Eliot) and "Now a dream involves me" (Newlove). Eliot's use of Dante's fire is as different from his predecessor's as Newlove's. Each poem offers a synecdoche of itself in its title and central image — the waste land and the green plain are literal-imaginative places drawn from a traditional topos, namely, the topos of place. The fisherman-poet with the arid plain behind him (<fisherman-poet, waste-land>) tries to escape the waste land; the tree-poet with the green plain around him (<tree-poet, green-plain>) assumes the garden as his natural habitation.

Eliot ends *The Waste Land* on a note of practicality: the thunder has spoken three rules for living (give, sympathize, control); the narrator somewhat confusedly intends to put his fractured world into some semblance of order ("These fragments have I shored against my ruins"); and the last line is a Hindu benediction, "shanti," repeated a trinity of times. Newlove's meditation — which has teetered on the brink of despair — resolves itself in the image of a tree in a fruitful plain. The old centre (Yeats) has not held: Newlove's centre is not an attempted recovery (like Eliot's) of the old images now lying about in ruins; Newlove's centre is the imagination. Where *The Waste Land* lamented lost beliefs and attempted to put Humpty together again, *The Green Plain* offers a relation among the ideal ("stars"), the actual ("green plain"), and the imagination of the poet (the "tree") which accommodates both by being rooted in the earth and pointing to the heavens.

It may help to have Newlove's argument before us:

The mechanisms by which the stars generate invention  
live all over and around us  
and yet we refine machines, defer  
to tricks as discovery. Everything is always here,  
and burning.

There are no surprises, there is only  
what is left. We live  
inside the stars,

burning, burning,  
the mechanisms. (Stanzas 19-21)

The "mechanisms" are not machines but living, burning entities teeming "all over and around us" in the green plain. One of the "mechanisms" is man, that means "by which the stars generate invention." Man "live[s] / inside the stars" as well as in the green plain: this (apparent) paradox is "what is left," the kernel of New-

love's vision. The poet's imagination mediates between heaven and earth: <plain,tree> and <tree,stars> yield <plain,stars>.

Paradox, as has been recognized since antiquity, is the core of the "human condition." Aristotle introduced a "Prime Mover" (motivated significantly like Lucretius' atoms by love) to avert the paradox of infinite regress of "first" causes; Sir Thomas Browne heartily asserted that paradox moved him to ecstasy rather than despair because it led to God; others have been less enthusiastic — the melancholia of Romantic irony, the fear of loss of belief in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," Yeats's assertion of that loss, and Eliot's attempt to recover — all these attest to the centrality of paradox in the disease called humanity. (See Colie, *Paradoxica Epidemica*, for a study of paradox in Renaissance thought; Marvin Minsky's *The Society of Mind* demonstrates an "artificial intelligence" expert's attempts to escape paradox in our time.) Newlove's contribution to the continuing debate about the problem is startlingly resolute: to state the paradox in a singular manner for his time and his place, and that is all. The contrast to Eliot is sharp: Newlove is very conscious of the consequences of paradox for belief (Eliot is not); Newlove confronts paradox, directly stating one (Eliot does not); Newlove does not beg the question of escaping paradox (Eliot does). Thus Newlove can end the poem by praising "this only world . . . flowing through the climate of intelligence," which is to say engaging the imagination actively ("looking," "seeing," "marveling"). This imaginative activity goes by various names: here, "invention"; in "The Double-Headed Snake," it was called "remembrance." Recalling that "remembrance" is not memory, we see why the poem closes with the invocation "O Memory": the muse, Mnemosthene, is necessary but not sufficient for the imaginative act, and the invocation is both a lament and a recognition.

In a curious footnote to *The Green Plain*, Newlove underscores the negative aspects of his muted hope with heavy irony. "The Light of History: This Rhetoric against That Jargon" (1986, 57) alerts us by its title to distinguish "this rhetoric" from "that jargon." Rhetoric is traditionally associated with poetry; jargon is group-specific argot; and Newlove's "rhetoric" is quite clearly his own poetry. Specifically, "Light" takes up the vision of *The Green Plain*, removing death and leaving only an Eden of vigorous life lived in peace and love forever. That the poet considers the Edenic vision "jargon" is emphasized by his use of a syllogistic form (if-then). "When [if] the day comes that these cries [this rhetoric, this poetry]" will be thought "ridiculous," "amusing," and "ununderstandable," "then God bless you happy people." Happiness here depends on ignorance: being unable to "comprehend / sadness or cruelty"; saying "To Hell with it" to "understanding." Again, the ironic conditional:

So long as the green Earth grows  
and the great stars shine, live on and love each other.

Being is admirable and the graceful trees in the wind  
sway in concert with you in this ever deathless world.

There is more in *The Night the Dog Smiled*, of course, but nothing to match the culminatory nature of *The Green Plain*. "The Wandering Tourist Comes Home" (14) evokes the earlier wandering poet motif and a sense of (spiritual) homecoming to family rather than place. The very fine "White Philharmonic Novels" (58-68) is, like *The Green Plain*, a summing up, but a summing up of the rhetoric of poetry generally rather than of the topos of place (the technique of that poem is stated within the poem — "arrangement is all"). Hence, the findings in this paper with respect to Newlove's use of the topos <prairie,x> would have to rest with the evidence of *The Green Plain*.

### Conclusion

The argument has been that Newlove's major topos is <prairie,x>. As defined above, the topoi are sources of both figure and argument, and the figures themselves may function as topoi. Thus, the notion of topos explicates the sense in which Newlove's poetry is rhetorical: its argument is drawn from a topos, <prairie,x>, which itself constitutes an argument from place. Particular examples of this topos include synecdoches such as <singer,prairie> ("East from the Mountains"), <measure,prairie> ("Ride Off Any Horizon"), <poet,land> ("The Pride"), and <tree-poet,plain> ("The Green Plain"). Other topoi (amplification, repetition, greater-lesser, metaplasm, paradox) are used in poems about both prairie and prairie poetry ("The Double-Headed Snake" and "The Prairie" are notable examples). Newlove's poetry, in other words, demands a rhetorical reading because it is rhetorically based.

### WORKS CITED

- Aristotle. *The Rhetoric. The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Rev. Oxford trans., 2 vols. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton Univ. Press, 1984.
- Atwood, Margaret. "How Do I Get Out of Here: The Poetry of John Newlove." *Open Letter* Ser. 2, 4 (Spring 1973): 59-70.
- Barbour, Douglas. "John Newlove: More Than Just Despair; Some Further Approaches." *ECW* 18/19 (Summer/Fall 1980): 256-80.
- Bartley, Jan. "Something in Which to Believe for Once: The Poetry of John Newlove." *Open Letter* Ser. 2, 9 (Fall 1974): 19-48.
- . "An Interview with John Newlove." *ECW* 23 (Spring 1982): 135-56.
- Blake, William. *The Complete Prose and Poetry of William Blake*. Rev. ed. Ed. David V. Erdman. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982.
- Bornscheuer, Lothar. "Zehn Thesen zur Ambivalenz der Rhetorik und zum Spannungsgefuege des Topos-Begriffs." *Rhetorik*. Ed. Heinrich F. Plett. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1977.
- Browne, Sir Thomas. *Religio Medici and Other Works*. Ed. L. C. Martin. Oxford Univ. Press, 1964.

- Campbell, George. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. 1776. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1963.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Cornell Univ. Press, 1978.
- Cicero. *De Oratore*. The Loeb Classical Library. Harvard Univ. Press, 1942 and 1948.
- Coleridge, S. T. *The Statesman's Manual*. 1816. *Lay Sermons*. Ed. R. J. White. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Vol. 6. Princeton Univ. Press, 1972. 1-114.
- Colie, Rosalie L. *Paradoxica Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*. Princeton Univ. Press, 1966.
- Cooley, Dennis. "RePlacing." *ECW* 18/19 (Summer/Fall 1980/81): 9-20.
- . "The Vernacular Muse in Prairie Poetry (Part 2)." *Prairie Fire* 8.1 (Spring 1987): 60-70.
- Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans. W. R. Trask. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953.
- De Vinsauf, Geoffrey. *The Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*. Trans. Margaret F. Nims. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1967.
- Denham, Paul, ed. *The Evolution of Canadian Literature in English 1945-1970*. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973.
- Eliot, T. S. *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*. London: Faber and Faber, 1969.
- Fenner, Dudley. *The Arte of Logike and Rhetorike (1584). Four Tudor Books on Education*. Ed. Robert Pepper. Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1966. 151-80.
- Genette, Gerard. "Figures." *Figures of Literary Discourse*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982.
- Godard, Barbara. "Epi(pro)logue." *Open Letter* Ser. 6, 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1985): 301-35.
- Group Mu. *A General Rhetoric*. Trans. Paul Burrell and Edgar Slotkin. Cornell Univ. Press, 1981.
- Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. Review. *Books in Canada* (January-February 1987): 25.
- King, Carlyle A., ed. *Saskatchewan Harvest: A Golden Jubilee Selection of Song and Story*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1955.
- Kroetsch, Robert. *Essays*. Ed. Frank Davey and bp Nichol. *Open Letter* Ser. 5, 4 (Spring 1983).
- Lanham, Richard A. *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*. Univ. of California Press, 1969.
- . *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance*. Yale Univ. Press, 1976.
- Mandel, Eli. "Writing West: On the Road to Wood Mountain." *Canadian Forum* (June-July 1977): 25-29.
- McCourt, Edward M. *The Canadian West in Fiction*. (First pub. 1949.) Rev. ed. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970.
- Minsky, Marvin. *The Society of Mind*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987.

- Monkman, Leslie. *A Native Heritage: Images of the Indian in English-Canadian Literature*. Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981.
- Newlove, John. *Black Night Window*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968.
- . *The Cave*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.
- . *Lies*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972.
- . *The Fat Man: Selected Poems 1962-1972*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977.
- . *The Green Plain*. Lantzville, B.C.: Oolichan Books, 1981.
- . *The Night the Dog Smiled*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1986.
- Peacham, Henry. *The Garden of Eloquence*. 1577. Meuston, England: The Scholar Press, 1971.
- Peirce, C. S. *The Collected Papers of C. S. Peirce*. Vol. 2. Ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Harvard Univ. Press, 1960.
- Perelman, Chaim and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver. Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969.
- Plato. *Plato: Euthyphro — Apology — Crito — Phaedo — Phaedrus*. Trans. H. N. Fowler. The Loeb Classical Library. Harvard Univ. Press, 1925.
- Plett, Heinrich F. "The Place and Function of Style in Renaissance Poetics." *Renaissance Eloquence*. Ed. James J. Murphy. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983. 356-75.
- Pound, Ezra. *Selected Poems 1908-1959*. London: Faber and Faber, 1975; rpt. with additions, 1977.
- Pratt, E. J. *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt*. 2nd ed. Ed. Northrop Frye. Toronto: Macmillan, 1958.
- Quintilian. *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*. Trans. H. H. Butler. The Loeb Classical Library. New York: G. P. Puttenham's Sons, 1921-22.
- Richards, I. A. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Oxford Univ. Press, 1936.
- Ricou, Laurence, ed. *Twelve Prairie Poets*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.
- Sloan, Thomas O. "Reading Milton Rhetorically." *Renaissance Eloquence*. Ed. James J. Murphy. Univ. of California Press, 1983. 394-410.
- Spenser, Edmund. *Spenser: Poetical Works*. Ed. J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt. Oxford Univ. Press, 1970.
- Stegner, Wallace. *Wolf Willow*. New York: Viking Press, 1962.
- Stevens, Wallace. *The Palm at the End of the Mind*. Ed. Holly Stevens. New York: Knopf, 1971.
- Stone, P. K. W. *The Art of Poetry 1750-1820*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967.
- Wah, Fred. "Contemporary Saskatchewan Poetry." *Essays on Saskatchewan Writing*. Ed. E. F. Dyck. Regina: SWG, 1987.
- Wilson, Thomas. *The Arte of Rhetorique*. 1553. Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1962.

# LIVING DAY BY DAY

*Lorna Crozier*

I have no children and he has five,  
three of them grown up, two with their mother.  
It didn't matter when I was thirty and we met.  
*There'll be no children*, he said, the first night  
we slept together and I didn't care,  
thought we wouldn't last anyway,  
those terrible fights,  
he and I struggling to be the first  
to pack, the first one out the door.  
Once I made it to the car before him,  
locked him out. He jumped on the hood,  
then kicked the headlights in.  
Our friends said we'd kill each other  
before the year was through.

Now it's ten years later.  
Neither of us wants to leave.  
We are at home with one another,  
we are each other's home,  
the voice in the doorway,  
calling *Come in, come in*,  
*it's growing dark*.

Still, I'm often asked if I have children.  
Sometimes I answer yes,  
sometimes we have so much  
we make another person,  
I can feel her in the night  
slip between us, tell my dreams  
how she spent her day. *Good night*,  
she says, *good night, little mother*,  
and leaves before I waken.

Across the lawns she dances  
in her white, white dress,  
her dream hair flying.

# THE COST OF STORY

## *Ideology and Ambivalence in the Verse Narratives of E. J. Pratt*

Heinz Tschachler

**T**O SAY THAT THE ESSENTIAL PRATT is the narratives has become almost a truism. As early as 1923 R. S. KNOX, in a *Canadian Forum* review of Newfoundland Verse wrote that “the great things are unquestionably the narratives,” a view later adopted by Munroe Beattie for his contribution to the *Literary History of Canada* (255). Similarly, for Northrop Frye, writing in 1946, “Brébeuf and His Brethren” was “not only the greatest but the most complete Canadian narrative” (*The Bush Garden*, 153). According to Susan Gingell’s introduction to her 1983 collection, *E. J. Pratt on His Life and Poetry*, Pratt’s fame rests on his “genius as a raconteur” (xv), while for biographer David G. Pitt, Pratt is “the product of a mainly oral culture in which the story-telling entertainer-historian was a kind of hero” (163-64). But there is an implicit assumption in such tokens of enthusiasm, namely that with insistence on story Pratt must have been moving in a direction opposite to the main movement of modern literature, where according to Ronald Sukenick the writer “is forced to start from scratch. Reality doesn’t exist, time doesn’t exist, personality doesn’t exist. God was the omniscient author, but he died; now no one knows the plot, and since our reality lacks the sanction of a creator, there’s no guarantee as to the authenticity of the received version” (41).

What Sukenick seems to have discovered but nevertheless refused to adopt for himself, is the certainty of a story based upon certainty of cultural values. I will be developing this point later, but let me mention here that in the lost “plot” sanctioned by an “omniscient author” there is involved the psychologically primitive conflict of Good and Evil: an epic hero personifying Good emerges victorious from mortal combat with Evil, however arbitrarily Good and Evil may have been defined. Are we to infer from this that Pratt, in resorting to the tradition of the epic was likewise concerned with the conflict of Good and Evil? If in “Brébeuf” Pratt regards as essential the difference between what “is to do” and what is “not to do,” the real subject-matter of the poem, apart from the Jesuits’ Huron mission, indeed seems to be the possibility of moral certainty. In any case, Pratt’s rediscovery of verse narrative should not be considered merely as a spontaneous event but should be

accounted for in terms of a crisis of our cultural value systems that seems to be reducing moral certainty to an obsolete necessity.

That narrative may be a response to crisis has been noted by Northrop Frye, who relates the re-emergence of verse narrative in Canadian literature to “all the philosophical pessimism and moral nihilism” of the nineteenth century (154). Contrary to those “Earlier Canadian writers [who] were certain of their moral values: right was white, wrong black, and nothing else counted or even existed” (226), by the end of the nineteenth century the social cohesion within the closely knit and beleaguered society of the “garrison” had begun to dissolve. At the same time, there had set in the rediscovery of “the spirit of Anglo-Saxon culture,” in which the poet was still “the voice of the community” (183, 187), in other words, restitution of moral certainty.

What Frye does not mention here is an efficient cause for the crisis of values that had reached the Canadian “garrisons.” For this, let us take into consideration what Marx, commenting on Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*, wrote about the effects of money — “[it] converts both human and natural qualities into their respective counterparts . . . truth into untruth, love into hatred, hatred into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, nonsense into reason, reason into nonsense” (301). Assuming, as Marx did, that the crisis of traditional values takes its origins in the marketplace — where the “yellow, glittering, precious gold” becomes the “visible God, that solder’st close impossibilities, and maketh them kiss” (*Timon*, iv.iii) — we can explain the crisis of storytelling envisaged by Sukenick. It is the inversion of everything dear and true (what Nietzsche referred to in terms of a “transvaluation of values”) that ultimately deprives narrative of the deep-structural oppositions which are its animating force.

On the other hand, discourse in which narrative opposition manifests itself in purer form can be described in terms of the semantic functions of good and evil (or other values) constituting the deep-structural opposition of a story within which they are eventually related to a particular set of “actants” (the term is that of A. J. Greimas). In abstract terms, a sender marks the ideological point of reference to ‘instruct’ a subject to search for and find a desired object. To illustrate this point, I will look briefly at the narrative program of orthodox Marxist ideologies: there, History sends humanity on an errand to wrest, with the help of the proletariat, a realm of freedom from the realm of necessity dominated by the opposing bourgeois classes. It is becoming obvious that the absolute certainty of ideologies concerning values accounts for their manichean structure. More importantly, perhaps, on the level of discourse such absolute certainty also accounts for the affinities of ideologies with an Ian Fleming novel, a mythic tale, or a heroic epic.<sup>1</sup>

But dogmatic writing may be overcome by irony and ambivalence. Commenting on Robert Musil’s *Man without Qualities*, P. V. Zima concludes, “A manichéisme



[idéologique] il oppose l'ambivalence et l'ironie qui tendent à discréditer les énoncés dogmatiques" (139). In view of this it is no mere accident that in his first attempt to write long poetry Pratt, rather than using the grave (heroic) style of the later and highly serious "Brébeuf," has employed the riotous incongruities of comic epic. "The Witches' Brew" (1925) is about the agreement of three witches to make all the fishes drunk. To this purpose a most powerful brew is concocted, which, apart from seafoods and some rather strange delicacies like "Corn beef, molasses, chamois milk, / Cotton, Irish linen, silk, / Pickles, dynamite and jam," contains practically all the different brands of liquor to be found on the Canadian black market of the 1920's (121-22).<sup>2</sup>

In order to protect the brew, the smell of which attracts not only the fish and other creatures but also the shades from Hades, the witches hire Tom, a monstrous sea-cat from Zanzibar. But in consequence of his partaking from the brew, Tom becomes oblivious to the differences between friend and foe, eventually making onslaught upon his own kin and kindred. With Tom's indiscriminate slaughter ending in "a lonely / Voyage of immortal raids / And epic plunder" (136), much of the poem seems an ironic statement concerning the idea of the epic hero, who is always faithful to his code of honour and who must therefore engage in mortal combat with Evil. If Tom's fight is but a caricature of the epic struggle, such ambivalence is also part of a much grander framework in which finally all certainties dissolve: all the dead, including the visible saints, have been relegated to Hades, while the feast of drunkenness, far from appearing sinful, is a prelude to paradisiacal bliss. By dint of this almost carnivalesque transvaluation of values even the fish is stripped of its Christian symbolism. Following only the laws of nature, the fish are without a moral code: "As Nature had at the beginning / created them, so they remained — / Fish with cold blood no skill had trained / To the warm arts of human sinning" (128).

The tone of comic epic in "The Witches' Brew" may well have served as a spur to the sensibilities of the reader toward the crisis of cultural values. But it is in the documentaries that Pratt seems to have probed most deeply the possibilities of moral certainty. If in these poems Pratt draws upon situations which allow for heroic action, ultimately for the poet as much as for his characters the quest for unambiguous values upon which to base moral choice seems to have resulted in ambiguity. I have already mentioned that the old myth of the conflict of good and evil is also involved in ideology. I hope that no one assumes that, as a result of the struggle against dogma, story in "Towards the Last Spike" is actually dead or about to die. But the end of the poem — always the most important part for Pratt, as he insisted invariably (see Gingell, 18, 47, 48, 60) — is peculiarly doubled: what the narrator would like to see as the epic achievement of "the breed [which] had triumphed after all," in the eyes of Van Horne has dwindled to the proportions of "a job . . . well done" (387-88). Pratt seems to have given free reign here to irony

and ambivalence, with the fact that the gain from a job that is well done is most certainly pecuniary suggesting that the marketplace be seen together with a crisis of cultural values as much as with a crisis of narrative. At the same time, the marketplace relates not only to the increasing fragmentation and discontinuity of modern narratives but also to dogmatic fabrication, which is but the ideologue's reaction to crisis.

If such is my thesis, it would have to be substantiated by an analysis of the bulk of Pratt's writings, a task which is beyond the scope of this essay. What I hope to achieve here is, by dealing with a few representative examples of Pratt's oeuvre to present enough evidence to stimulate the option of looking at Pratt in a fresh light.<sup>3</sup> Although I will refer to a variety of Pratt's poems as well as to some of his commentaries, my subject-matter will be limited to "The Titanic," "Brébeuf and His Brethren," and "Towards the Last Spike." Not only are these poems comparable in form (unlike the "extravaganzas," for which Pratt used the ballad meter, they are written in pentameter lines), but they are also the ones generally held in highest esteem. And since ironically the *Collected Poems* of one of Canada's "leading poets" (Frye, 10) have long been out of print, they are the ones most easily accessible at least in part in anthologies, such as Margaret Atwood's *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*.

To begin, then, with "The Titanic," for Pratt modern life provides just as many opportunities for heroic action as does the world of our ancestors. This is suggested by his linking past and present through invoking "That ancient *hubris* in the dreams of men, / Which would have slain the cattle of the sun, / And filched the lightning from the first of Zeus" (213). But not only is the restoration of traditional loyalties a matter of a time out — of the period following the collision with the iceberg. Defining heroic actions as "deeds . . . where there is no commercial equation" (Gingell, 17-18), Pratt seems only too aware that the place for modern heroics is not just outside the quotidian but outside the realm informed by money. What is central to the story of "The Titanic," therefore, is not only certainty of values; equally important is the fragmentation of the modern world into the sub-systems of power, money, and culture.

In a comment on "The Titanic" Pratt notes that one of his aims was to show the many ironies that had accompanied the disaster, such as the semblance of the historical chronology to "some power with intelligence and resource [having] organized and directed a conspiracy" (Gingell, 95). To be sure, directed against a ship which was "An ocean lifeboat in herself" and which was the visible expression of the "dreams of builder or of navigator" (212). But the ship had been ordered not only to the greater glory of the builders. Not the least reason for the *Titanic's* being built was to bring home her share of a highly competitive market: "The Primate of the Lines, she had out-classed / That rival effort to eliminate her / Beyond the North Sea" (212). What is more, the blatant illogicality of her being

“The perfect ship at last — the first unsinkable, / Proved in advance,” turns out to be a sales device: “had not the folders read so?” (212).

It is only if we take into consideration the pecuniary motifs behind the building of the *Titanic* that Pratt’s elaborate image of the poker game makes full sense as a microcosm of the whole enterprise. What is at stake, with the ship as much as with the card game, is money — risk capital. Not unlike *Robinson Crusoe*, in which the moralizing only thinly disguises the protagonist’s risky business ventures, the story of “The Titanic” is about the world of money. The poem, written only a few years after the crash of the New York stock exchange, introduces a note of secularity that is much less prominent in the companion poem by Thomas Hardy, “The Convergence of the Twain: Lines on the Loss of the *Titanic*.”<sup>4</sup>

Taking stock of the characters in Pratt’s gambling scheme, a good many of them belong to what Veblen called the “leisure class.” Among the “Thousands of feet . . . taking overhead / The fourth lap round the deck to make the mile” (216), there are the members of the poker party (Jones, Larry, Van Raalte, MacRae, Cripps, Harry), as well as the “Grey-templed Caesars of the world’s Exchange / [who] Swallowed liqueurs and coffee as they sat / Under the Georgian carved mahogany, / Dictating wireless hieroglyphics that / Would on the opening of the Board Rooms rock / The pillared dollars of a railroad stock” (217). The unconcern of these high priests toward those not of their class (perspective is that of an observer [222]) is later reflected in their behaviour on deck — “silhouettes / Of men in dinner jackets staging an act / In which delusion passed, deriding fact / Behind the cupped flare of the cigarettes” (223).

This abstract approach to the world by those who are lulled by “the security / Of wealth” (223) also pertains to the officers and the crew, who “Might just as well have stopped ashore” as the ship “is run / By gadgets from the bridge” (223). The “risk at Lloyd’s remained a record low” (213) precisely because the human factor has been made redundant: “Even the judgment stood in little need / Of reason, for the Watch had but to read / Levels and lights, meter or card or bell” (218). Both the leisure class and the technicians are representatives of a new order, within which reason is believed to have “driven out all phantoms which the mind / Had loosed from ocean closets, and assigned / To the dry earth the custody of fears” (216-17).

Ironically, however, those fears have in fact “Stalked with her down the tallow of the slips” (212). During the ship’s maiden trip, “Old sailors of the clipper decades, wise / To the sea’s incantations, muttered fables / About careening vessels with their cables / Snapped in their harbours under peaceful skies” (214). With “those sailors, wise and old” being but vestiges of an older order, Pratt seems to be saying both that this old order, however desirable it may have been,<sup>5</sup> is rapidly giving way to a new order, and that the stories “Of portents hidden in the natal hour . . .” (215) are truer than the ones being told now because with the old order

there still was certainty of values. Equally important, perhaps, is that in the end the old order is at least partly restored. From the issuing of the command "Women and children first!" (231) to the liner's "thousand fathoms journey to her grave" (242), there is epiphany after epiphany of human courage, endurance, and self-sacrifice. Even when "self-preservation fought / Its red primordial struggle with the 'ought'" (241), this is possible only because there is certainty of what is good and what is not.

But the old order is restored only in the face of imminent disaster. What is restored is at best a simulacrum (a "spell" [239]) of traditional loyalties, bound to go down with the ship. The transitory quality of the manifest heroism (hence its semantic ambiguity) is perhaps best expressed through its association with the poker game — "those high moments when the gambler tossed / Upon the chance and uncomplaining lost" (241). And neither should we overlook the ambiguity of the word "redeem": the decision of the captain of the *Carpathia* to steam up, in spite of the ice, to eighteen knots is described as one "to redeem / Errors of brain by hazards of the heart" (235). The religious and, on the other hand, economic overtones of the word "redeem" (if used in the sense of, 1. to make atonement for and, 2. to recover mortgaged property by payment of the amount due) are symbolic of the degradation of the certainty of values sought for by the laws of the marketplace. Moreover, traditional loyalties are not to be recovered through the "spell" of a new heroism. This is, I believe, why the poem ends upon one of the most terrifying images of indifference in modern literature, which owes much of its effectiveness to the obvious personification of the berg:

And out there in the starlight, with no trace  
 Upon it of its deed but the last wave  
 From the *Titanic* fretting at its base,  
 Silent, composed, ringed by its icy broods,  
 The grey shape with the palaeolithic face  
 Was still the master of the longitudes. (242)

I  
 N "THE TITANIC," NATURE IS CLEARLY SYMBOLIC of a crisis of cultural values, which can be recovered only in extreme situations. This is true also of "Brébeuf and His Brethren." Unlike in "The Titanic," however, where there is transition from the secular world to the realm of heroic doom, in "Brébeuf" the stage for heroism is set from the very beginning. Moreover, the recovered loyalties do not perish with the priests since the present is called upon to understand and appreciate the past. As we are told in the epilogue, "the winds of God / Which blew over France are blowing once more through the pines . . . And the ashes of St. Ignace are glowing afresh" (297). This and the fact that the realms of power

and money are virtually excluded from the story, render the sense of crisis more urgent here than in "The Titanic."

Characterization reveals to what extent Brébeuf's heroic stature serves as an alternative to a crisis of cultural values. For once, there is his noble birth: "The family name was known to chivalry" (246). As his ancestors, so is our hero engaged in the conflict of good and evil, "reshaping for the world his *City of God*" (244). On a symbolic level, the present, too, is felt to be in need of yet another "Crusades" (298). The plight of the present is also foregrounded by Pratt's emphasis on Brébeuf being heir to Norman nobility, making him the spiritual ancestor not only of French-Canadians (for whom the ill-fated Jesuit mission of the Hurons between 1629 and 1649 had always been written in capital letters in their *Annales*) but also of English-Canadians, hence a truly national hero.

In keeping with the task that is truly beyond the merely human, there is mention of Brébeuf's "massive stature, courage never questioned, / His steady glance, the firmness of his voice, / And that strange nimbus of authority" (271). Brébeuf's physical strength (in a footnote to the poem Pratt explains that the name given to Brébeuf by the Indians, Echon, means "he who pulls the heavy loads" [255]) is surpassed only by his endurance during his martyrdom, which he undergoes like "a lion at bay, not a lamb at the altar" (299). In order for Brébeuf to be convincing as the hero to plant the "martyr's seed" (297), Pratt has liberally drawn upon the conventions of the serious epic. If the division into twelve parts has overtones which are Homeric, "Brébeuf" is also the one among Pratt's longer poems the action of which follows most closely the pattern of the heroic quest. Sent upon an errand into the wilderness by his superiors, the hero is first separated from his society of the monastery at Bayeux. In the course of dangerous journeys he is then initiated into the fields of moral indifference ("On which the yield would be the Huron nation / Baptized and dedicated to the Faith" [255]). In what here resembles the beatification of Roman Catholic rites, he is finally elevated to the status of a martyr or religious hero. If "the source / Of His strength, the home of his courage" was in "the sound of invisible trumpets blowing / Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered / By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill" (296), he was certainly well equipped for the crucial struggle.

I do not doubt that for Pratt the cross was indeed a symbol of the necessity of Christian values *vis-à-vis* a moral wilderness,<sup>6</sup> and that Brébeuf can be understood as the agent of divine will, pledging himself "never to fail thee in the grace / Of martyrdom, if by thy mercy, Thou / Dost offer it to me" (265). But Brébeuf's actions are also shown to be informed by the Society of Jesus, a vast network of religious zealots braced by a Christian ideology founded by Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier in 1534. "The winds of God were blowing over France" at a time when the Christian faith had lost its universal authority and had been reduced to a partial system. Hence the Counterreformation appears in terms of a battle be-

tween two Christian ideologies, each reflecting the interests of a particular social group. However authentic the faith of Loyola and Xavier may have been, at the hands of the Church political (the order of S.J. was formally approved by Pope Paul III in 1540) their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were turned into ideological weapons in the struggle for an endangered value system.

If it is true that, as Louis Althusser once said, ideology calls upon individuals to become subjects,<sup>7</sup> this is precisely what is happening in the opening lines of the poem: "The winds of God," we are told, were "Kindling the hearts and altars, changing vows / Of rote into an alphabet of flame" (244). It is ideology as much as genuine belief which makes Brébeuf say with assurance the words, "This is / To do, this not to do" (246).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the letters Brébeuf sends back to France are meant to call upon other individuals to become subjects — to "galvanize" (253) them to the extent that "Their names would rise from their oblivion / To flame on an eternal Calendar" (264).

Much has been written about Pratt's use of the thirty-volume *Jesuit Relations* as a source of the poem.<sup>9</sup> Faithful as Pratt seems to have been to the facts, he chose to include but little concerning the entanglement of the Jesuit mission with the economic interests of the fur trade. There is brief mention in the poem of a "trade and tribal feud long-blown / Between the Hurons and the Allumettes" (253). But the purpose of the passage is essentially to retard the action somewhat. Thus it does not make much of the historical irony that it was the contacts, animated by trade and power politics, between the whites and the Indians which eventually brought about the fall of the Jesuit missions. Pratt's highly selective use of historical material (which has not been noted yet except by Konrad Gross)<sup>10</sup> relates to the realms both of power (to the short-lived dream of "New France expanding till the longitudes / Staggered the daring of the navigators" [285]) and of money (since Fort Sainte Marie "Was ratified by Richelieu who saw Commerce and exploration pushing west" [268]). If Pratt did not make much of either Richelieu or the fur trade, this may have been in the face of the threat to traditional values from the realms of power and money. The missionaries' "different empire" (285) may well be the expression of Pratt's defensiveness concerning traditional loyalties, much as Brébeuf's character is "The token of a nobler chivalry" (282).

Eventually, however, the hopes of the Jesuits' converting the Hurons are as unfulfilled as the hope that the mission's outpost on Lake Superior become "the western gateway to Cathay" (285). The spreading fire, which from the beginning had set the tone of missionary zeal, in the end consumes not only the missions but also the bodies of Brébeuf and his companions. On the one hand the ambivalence of the image reflects the ambivalence of all values (even Brébeuf's fellow priests are as much his "brethren" as the Indians). But it also reflects the ambivalence of all efforts, religious zeal included, to preserve certainty of values against the influence of the marketplace. The priests' mission does not fail because they had,

however unwittingly, been doing the dirty work for the politicians and the merchants but because it had been carrying the spark of its destruction from the time the missionaries had begun to follow “the footsteps of their patrons” (245).

I  
N “TOWARDS THE LAST SPIKE” Pratt also brings together past and present (“It was the same world then as now”), insisting that, for whatever changes there are in the material world, “blood kept its ancient colour” (346). We are also told that then as now people are moved by ideas or, since ideas are parts of systems of values, ideologies: “Men spoke of acres then and miles and masses, / . . . The east-west cousinship, a nation’s rise, / Hail of identity, a world expanding. / If not the universe: the feel of it / Was in the air — ‘*Union required the Line*’” (346). This sets the tone for a struggle which is hardly one between man and nature (although that is there too), but between actions informed by ideas (“the patriot touch, / The Flag, the magnetism of explorers, / The national unity” [351]) and actions ultimately informed by the marketplace (the “authority from wallets” [347]).

Unlike ideology, which calls upon individuals to become subjects, the laws of the marketplace are indifferent to heroic mottoes like Macdonald’s “From sea to sea” (351). The “sweet silver jingle [in the railroad magnates’] minds” (356) will be heard irrespective of whatever values may be informing the heroes’ actions. This is why it was so difficult for Pratt to sustain poetic conflict. Macdonald is not struggling against a vision equally powerful as his own. Rather, he is struggling against the absence of vision. Blake’s statement in parliament, “*To build a Road over that sea of mountains*” is “pagan” (360) in the sense of its not being informed by a value-system that would oppose Macdonald’s. In fact, had a profit been expected (rather than the prospect of sinking “Those added millions down that wallowing hole” [382]), there would have been no conflict at all and, consequently, no story.

The problematic state of story in “Towards the Last Spike” has been noted by a good many critics. To Munroe Beattie what is absent from the poem are the two chief virtues of the earlier narratives, “a closely knit continuum of motive and action, and a systematic exposition of the process by which a task is carried out” (260). Similarly, for Milton Wilson the poem “assumes the story rather than narrates it” (50), because unless one is a Canadian or has a pretty good knowledge of Canadian history it is virtually impossible to see it as narrative. If the poem does read like a series of snapshots against an historical backdrop, neither critic gives an explanation for this — to Beattie it is simply an “anomaly” (261), while Wilson expresses his bewilderment at the “discontinuity” of what is not epic but only “Verse-Panorama” (as reads the subtitle appearing in the original edition of 1952

[Gingell, 145]). But is not the very contradiction of the textual surface with the 'comic' plot of the narrative (using the term 'comic' in its Frygean sense of referring to a successfully accomplished human act) an expression of Pratt's sense of a crisis of values?

No less problematic than the story is the concept of the hero. Sir John A. Macdonald's moral integrity may be unquestionable, but in the end he is virtually nonexistent as a person. Not part of the last scene of the drama, he is but laboriously retrieved by the narrator promising that the motto, "From sea to sea," would henceforth "Pour through two oceanic megaphones — / Three thousand miles of Hail from port to port" (388). As to Macdonald's helpers (or *adjuvants*), they follow the comic exaggerations of the tall-tale rather, having been pushed upon the scene by the grotesque conceit of the nutritional effects of oatmeal upon Scots ("Out of such chemistry run through by genes, / The food released its fearsome racial products" [348]). The dragon, which in heroic epic is the *opposant* to be overcome by the hero in pitched battle, has lent its shape to the Laurentian Shield. This and the fact that this dragon is but a somnolent one ("asleep or dead . . . too old for death, too old for life" [369]) suggests that finally for Pratt, genuine epic is no longer feasible. As Northrop Frye remarked, "The poem is in the epic tradition without any of the advantages of epic to sustain it."<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the accomplishment of the final act of the building of the trans-continental railroad is a climax only technically; "imaginatively," to cite Frye again, it is "an anti-climax" (12). There is but one spike to drive in after the thousands that have preceded it — an iron one, to be sure, and neither are there "flags or bands [to announce] this ceremony" (386). The spike is fumbled, though, and what little elation there may have been, "It ended when Van Horne spat out some phlegm / To ratify the tumult with 'Well Done' / Tied in a knot of monosyllables" (388). At this point the real, imaginative triumph has already taken place in the Montreal board room of the Canadian Pacific Railway. When the cable pledge arrives from London, the story climaxes in the triumph over all the tight-fisted bankers, over the "treasury at home" as much as over the "purse-strings of the Londoners, / As hard to loosen as salt-water knots" (372). Thus for Macdonald the real antagonist is indifference to his vision effected by money. If Macdonald is indeed paired with Blake, as Catherine M. Pfaff concludes from a note Pratt wrote in the margin of an early draft of the poem (61), the dichotomies they are the representatives of (like vision versus logic, close argument versus magic phrases or metaphors, or the ascetic, the plain, the home-grown versus the luxurious, the romantic, the foreign) are also evidence to Pratt's own struggle toward a plausible set of *actants* when faced with narrative discontinuity, fragmentation, and loss of identity: "As individuals / The men lost their identity; as groups, / As gangs, they massed, divided, subdivided, / Like numerals only" (368).



The “numerals” which are about to replace the individual are symbolic of the crisis of values as much as of the words denoting them. This is why Pratt spends so much time showing how the length of Blake’s speech against Macdonald eventually backfires in the latter’s favour. Here (as in the poem “The New Organon 1937 A.D.”) Pratt lashes out against the corruptions of language — in particular that of the politicians, with its tendency toward formalization and appeasement, its hedging ‘ifs’ and its obfuscating ‘wherefores.’ If language (or speech) is a central aspect to the poem,<sup>12</sup> Pratt’s response to a situation in which words no longer mean what they say is not a simple one. On the one hand, there is Macdonald, who against an encroaching crisis (his “stock of stories had run out” [382]) remarks upon the struggle for those “paltry millions” which “stood between completion of the Road / And bankruptcy of both Road and Nation” (383). This is clearly a struggle in which a nationalist ideology is the ethical stimulus to the “moulding of men’s minds” (358). On the other hand, there is the anti-climactic resolution around the virtually speechless Van Horne. Thus Pratt may indeed have become aware that both the actions informed by a vision and those informed by a political ideology can make for a “battle of ideas and words” (358). In other words, he may have realized that with the kind of history we have to live with the crisis of values is not to be compensated for by a simple return to traditional loyalties, say, of the “Old Organon of 1225 A.D.,” when “there was no sophistry between the subject and the verb; / For what the Khan said, he meant” (74).

**T**HIS ESSAY IS NOT AN ATTEMPT to establish Pratt as a radical writer. Apart from a few angry notes during the thirties (which survived in “The Fable of the Goats” or in “Still Life”) Pratt’s awareness of social pressures was always of a different kind — liberal, humanitarian, Christian. It was from such a perspective that he chose to observe the effects of the marketplace upon traditional values. Thus his rediscovery of verse narrative is neither spontaneous nor particularly Canadian. Like other attempts to create worlds of significant action it marks a reaction to the general degradation of values. But more often than not the recovery of moral certainty may involve but the certainty of ideology. As the chronology of the great narratives reveals, this is an attitude which Pratt the man, admiring the “loyalty to a tradition” of his native ‘Newfies’ (Gingell, 10) as much as Morris’s utopian vision of a Christian-socialist commonwealth in *News from Nowhere* (Pitt, 356), might adopt. To Pratt the poet, however, this was no longer a possibility.<sup>13</sup>

If it is in the technical problems rather than in the choice of subject-matter that the claim to modernity of Pratt’s poetic vision lies, F. Birbalsingh is right in saying that the “tension of [Pratt’s] time” results in “ambivalence or incoherence” (75,

77). However, he is hardly right to chastise Pratt for avoiding “intellectual coherence [which alone] ensures structural unity and ultimately artistic success” (79). As I hope to have shown here, for the modern writer to represent a coherent world is illusionistic or, as another later poem, “Myth and Fact,” puts it, “make-believe [furnishing] to the mind / Asylum in the foliage. / Draw down the blinds and lock the doors tonight: / We would be safe from that which hovers / Above the eaves” (113). The dualisms of such “make-believe” are also involved in the dualisms of ideology (what Zima describes as “les énoncés dogmatiques”), which in turn may be opposed (discredited) by irony and ambivalence. Thus the very ambiguities of the poems analyzed here establish Pratt as an artist constantly moving between the attitudes and assumptions of Victorian Canada and the complexities of modernity. If Pratt the man is not always aware of the vicissitudes of being a modern writer, there are still the poems which, as Theodor W. Adorno once remarked, may be redeemed by the surfacing of that which ideology would deny — “Kunstwerke jedoch haben ihre Grösse einzig daran, dass sie sprechen lassen, was die Ideologie verbirgt” (51).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Le Texte de roman* (Paris: Mouton, 1979), 58: “L’épopée s’organisait plutôt sur la fonction symbolique de la disjonction.” Cf. also Pierre V. Zima, *Manuel de sociocritique* (Paris: Picard, 1985), 118-25.
- <sup>2</sup> All references to Pratt’s poems here are to the *Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt*, 2nd ed., ed. Northrop Frye (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958).
- <sup>3</sup> One might also say, with some justification, “to look at Pratt in a light that may have been glimpsed by John Sutherland in 1956 but has somehow failed to attract much attention.” Analyzing “The Titanic,” “The Cachalot,” and “The Great Feud,” Sutherland has suggested that while Pratt’s vision may well be “heroic,” we cannot use that word unless we remember that there is also irony and humour to qualify it. I have not used Sutherland more here as this essay is not trying so much to resolve the paradoxes in Pratt’s poetry by positing some hidden Christian mysticism as to discuss the question of what has kept Pratt’s “Christianity” (or, in more general terms, traditional loyalties) below the surface.
- <sup>4</sup> Sandra Djwa notes that in order to give to the tragedy of the poem the sense of a secular (rather than a metaphysical) gamble, Pratt blew up the incident of the poker game at the expense of the story of a hymn service held by the Rev. Mr. Carter, which he had also found in the source he used. Significantly, in the original account by Lawrence Beesley, one of the survivors, the service is linked with the endurance of passengers quietly facing their death. Cf. *E. J. Pratt: The Evolutionary Vision* (Vancouver: Copp Clark, 1974), 81.
- <sup>5</sup> We know that Pratt, although once an enthusiastic follower of empirical psychology, became increasingly skeptical about science and technology; see David Pitt, *E. J. Pratt: The Truant Years* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984), 119-20, 146-51. Similarly, in the poem “From Stone to Steel,” Pratt exhorts us to “Let Java or Geneva be,” for “The path lies through Gethsemane” (*Collected Poems*, 41).
- <sup>6</sup> There are at least two more instances of Pratt’s juxtaposing the cross and moral wilderness: 1. when in “The Roosevelt and the Antinoë” (1930) the priest invokes

- "The pale heroic suasion of the rood" upon pronouncing the final absolution for two drowned seamen (199); and 2. when the truant stands up in defiance against the purely mechanical power of the Great Panjandrum, swearing that, "No! by the rood, we will not join your ballet" (105).
- <sup>7</sup> Louis Althusser, "Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'Etat," *La Pensée*, 151 (1970), 36: "L'individu est interpellé en sujet (libre) pour qu'il se soumette librement aux ordres du Sujet, donc pour qu'il accepte (librement) son assujettissement."
- <sup>8</sup> It is probably this paradox which allows for widely opposing views of Pratt's 'Christianity.' For Peter Hunt "Brébeuf and His Brethren" is a celebration of an orthodox religious vision. See "E. J. Pratt's *Brébeuf and His Brethren* — The Critics and the Sources," in Glenn Clever, ed., *The E. J. Pratt Symposium* (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1977), 69-89. At the other end of the interpretive spectrum Vincent Sharman argues that both the hero's ideal and his social context "deny the humanity of men." Vincent Sharman, "Illusion and Atonement: E. J. Pratt and Christianity," *Canadian Literature* 19 (Winter 1964), 27. My own view is perhaps closer to James F. Johnson, who also insists on the "ambiguity" of the poem: "*Brébeuf and His Brethren* and *Towards the Last Spike*: The Two Halves of Pratt's National Epic," *ECW*, 29 (1984), 146. For a general discussion of Pratt's qualified 'Christianity' see John Sutherland, *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1956).
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Peter Hunt, 69-89.
- <sup>10</sup> Konrad Gross, "Das Verhältnis von Evolutionstheorie und Geschichtsverständnis im Dokumentargedicht E. J. Pratts," in Dieter Meindl, ed., *Zur Literatur und Kultur Kanadas* (Erlangen, F.R.G.: Palm & Enke, 1984), 67-84.
- <sup>11</sup> Frye, *The Bush Garden*, 11. Cf. Dorothy Livesay's comment that much of what has been somewhat loosely termed 'narrative' in Canadian verse is "neither epic nor narrative." Dorothy Livesay, "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre [1969]," in Eli Mandel, ed., *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 267.
- <sup>12</sup> I am indebted here to Peter Stevens, "Language and Man in the Poetry of E. J. Pratt," in Glenn Clever, ed., *The E. J. Pratt Symposium*, 33-42.
- <sup>13</sup> In an address "On Publishing" (1925/26?) Pratt deliberates on the question of whether one may produce poetry out of propaganda, saying, "I suppose propaganda might be construed on such high and comprehensive grounds that poetry could issue from it, but generally I think that where the intention is so stated at the beginning, the propaganda becomes lost in the poetic construction" (Gingell, 29).

## WORKS CITED

- Adorno, Theodor W. "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft [1957]." *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt, F.R.G.: Suhrkamp, 1981).
- Beattie, Munroe. "Poetry 1935-1950," *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl F. Klinck. 2nd ed. Vol. II (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), 254-96.
- Birbalsingh, Frank. "The Tension of His Time," *Canadian Literature* 64 (Spring 1975), 75-82.
- Frye, Northrop. *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971).
- Gingell, Susan, ed. *E. J. Pratt on His Life and Poetry* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1983).

- Marx, Karl. *Die Frühschriften. Von 1837 bis zum Manifest der kommunistischen Partei 1848* [*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. Early Writings*], ed. Siegfried Landshut (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1971).
- Pfaff, Catherine McKinnon. "Pratt's Treatment of History in *Towards the Last Spike*," *Canadian Literature* 97 (Summer 1983), 48-72.
- Pitt, David G. *E. J. Pratt: The Truant Years 1882-1927* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984).
- Sukenick, Ronald. *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (New York: Dial, 1969).
- Sutherland, John. *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt: A New Interpretation* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1956).
- Watt, F. W. "Edwin John Pratt," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 29 (1959), 77-84.
- Wilson, Milton. *E. J. Pratt* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969).
- Zima, Pierre V. *Manuel de sociocritique* (Paris: Picard, 1985).



**SEVEN SPECIALIZED BOOKSHOPS UNDER  
ONE ROOF AT THE NEW UBC BOOKSTORE**



6200 UNIVERSITY BLVD.  
VANCOUVER, B.C. V5Y 1W9

- ARTS & HUMANITIES
- LANGUAGE & LITERATURE
- SOCIAL & BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES
- PROFESSIONAL
- HEALTH SCIENCES
- GENERAL

# WINDOWS

*Alan R. Wilson*

A girl in a sandalwood chair  
faces the ocean.  
Waves batter in  
through a beachscape of rock.  
Winds from China test the glass.

Inside a car.  
Her face behind the window.  
The wheels turn and the wheels turn  
and scenery moves  
in the still eyes.

Seated at the table.  
Her daughter's voice beyond the panes  
as a bass voice calls.  
Lining her plate an assortment  
of shapes to eat.

Standing in the quiet house.  
The lines round her eyes  
and the lines of the road  
meeting at windows  
impossibly clean.

Rocking chair  
motionless in the umbra.  
Parakeet's cry above the wind  
as clouds part. Cold stars  
sharp against the glass.



# READINGS OF NOTHING

## *Robert Bringhurst's "Hachadura"*

*John Whatley*

**R**OBERT BRINGHURST IS NOT YET a well-known name in Canadian Letters although this is beginning to change. In my experience he comes up now and then in discussions of West Coast poetry where he is likely to be connected with West Coast Surrealism, a group in which he is not a participant. Reading through his five books we find instead an intellectual poet with a stubborn and erudite sense of history and a very conscious technique.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Bringhurst pays so much attention to the craft of rendering the past that a good category for him may be "allusive." The Presocratic texts, the Old Testament, the writings of the Zen masters and New World myth mark out the arcanum from which he draws his imagery and such ancient spirits as Pythagoras, Moses and the Salish and Toltec shamans walk through his poems, speaking to us so sharply that a faint whiff of acid is left after them. However, trying to place his allusions more precisely than this is difficult. It is obvious that these portraits are there to remind us that our first texts are a record of reform. Moses and Pythagoras, the Buddhist philosopher-poet Saraha are shown to have created sharply elegant systems of thought, but we also see them as social critics: they have in common the fact that they could no longer suffer the glut of appetite around them or the complacent cruelties of the bad government under which they suffered. Is there, though, a possibility that Bringhurst has a present target in mind for these sharpened words from the past? Like those edged figures in Pound's verse, Bringhurst's ancient spirits could be making careful, indirect statements about a present situation. I will argue that this is an ironic poetry that does have the present as its target, though unravelling the network of its references and coming to its specific victim, is a challenge.

Bringhurst has, of course, allowed us some clues, and one poem in particular gives us an advantage in finding the strand of thinking that might be the focus of his irony. *Hachadura*, found roughly in the middle of *The Beauty of the Weapons*, appears to me to be directed to a recognizable, modern problem in poetry; though, as with most things in Bringhurst's work, this is not at first obvious. But we have been given a long introduction and reading *Hachadura* with this preliminary material in mind, we come upon a network of allusions to a very modern dilemma

in verse. With these references we can use *Hachadura* to uncover part, and I think it is an essential part, of Bringhurst's overall statement.

In the foreword to the poem, Bringhurst translates the title for us as *Hard Axe* and tells us that it was taken from the name of a village in El Salvador as he knew it "years ago before the present guerrilla war." The village was made up of a church and a few houses and not far away there was "a military prison as infamous as any in the hemisphere." This kind of contemporary reference is unusual in Bringhurst's poetry. Keeping it in mind, the title prepares us for a poem about the predecessors to Duarte and Molina, of an oppressive South American regime and the hard-edged faith required to survive under one. But we are thwarted almost immediately in this line of thinking. The opening stanzas extend the image of the axe rather than the politics of El Salvador: we deal with rock and leather thongs, with fins, wind, wing bones and spalled flint. The connection with El Salvador could yet be there as a faint connotation of the imagery of axes, bows, and hard edges, but later in the poem, in the midst of this appreciative reflection on thought as weaponry, we find an address to Wallace Stevens.

In the version found in *The Beauty of the Weapons* (1982), the allusion at first appears a bit hidden:

My Connecticut uncle stares into his manicured  
thumbnail, thinking of his Riviera uncle's  
smoked-glass monocle. A one-eyed sun-goggle,  
halfway useful in the lethal roselight. (vi, 1-4)

It is not too difficult to get the general drift, and wit, of these lines. They seem to say that Stevens is meditating on his poetry and that while he takes it to be something like a fashionable monocle, he is really meditating on his own manicured thumb nail, another reference, perhaps, to poetry as weaponry. This in turn leads us to the question of whether the beauty of poetry springs from *amour plaisir* or from something like Rilke's "first touch of terror," or given the "halfway useful," some mixture of both. But to see a less hidden connection to Stevens, we must turn to an earlier version of *Hachadura*. In the version found in *Bergschrund* (1975), the allusion is quite clear. We find it again in verse section vi, but here the title of Stevens's *Le Monocle De Mon Oncle* is played with more openly. "*Ton ongle, ton ongle, plutot que ton monocle, Uncle / Wallace. Or a one-eyed sun-goggle, / halfway useful in the lethal roselight . . .*" says Bringhurst. Here, the French pun clearly gives a set of hidden claws or nails (*ongle*) to Stevens. If we read *Le Monocle* to find them, we uncover not only a severe sonnet-like form (which might be the "hard structure" or "nail" to which Bringhurst refers), but also a more complex network of allusions to Stevens's well-known poem. Reading *Hachadura* and *Le Monocle* in conjunction, the relations proliferate. Both poems have twelve sections and each of Bringhurst's stanzas or verse paragraphs extends or develops imagery found in *Le Monocle*. The allusions and borrowings are so numerous that

*Le Monocle* must be one of the steady contexts for *Hachadura*. Is the poem, then, an interlocution, an extended questioning, of Stevens's aesthetic?

A nexus seems to be the word "nothing"; Bringhurst has seen possibilities in this word that Stevens only suggests. There is, for instance, a modulation of the word in *Hachadura*'s opening line, "There is a nothing like the razor / edge of air," which looks like a response to the "no's" and "nothings" in Stevens's first stanza:

"Mother of heaven, regina of the clouds,  
O scepter of the sun, crown of the moon,  
There is not nothing, no, no, never nothing,  
Like the clashed edges of two words that kill."  
And so I mocked her in magnificent measure.  
Or was it that I mocked myself alone?  
I wish that I might be a thinking stone. (1, 1-7)

Although we have begun to find an approach to *Hachadura*, we may have also added another enigma to the one with which we started. Before we can find the meaning of Bringhurst's response, we need to confront the question of who is the "Mother of heaven" and what were the two words that 'killed,' and in what sense can words kill?

Harold Bloom, one of Stevens's more well-known and intrepid interpreters, has called this stanza "one of the most ferocious ironies in our poetry"<sup>2</sup> and sees this irony as romantic and self-reflexive. For Bloom, the "Mother of heaven" refers to the imagination, but the personification is very consciously made. Stevens has seen through a belief in such a presence; he is very aware that he is talking to himself. According to Bloom, then, the stanza begins the painful interrogation of a trope in which the imagination is figured as a mistress who had once loved Stevens but who is now rejecting his advances. This ironic self-reflection is continued throughout *Le Monocle*, and underscores a fading potency of poetic creation. The mood slides between bitterness and a nostalgic wish for the return of the past; the interrogation itself has been caused by an awareness of encroaching middle age (Stevens was nearing the troublesome boundary of forty on writing the poem), the feeling that an uncaring, and boring reality could no longer be kept at bay by the beauties and dangers of verse. For Bloom, then, the irony turns the more positive meaning of "there is nothing like poetry" into a negation of one of the major romantic tropes: it questions the power of the "clashed edges" of poetic words to "kill," to vanquish opponents or convince others, to create and destroy worlds, or to alter social forms.

With this, the focus of Bringhurst's first use of "nothing" becomes a little clearer. It is as if Stevens's mockery had been interpreted as saying: "I am worried that despite the beauty and power I once felt in it, poetry, in the end, could be ineffective, a nothing, a void, at least unequal to age and mortality . . ." and Bringhurst, or his persona, has quickly risen up to defend his art. The assertion for poetry is



made by realigning, turning, remaking the meaning of Stevens's word "nothing" so that it gradually becomes active, absorbing all the force and edge of the dispersals, insinuations, and infinite numbers of nature:

There is a nothing like the razor  
edge of air, another  
  
like the tongued pebbles, syllables  
of sea-wind and sea-colour and  
  
another and another like the salt  
hide drying inward, eating  
  
in through the underbelly of the bone,  
the grain  
  
of the sea-eaten iron, and the open  
lattice of the wave. (1, 1-10)

These aggressive "nothings" have, then, been made to go directly against the grain of Stevens's inwardly directed irony. The repetitious use of simile (like a razor edge of air, like pebbles, like sea wind and salt hide) gradually make a word having no physical referent, a "no-thing" into a substantive, something almost tangible or concrete. Looked at from this angle, as a response to Stevens, we see not a poetry of melancholy and self-interrogation, but a negative, ghostly poetry that has the force or energy of a weapon. The idea that poetry is dangerous and composed of the "clashed edges of words that kill," has been re-instated so forcefully against Stevens's doubt, it is as if an armed spirit has suddenly come down to earth to defend itself against attack.

This revision has many other implications. For one thing, by the time we have reached the end of the first stanza, the self speaking these lines has almost been erased; we are no longer in a psychological present at all. These first images present themselves in so objective a way we can almost hear a bit of stone-age flint being broken or chipped or see something like an ancient spear or arrow in flight. Behind the answer to Stevens, we are allowed to glimpse, then, something more primitive than sophisticated word play: the origin of a poetic *techné*, a very ancient use of irony and word craft. The key is the "clashed edge" of a carefully placed line break:

There is a nothing like the razor  
edge of air . . .

The deliberateness of this enjambment signals technique; it amplifies the meaning of "razor edge" and we glimpse a "nothing" that has an edge so sharp it is also, somehow, "air" and this is a neat reworking of the idea that the poetic word has a "clashed edge." But, more than this, the image has a lot of associations with the weapon images of Bringhurst's earlier poems.

**B**RINGHURST LIKES EDGES and sharp boundaries. If we place this first enjambment in the context of his imagery about the craft of poetry found in the previous poems, the full range of its implications becomes clear. There is the “dressed edge of the air” in the *Song of the Summit* and the closely drawn parallel between poetic craft and the cutting of stone in *Stone-Lathe* and *Wing*. In *Pythagoras* intellectual light is connected with the shaving of obsidian to a transparency that is like “the clarity of the clean talon,” and in *Four Glyphs* the images of sharpened stone, light and sky seem very close to *Hachadura*’s opening:

bright blade of blue sunlight  
 over the stone,  
 spalled off the solid block  
 of the sky’s light like a smoke-thin  
 razor of obsidian  
 or an unseen wing. (III, 8-13)

These and similar images point to ancient philosophy and myth as “word weapons” poised against antagonistic forces like the “darkness that can be drunk” in *Pythagoras*, or the “death . . . by darkness” of “Three Deaths.” Our earliest thinkers were using a sharply turned irony and this was achieved through a technique like stone-cutting or the fastening of a handle to an axe-head by allowing wet thongs to tighten around it. In these first lines of *Hachadura* we get, then, a mingling of images of primitive artifacts and symbolic connections with myth, Homer, the transcendent and critical consciousness of the early Greeks. It is an understatement to say that the answer to Stevens’s query about whether he is mocking a mistress or himself is complete. He has been shown a condensed history of early techniques of poetic irony comparable to an anthropologist’s sequence of *Homo Faber*: through a stone, bone and hide age, through an iron age and ending with a lattice of wave-like “clashed edges.” Stevens is mocking himself and he should be mocking himself; poetry’s first law, which we have glimpsed in this ancient craft, is just such self-negation.

The connection of these weapon images with early thought is further borne out by the next stanza. We are here introduced to Eurytos (c. 450 B.C.), a later Pre-socratic philosopher attached to the Pythagoreans through his master Philolaus. Eurytos is thought to have applied geometrical theory in the form of patterns of coloured pebbles to the study of the human spirit.<sup>3</sup> In *Hachadura* he never quite arrives at his “nothing” and his “abacus” is “unsheathed,” weapon-like, from his hand as he tallies the human dust. But what point is being made with this juxtaposition of Eurytos and his abacus with Stevens’s melancholy self-questioning?

Eurytos was a member of the group of early Greek philosophers who began to question the prevailing Greek rituals and cosmology and who are thought to mark the transition in our culture from myth consciousness to the beginnings of rational-

ism. We begin to see Eurytos's relevance. The complexity of the Presocratic number mysticism and idealism often obscures the fact that they were also satirists. Hera-  
kleitos, for instance, had some rather pointed things to say about the Dionysian  
rites:

They purify themselves by staining  
themselves with other blood, as if  
one were to step into mud in order to  
wash off mud.<sup>4</sup>

Herakleitos seems to be making the point that in such rites men show themselves ignorant of the gods; the gods transcend man and exist wholly apart from the world of human desire. For him, any ritual which allows for the intermingling of divinity and men is corrupt. The Pythagorean number mysticism also seems to be based on a similar insight. In Bringhurst's magnificent portrait of this system, "Unity is a substance not a property. Light / is finite and motionless. Darkness / is the everlasting verb . . . And the darkness . . . this . . . *these* / darkneses are everywhere." Here we see an equal insistence that there is a clean, transparent world of spirit that transcends the world of material pleasures; in trying to mix the two spheres man corrupts himself. With the appearance of Eurytos, the cluster of weapon images with which Bringhurst starts off *Hachadura* now seems clearly connected to his other portraits of the Presocratics. They would thus share and forward the Pre-socratic goal of reforming a hedonist, corrupted imagination. By questioning the "Mother of Heaven" figure of the imagination, the voice in Stevens's poems has opened the dangerous possibility of a poetry adrift in egoism. Set beside Eurytos, we can now see that his irony is exposing a poetry grounded in the pleasure of self-aggrandizement and self-projection.

We gain further support for this reading in the next stanza. The malignant counter-force that is shown next would give us the reaction of a pleasure-based mind to this new kind of impersonality:

Therefore:

darkness under the sunrise,  
darkness in the hollow of the hand;  
  
inside the spine the darkness,  
the darkness simmering in the glands;  
  
the rumpled blade of darkness which is  
lodged in every fissure of the brain;  
  
the membrane  
of the darkness which is always  
  
interposed  
between two surfaces when they close. (1, 22-32)

A seamless egotism has been split here. Like the contrast between the "darkness of the everlasting verb" and the transcendent, motionless light shown us in *Pythagoras*, this stanza shows us the splitting of the mind into a potent, dramatic polarity. In these dark images, we have the inner response to the ironic self-control of the first verse, a similar imagery has been used and we have gone a step toward a larger, more comprehensive order of irony. We have moved from imagery of edges and fissures to imagery of lines.

In the first stanza, for instance, we had the "nothing" eating in through the underbelly of the bone and now there is a darkness inside the spine. Again, in the first stanza we had some sea-eaten iron and a razor-edge of air but now there is a rumpled blade of darkness; lastly, the wet and living "membrane of the darkness" seems obversely related to the salt hide drying inward. The parallels are not exact, but most of the preceding images seem to have been turned from language based in an outward sensation to a language of inwardness, desire and living motive; each outward perception having its roughly opposite number simmering in a dark interior. At the end, we are given a conscious, formal progression: we have gone from the intermittent "fissures" of ironic words or phrases, to a continuous "line" demarking two complete and conflicting worlds. A darkly material, savage, inner self is now coming under the control of an equally potent, awakening, ironic self which is focused on an outside. Stevens's mockery of a "mistress" (really a self-mockery) has been set within a very different context and is opening the possibility of poetic statement beyond the inner world of self.

The formal progression does not stop here. The balance is momentary, the simmering darkness is an ongoing presence and Bringhurst's challenge now is to see how far he can extend this ironic line of self-control, developing Stevens's self-doubts into a counter-aesthetic. In the next stanza we are confronted with the image of a strange bird flying through both moonlight and sunlight. The bird is a bit enigmatic until we see that a similar image in the second verse of *Le Monocle* has also been turned inside out. In stanza II of Stevens's poem we have:

A red bird flies across the golden floor.  
It is a red bird that seeks out his choir  
Among the choirs of wind and wet and wing.  
A torrent will fall from him when he finds. (II, 1-4)

Another idealized figure for the poet has briefly replaced thoughts of self-decline and mortality; this exquisite symbol has been worked up from an impressionist palette in the hope that it will find its place among other such singers. Like Yeats's golden bird, this red one (contrasted neatly with real birds of wind and wing) will sing in an inner, fabulous region of mind and if we hear his music we will hear it with a pure aesthetic pleasure within the imagination. Bringhurst's bird, however, is finding another dimension in which to sing and appears not very concerned with becoming a member of a choir. In fact we can no longer be sure that we are dealing

with a symbol for the poet; Bringhurst's bird looks quite alien and the red and gold have been scraped away to disclose a more basic and lethal hue:

The bird is the color of gunmetal  
 in sunlight, but it is midnight;  
 the bird the color of gunmetal  
 in sunlight is flying  
 under the moon. (II, 1-5)

Stevens's brilliant red bird of poetry can be placed within his general project of subverting these modern world views that vitiate the imagination and which have produced a "culture dominated by science."<sup>5</sup> But, in the face of this archetypal figure for the lyric poet, Bringhurst's symbolic colouring is drawn from perhaps the most impersonal and technological area one could imagine, the rifle or gun. These colours symbolize pure, lethal technique and are set directly against Stevens's aesthetic pleasure in creating imaginary worlds. Rather than a symbol of beauty, we have another symbol or irony and a widening field of interplay between inside and outside: between romantic nightingales and real birds, birds standing for beauty and birds striving for survival, imaginary skies and real skies, poetic selves and the not-self. We have also settled on one image. This dangerous bird of poetry is a symbol in which a whole complex of ideas is beginning to cohere.

After this signal though, the relation between the two poems becomes ambiguous and the line separating them bafflingly complex. Bafflement may be meaningful here. The point of departure is Stevens's continued cross-examination of the presence he finds in his poetry. The glowing and hopeful symbol of the red bird is momentarily helpful against his depression but he quickly slides back to mocking his 'mistress': "No spring can follow past meridian. / Yet you persist with anecdotal bliss / to make believe a starry *connaissance*" (II, 9-11). The narrator is again doubting his imagination, criticizing the romantic trope (and what appears to be his own belief), that poetic inspiration is connected to something outside himself, a divine mystery or "starry *connaissance*" which could hold against doubt or ameliorate it. Against this hint of fatalism, Bringhurst next throws out a group of 'meridians' that are so visually intricate that we can almost not follow them until we realize that the two worlds we saw being separated in the first stanza now adhere in the boundaries and layered feathers of wings.

There is a point at which  
 meridians are knotted  
 into nothing and a region  
 into which meridians fray and intertwine,  
 but not like mooring lines; they  
 fray like the leading and trailing edges  
 of wings, running from nothingness  
 to muscle and strung from the muscle back again. (II, 6-13)

Stevens's symbolic bird has now not only been "repainted," it has been reconstructed and his "meridian" has been remade into almost a thesaurus of the word "line." The language is, again, enigmatic, just bordering on sense; the links between the various "lines" are subtle and hermetic; though, with a careful reading we can begin to make out the connections, or guess at them.

Stevens's "meridian" demarks youth from age and a romantic poetry from the cessations and diminutions of age; but, for Bringhurst, the word demarks a further step away from self-concern. We are brought to a point where the meridian gets "knotted," a point where intended meaning or guided direction of statement seems to curve into itself or becomes solipsistic. The meridian is, secondly, in a region where it begins to "fray," where words take on multiple meanings, or become figurative because what is being perceived cannot be stated in conventional speech. Thus this "fraying" poetic line will not be like a mooring line rubbing against a dock, there will be no links to earthly harbours and securities, no literal level of meaning for this symbolic wing in the self. The true symbol will fray meaning such that it lets us feel the empty nothingness away from which the narrator in Stevens's poem, through his imaginative bird, is trying to escape.

WE CAN BEGIN TO SEE why so much of Bringhurst's imagery is concerned with shaving and refining and making sharpened edges. The term "Nothing" has no referent. Trying to picture it will always involve figures of speech; it can be approximated but not presented in an image. For Roland Barthes, ". . . *nothing* is perhaps the only word in the language which admits of no periphrase, no metaphor, no synonym, no substitute; for to say *nothing* in any other way than by its pure denotation (the word *nothing*) is immediately to fill the nothing, to belie it. . . ."<sup>6</sup> By fixing his symbol for poetry to such an inexpressible key term, Bringhurst is opening up his language. Such "nothingness" provides an *exterior* for language and this severely restricts a magic which gives the guarantee for anything said to the author. Stevens's twelve stanzas spiral inward as the old romantic solutions and formulas crumble and his quest for a credible source for his poetry becomes more pressing, Bringhurst's "nothingness" provides an *outside* for his language that is as objective and cold as the "not-self" found in the scientific perspective.

But Bringhurst's "nothingness" is not quite the exterior explored by science. In an article that traces this problem in a long line of modern poetry, Karsten Harries catches what I think is becoming clear in Bringhurst's reconstruction of Stevens's symbol:

All metaphor that is more than an abbreviation for more proper speech gestures toward what transcends language. Thus metaphor implies lack. God knows neither

transcendence nor metaphor — nor would man, if he were truly godlike. The refusal of metaphor [by modern poets] is inseparably connected with the project of pride, the dream of an unmediated vision, a vision not marred by lack, that does not refer to something beyond itself that would fulfill it.<sup>7</sup>

For Harries, then, true metaphor relies on a context of the unknown: the more essential the metaphor, the more complete the recognition of a 'lack' or the necessity of mediation. For Stevens the older romantic formulation of this mediation, the "starry *connaissance*," is losing its power and he is suffering the loss of the fluency and self-sufficiency such a faith gave him. He is feeling this as a lack, a still point, or negative. But for Bringhurst, poetry is to come precisely from this negative, the sense of lack, of an encompassing sense of *le Neant*, or not-self that Harries sees as essential to metaphor; for him poetic language must, as its fundamental gesture, reach out to try and present or picture "nothingness" even though this exterior will, by definition, remain absent. The poet must do this or he will fall into pride, and his poetry will become a mere projection of himself.

We can begin to see, then, how far Bringhurst has developed his first bits and pieces of ironic statement. We have gone from images of weapons that ironically restated Stevens's "nothing" and various stages of a dark reaction, through a gradual widening of the ironic interplay with *Le Monocle*, to an attempt to relocate the source of poetic imagery not in the self, but in the perception of an infinity outside the self.

A logical next step would be to find the social stance that such a poetic entails. Opening an exterior that is the basic ground of poetry could mean, for instance, that Bringhurst allow a more priestly or prophetic attitude than is evident in Stevens, and in the following stanza a prophet does appear.

Listen: the sounds are the sounds of meridians  
trilling, meridians drawn to produce  
the illusion of plectrum, tuning pegs and a frame,  
or perhaps to produce Elijah's  
audition: the hide  
of the silence curing,  
tanning,  
tightening into the wind. (II, 14-21)

With the allusion to Elijah, the exterior which has been growing as the poem develops is now infinitely large, the self correspondingly small. This is the Elijah who was forced by his king and queen into the desert mountains for his open attacks on their illegal marriage. Perhaps for Bringhurst, Elijah is figuring the fight against an imagination which has become a "mistress"; poetry is cohabiting with social power and furthering corruption. But Elijah is also the archaic figure who received a divine visitation in the whirlwind; the figure who, after finding that "the Lord was not in the wind, earthquake and fire," heard "a still small voice." Verse 22 of

I Kings 18 tells us: "Then said Elijah, unto the people, I, / *even*, I only, remain a prophet of the / Lord; but Baal's prophets *are* four hundred." For Elijah, and perhaps for Bringhurst, this 'exterior' is then also the isolation of banishment. He is outcast, though, this has allowed him to see that the tribe's beliefs have eroded; they have sunk into greed, materialism and idol worship, though one small, isolated voice remains.

We must keep in mind, though, that Elijah is one of a list of possible stances toward the exterior that Bringhurst has found. Counterpointing Elijah's isolate audition there is an almost scientific description of a bird in flight.

Or the sounds are the sounds of the air opening  
up over the beak and closing over the vane,  
opening over the unmoving cargo slung  
between the spine and the talon,  
slung between the wingbone and the brain. (II, 22-26)

This almost zoological description keeps the Elijah possibility in perspective by reminding us that millennia and the impersonal force of evolution were required to perfect a wing structure that could hold against space and gravity and against the "unmoving cargo" of the bird's mass. The bird reminds us that what Elijah heard may have been only the lonely desert wind, the same sounds are made by a wing as it cuts alone through uncaring, godless space. These two figures of "nothingness," then, deny any intrinsic connection to social power or to powers in the self for a poetry that can be relied on.

Perhaps I am giving too much weight to Elijah and the bird. Both are yet only possibilities, *figures* of isolation and the outcast; they are also members of a list. Another version of the sound that Elijah heard and that the bird makes over its leading and trailing edges is music, the sound made by "the illusion of a plectrum, tuning pegs and a frame." And this third possibility for poetry prepares us for what I take as the climactic stanza of the poem, its defining moment. In stanza III of the Stevens's poem we have another statement of the aesthetic problem. He is now playing with the possibility of philosophic study as an alternative ground for the imagination. "Is it for nothing, then, that old Chinese / Sat titivating by their mountain pools / Or in the Yangtse studied out their beards?" (III, 1-3). But this doubt returns when he realizes that such a quest after wisdom may be simply the absurd compensation for an impotence of the imagination. Bringhurst's answer to the question gives poetry an ultimately potent role. The poet should sing in the harsh register of alienation. With "nothingness" as the ultimate ground for poetry no other motive (especially a corrupt or self-serving motive) is possible. We are again refiguring Stevens's query about "nothingness" but now with an accumulated weight to the irony:



It is for nothing, yes,  
 this manicuring, barbering, this  
 shaving of the blade.

Nothing: that is that the edge should come  
 to nothing as continuously  
 and cleanly and completely as it can.

And the instruction  
 is given, therefore,  
 to the archer, sharpening

the blood and straightening  
 the vein: the same instruction  
 that is given to the harper:

*Tap.*  
*Strum the muscle.*  
*Breathe.*

*And come to nothing.* (III, 1-16)

As the culmination of the debate with Stevens over the origin and purpose of poetry, the stanza is something of a technical marvel. The “line” we have been following from the beginning has now taken a final shape: fissure (word), to meridian (line), to frayed meridian (symbol), to wing shape, strings, to a harp-like bow (stanza or verse paragraph). The strings have been sounded; double meanings play back and forth about this last “nothing.” The word now signifies the various exteriors we have found: the ironic reinstatement of poetry as a weapon, the early Greek satire of hedonism and corrupted myth, the mathematical/moral infinity discovered by Eurytos; equally it merges the reach of time through which the bird flies and the subject who has taken on Elijah’s vow and denied himself participation and status in a corrupted society (the kind of society that would allow the prison camp outside La Hachadura). The pattern of tensions between gradually more polarized forces in the self has thus reached a limit. In this stanza, the bow string has been let go, and the target for Bringhurst’s ghostly arrow is the egoism of the poet who wants to “possess” or “repossess” a corrupt form of the imagination rather than to recognize a clean “nothingness” as the ultimate source of his poetry.

**B**EGINNING WITH THE FIRST SYLLABLE and line break, then continued through the building of larger forms like the symbol, the stanza and verse paragraph, we see in *Hachadura* the gradual enclosure of the self by the not-self. Each development of a larger poetic form thus shows us a wider expanse of this exterior until it becomes all encompassing. Although the problem of *amour*

*plaisir* in poetry continues to be a target for Bringhurst's irony, by stanza III an essential difference has been made. After this, the word "nothing" does not appear significantly again. And in the remainder of the poem the exterior becomes a background, a transparent and negative source out of which the more positive content of imagery is drawn.<sup>8</sup>

In one instance of this use, found in stanza VII, the exterior becomes a kind of absolute coldness into which parts of us project. "Empedokles says the talon / is the crystallization / of the tendon, the nail is the wintered nerve" (VII, 1-3). Another use shows us a glimpse of the Goddess of this alienation, a glimpse of a surrounding indifference out of which poetry comes. In stanza V, of *Le Monocle* the mistress of Stevens's first poetry is shown as alluring and sensual; in the past she allowed him a most pleasurable feast of the imagination under the "furious star" of Venus; while for Bringhurst there is

mountain water, mountain trees  
and mosses, and the marrow of the air  
inside its luminous blue bone.  
And the light that lies just under darkness,  
Artemis

grazing the ice  
that is sea-rose under the sunset, and sea-green  
and sea-deep under the snow's froth. Under  
the still white water the sudden  
fissure in the wave. (V, 5-14)

The "pleasure principle" that has not yet been given up in Stevens's poem is thus aligned with its severe, classical opposite. Artemis was sister to Apollo, sister then to beauty, her arrows were of an absolute clarity while her brother's were gold. She also changed Acteon the hunter into a stag and had his own hounds rip him to pieces because he happened to see her bathing, without clothes, or without benefit of mediation. To see "Artemis" directly would, then, be like looking steadily into the essence of indifference, into an ultimate alienation; thus, we can only have her "grazing" the ice here. But the essential pattern of *Hachadura* should now be clear; each of the remaining stanzas places Stevens's self-concerned, almost rococo, melancholy in relation to this "nothingness." By answering each of *Le Monocle's* questions with a look at this indifferent, impersonal exterior, the poetic self is brought to its true size and importance.

I think that grasping his sense of a "not-self" or exterior for language is a good start in understanding Bringhurst's poetry as a whole. *Tzuhalem's Mountain*, the last poem in *The Beauty of the Weapons* is quite different in cultural and visual content than *Hachadura* yet within its beautifully dark metaphors we see the same scrupulous attention to preserving and presenting a sense of a world outside our own. In this reconstruction of the mind of a Coast Salish chieftain, we see an

outlook as iconoclastic as Eurytos' or Elijah's and here again is a psychology that breaks all of the rules about possession which our culture has so thoroughly constructed. In making love to one of his various wives, Tzuhalem, passion and ecology merge.

Love, in this bed full of horses  
and fishes, carnivorous birds  
are leading us down into oceans  
and up into mountains. (III, 1-4)

Even the most intimate of feelings has been tied to an outside, filtered through imagery that points it outward away from any attempt at interiorization, any attempt to hold on or to possess the emotion by containment within a subjective, aesthetic response. We now find this transparent exterior everywhere in Bringhurst's poems. In *Sutra of the Heart* at about the mid-point of *Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music* (1986) the old sense of the heart as an inner, secretive "seat of the emotions" is radically changed by opening it to everything outside. The swing away from the old way of looking is so severe that we begin to see that the "heart" being described is really our love of the world, our love of the world for its own sake not for the sake of love in itself:

The heart is a house with torn floorboards  
the heart is a seeded and peeled  
grape on the vine, a bell  
full of darkness and anvils,  
the heart is a flute with four fingerholes  
played in the rain.  
The heart is a deep well dug upward. (9-15)

And so on through some eighty-five lines of tying the heart to various similarly inappropriate objects. Somehow each new metaphor works, but only because we can, perhaps, see the humour involved in upsetting the custom that says our "heart" is and must be our most inner and serious possession. The heart is really an organ for perceiving the beauty of a world cleanly unaware of us.

Perhaps, now, it is no longer so strange to see a modern like Stevens and these acerbic pictures of the ancients so closely, though oppositely, aligned. Northrop Frye's insight might be useful here: if, as Frye tells us, modern literature is completing a vast, circular movement back to the myth consciousness in which it began, in *Hachadura*, Bringhurst can be seen to have paused in the boundary created by our first "scientists." The wish of the voice in Stevens's *Le Monocle* for a return of his "mistress," now seems to direct poetry to a self-enclosed, self-contained world; Bringhurst has shown that this wish ends in a corrupted myth. One can gain a great deal of ironic leverage and insight into both Stevens and modern culture

by aligning ancient man problematically alive in myth and the problematic hunger for the securities of myth in modern man, as, I think, Bringhurst has done here.

there is a 'back-stretched  
 connexion' like that of the bow  
 or of the lyre. (Herakleitos, *Fragment 23*)

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Bringhurst's books so far include *Cadastre*, *The Shipwright's Log*, *Bergschrund*, *The Beauty of the Weapons*, and *Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music*.
- <sup>2</sup> Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), 37.
- <sup>3</sup> Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), II, 110.
- <sup>4</sup> Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), 25.
- <sup>5</sup> Margaret Peterson, *Wallace Stevens and the Idealist Tradition* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press), 3-13.
- <sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *New Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Editions du Seuil, 1972; New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 108.
- <sup>7</sup> Karsten Harries, "Metaphor and Transcendence," *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1978), 78.
- <sup>8</sup> The word 'nothing' we have been following does appear once more. We find it in Stanza VI, where we have "this one, this one saying nothing . . ." and in the context of the stanza 'this one' is I think a carefully shaded figure for the poet as he shows us, indirectly, the wintry exterior which Stevens would like to escape from.



# MOBILE OVER HECATE STRAIT

*Anne M. Kelly*

I'd like to go back and collect my bones.  
I left them rattling,  
a skeleton hung complete  
with ribs and a perfect set  
of teeth, strung on cedar  
in the wet green air —  
a perch now for kingfishers and ravens,  
their wings light  
kisses on the web  
of fingerbones laced and upraised;  
the bower of branch nearer to sky,  
the forest floor a diminishing green  
as tree roots deepen.

Sometimes, in my dark  
suburban bedroom, I hear  
a wild racket in the night,  
the violence of bone  
beating against cedar-bark  
and the wind singing  
the old green turmoil of forest and sea,  
stones on the beach  
clattering like teeth  
as the undertow draws them back.  
And sometimes my lover wakes,  
nervous in the shadow-branches  
cast flickering on the curtain,  
but I lull him back  
to sleep,  
telling him there are wind-chimes  
in the trees.



# A GRIM TALE

*Anne Marriott*

I see it only from the window of a train,  
a place that has no name.

A rocking-horse lies dead  
one rocker split, legs splayed  
to brace itself against  
whatever terror came.  
The rectangle of sand  
rimmed with wood fragments  
(once a tidy box)  
of course suggests a grave.  
A greying paw  
uncovered by a twist of wind  
shows where a teddy-bear is buried.  
There may be others.

The house, beyond, stares  
vacant-windowed,  
vision skewed in one pane  
broken by a rock.  
Was it cursed from the beginning?  
The golden son  
cherub, really a changeling, monster?  
Somewhere in me an unknown ogre stirs.  
I pull down the blind.



# SAINT-DENYS GARNEAU

## *L'Itinéraire créateur*

Irène Oore

**S**AINT-DENYS GARNEAU est sans doute un des plus grands poètes québécois. La poésie fut pour lui un engagement profond de tout son être dans la communication. Alors que plusieurs études excellentes portent sur tel aspect ou sur telle particularité de l'oeuvre de Saint-Denys Garneau,<sup>1</sup> nous nous proposons de cerner dans la présente étude la source même, le lieu du jaillissement, de l'oeuvre de Saint-Denys Garneau.

Engagement douloureux à la parole poétique, la création de Saint-Denys Garneau naît dans le silence déchirant entre l'incommunicabilité et la communication. A partir des poèmes de Saint-Denys Garneau, de son *Journal* ainsi que de sa correspondance, nous retracerons quelques phases essentielles de l'itinéraire créateur chez ce grand poète, itinéraire qui va de l'état de solitude, de la non-communication à travers l'abolition de la parole vers la création d'un verbe poétique sacré.

### *La non-communication*

Le poète se sent prisonnier d'une mauvaise solitude hostile à toute communication. Dans son poème "Maison fermée" Saint-Denys Garneau recrée une telle solitude. C'est le lieu du froid et de la mort :

Je songe à la désolation de l'hiver  
Seul  
Dans une maison fermée.<sup>2</sup> (P 67)

Le terme "seul," mis en apposition, constitue un vers en lui-même et se trouve ainsi littéralement isolé. Le "je" qui parle est entouré de murs-obstacles. Inévitablement cette fermeture entraîne la mort, essence même de la non-communication.

Ee une porte d'ombre se referme  
Sur la solitude plus abrupte et plus incompréhensible.  
(P [Un poème a chantonné tout le jour] 128)

Alors que cette solitude ontologique est donnée à l'être indépendamment de lui ou des autres, la solitude de l'homme parmi ses semblables est autrement tragique. Dans son journal, Saint-Denys Garneau décrit une telle solitude: "Retour du thé

chez les X. De plus en plus je me sens dépaycé parmi cette société [. . .]”<sup>3</sup> (J 44). D’après lui ces gens ne représenteraient que des “[a]gglomérations d’intérêts, agglomérations de cupidités [. . .]” (J 44). Le poète associe le monde quotidien de la société au mensonge et à l’artifice. Or mensonges et artifice constituent des écrans, obstacles à la communication. Opposant société et nature, le poète note :

Avec [la nature] on ne ment pas comme avec les hommes [. . .] tout notre artifice tombe [. . .] (L 60)<sup>4</sup>

Seul devant la mort, entouré de murs infranchissables, prisonnier de l’hiver, le poète se sent atrocement seul parmi les humains. Par surcroît, il se sent souvent abandonné par Dieu, sans aucune communion possible. Ce sentiment de dérélliction lui est particulièrement douloureux :

Dans le bas du ciel, cent visages  
 Impossibles à voir  
 La lumière interrompue d’ici là [. . .]  
 (P “Monde irrémédiable désert” 155)

Non seulement le ciel est accablant et bas, mais encore la lumière du ciel n’atteint plus le poète.

Ces solitudes que nous venons de noter brièvement sont de “mauvaises” solitudes, des solitudes qui isolent et qui s’opposent à la possibilité de communication. Le poète s’en plaint :

Ma solitude au bord de la nuit  
 N’a pas été cette amie [. . .]  
 (P [Ma solitude n’a pas été bonne] 144)

Ainsi que le suggère le terme “cette” le poète reconnaît la possibilité d’une autre solitude, une solitude amie, favorable à la création artistique. Nous verrons plus loin en quoi elle consiste.

Examinons à présent les éléments-obstacles à la communication tels qu’ils apparaissent dans l’oeuvre de Saint-Denys Garneau. Le plus grand parmi ces obstacles serait l’envahissement total du spirituel par le corporel, ou encore, en termes sartriens, l’envahissement par “l’en-soi.” C’est que le physique est associé à une lourdeur, une immobilité de chose caractéristiques de la mort. Saint-Denys Garneau déplore ce passage constant du vivant vers le figé, passage qui s’opère au niveau de la parole même :

Parole sur ma lèvre déjà prends ton vol,  
 tu n’es plus à moi [. . .]  
 (P [Parole sur ma lèvre] 119)

Or à peine prononcé, le verbe poétique se transforme en objet mort et figé :

Je me heurterai à toi maintenant  
 Comme à toute chose étrangère



Et ne trouverai pas en toi de frisson fraternel [. . .]  
 Tu es déjà parmi l'inéluctable qui m'encercle  
 Un des barreaux pour mon étouffement.

(P [Parole sur ma lèvre] 119)

Le terme "heurterai" suggère le durcissement, la pétrification du mot. Le mouvement du vol est figé, le verbe est chosifié, la liberté devient prison. Métamorphose cauchemardesque du "pour-soi" en un "en-soi." Le poète exprime son sentiment de profonde déception dans "Te voilà verbe":

Te voilà verbe en face de mon être  
un poème en face de moi [. . .]  
 Et voilà le poème encore vide qui m'encercle  
 Dans l'avidité d'une terrible exigence de vie [. . .] (P 120)

Ce qui est fixé au niveau du verbe est à éviter au niveau de l'attitude du poète envers la vie. L'immobilité, le confort sont une source d'angoisse pour le poète en ce qu'ils transforment tout en un "en-soi." Dans le poème liminaire des "Jeux," Saint-Denys Garneau déclare:

Je ne suis pas bien du tout assis sur cette chaise  
 Et mon pire malaise est un fauteuil où l'on reste  
 Immanquablement je m'endors et j'y meurs. (P 31)

La position assise, le fauteuil représentent confort et immobilisme, et caractérisent ce qu'un Bataille nomme le monde du "Bien" et qui s'oppose à toute activité créatrice authentique. Dans le poème "Identité" (P 158) où un cadran sur la console représente le temps linéaire historico-social, le poète s'enlise, s'immobilise et devient chose.

Si le temps-obstacle chez Saint-Denys Garneau est symbolisé par ce cadran, les éléments spatiaux hostiles à la communication seraient des murs, des ombres, des brumes. Nous avons vu que l'espace fermé représenté par un cercle clos suggérerait chez Saint-Denys Garneau la mort. Le poète se sent souvent pris dans de tels cercles: en fait il s'y sent emmuré et y étouffe. . . .

Car la maison meurt où rien n'est ouvert —  
 Dans la maison close, cernée de forêts [. . .]  
 Jusqu'à ce qu'on étouffe dans la maison fermée (P 66-67)

L'espace d'incommunicabilité chez Saint-Denys Garneau est un espace de brume et de manque de clarté. La vision y est entravée. Lorsque le poète parle de son identité rompue (manque de communication entre le "je" et le "moi"), l'espace du poème devient brumeux:

Le pas étrange de notre coeur  
 Nous rejoint à travers la brume  
 (P [Identité] 158)

Or la brume c'est l'épaississement de l'espace. Le poème "Commencement perpétuel" décrit le drame d'une quête rendue impossible par des obstacles spatiaux qui entravent la vision.

Un homme [. . .]  
 Portant [. . .]  
 des lunettes sans couleur  
 Est assis au pied d'un mur  
 Au pied d'un mur en face d'un mur (P 73)

Le mur est un obstacle insurmontable à la création, or l'homme est prisonnier des murs. Non seulement l'homme se trouve dans une position statique caractéristique du monde du "Bien" (il est "assis"), mais encore s'agit-il, apprenons-nous un peu plus loin, d'un espace sans lumière: "il fait noir comment savoir" (P 74). Cet homme compte (activité mécanique semblable à celle d'une horloge) et vit dans l'opacité d'un espace paralysant et d'un temps infernal du recommencement perpétuel de l'absurde.

Le vide est un espace-néant invivable. C'est que le vide, absence d'air, signifie en fait l'espace de la mort. Dans un tel contexte même la transparence devient horrible et ne fait qu'accentuer l'incommunicabilité. Nous retrouvons un tel espace-obstacle dans le poème [Et maintenant]:

Et dans cette lumière retirée derrière un mur  
 infranchissable de vide et qui ne sert plus à rien  
 [. . .] (P 184)

Notons l'association du vide à un mur infranchissable. Ce thème obsédant de l'emmurement apparaît dans le poème "Commencement perpétuel" d'une façon surprenante: c'est le ciel, espace ouvert par définition, qui constitue un mur.

Quel dôme de firmament concave qu'on le perce (P 75)

Et dans "Spectacle de la danse," il est impossible de mouvoir (le mouvement étant la paraphrase du regard), donc de créer, à cause des murs et de l'espace étouffant:

Il faut dire qu'il est difficile de danser ici  
 Dans ce manque d'air  
 Ici sans espace qui est toute la danse. (P 37)

Un peu plus loin Saint-Denys Garneau explique:

Comment voulez-vous danser j'ai vu les murs  
 La ville coupe le regard au début  
 Coupe à l'épaule de regard manchot [. . .] (P 37)

Le dernier vers explicite le lien entre regard et mouvement. Si l'élan du regard se trouve brisé (une fois de plus par les murs de la ville), l'élan du mouvement est brisé lui aussi: la réalité des murs paralyse.

Les images du mur, de l'ombre, du vide ainsi que de la fermeture et de l'opacité se retrouvent toutes dans le poème intitulé "Monde irrémédiable désert." L'espace y constitue un obstacle :

Quel appel de bras tendus  
Se perd dans l'air infranchissable (P 155)

La mémoire y a "de lourds rideaux aux fenêtres" (P 156). Ces rideaux qui ne laissent pas la lumière entrer, arrêtent l'élan du regard (ici élan vers le passé). Dans cet espace toute communication est impossible :

L'ombre des absents est sans voix  
Et se confond maintenant avec les murs  
De la chambre vide. (P 156)

Espace muet car "sans voix," espace où l'absence et le vide constituent des obstacles aussi durs qu'un mur :

Et me heurter d'un grand coup sourd  
Contre l'absence (P 156)

Murs, rideaux, brumes, vides ne sont que symboles de difficultés plus graves. Le poète est pris dans un engrenage ; il veut communier avec autrui, mais "autrui" est chose immobile, "assis sur cette chaise" (P 31). En termes sartriens, cet obstacle spatio-temporel représente une conscience en vie et en mouvement en train de devenir image figée et impénétrable. C'est l'obstacle constitué par un pour-soi vivant qui s'enlise dans un en-soi mort. Cette pétrification spatio-temporelle et la solitude qui en résulte appartiennent au monde des adultes, monde du "Bien." C'est un monde où le contact entre les gens est rompu et où l'amour n'existe plus. Rappelons ici l'ambiance socio-culturelle dans laquelle avait tenté de créer Saint-Denys Garneau. Ce monde figé où toute communication authentique semble impossible se réfère, à ce niveau, à ce que les critiques ont étudié et décrit comme le contexte duplessiste et janséniste étouffant.<sup>5</sup>

Mais l'obstacle le plus subtil et le plus insidieux à la communication est le langage même. Car l'espace-temps hostile à la communication génère un langage mort et linéaire. Ce langage du monde du "Bien" constitue un écran, un obstacle pour cacher l'absence du réel, plutôt qu'un instrument pour le dévoiler. Saint-Denys Garneau rejette ce langage inauthentique. Dans son *Journal* il écrit : "Je me détache du lyrisme facile, coulant, qui s'emporte lui-même : je me dégage des mots" (J 58). Il explique la relation entre ce langage et la qualité du temps dans le monde quotidien du "Bien" :

[. . .] ces paroles dans le temps,  
des paroles de passage,  
(car sous) [. . .] l'atteinte du temps salissant, du temps passager.  
(P "Silence" 118)

Ce langage "passager" non seulement reflète l'échec de la communication, mais encore constitue un obstacle à la communication. Afin que le langage poétique puisse naître, il faut abolir le langage mort du monde du "Bien," du monde janséniste figé du poète.

*Conditions privilégiées de la communication*

L'espace le plus évidemment privilégié pour la communication dans l'oeuvre de Saint-Denys Garneau est l'espace du voyage et de la mer: "[. . .] un enfant qui part en mer" (P 85). Que l'espace privilégié de la poésie au langage fluide soit la mer ne surprend guère, car comme nous le verrons plus loin, le voyage de l'enfant est une quête d'un verbe poétique. L'eau, source éternelle de la vie, aux fonctions purificatrices, est l'élément privilégié pour la création d'un nouveau langage. Ainsi que nous l'avons noté, si la fermeture constitue la mort, l'ouverture est condition nécessaire pour la création. La mer est l'espace ouvert par excellence. Alors que la "maison fermée," nous l'avons vu, était pour Saint-Denys Garneau le lieu d'une "mauvaise" solitude, il veut que sa maison (son espace) soit ouverte:

Je veux ma maison bien ouverte  
(P "Ma maison" 103)

L'ouverture est accueil et réceptivité. Alors que l'espace fermé s'oppose à la vie et à l'art, l'ouverture favorise la création:

[. . .] l'espoir à la surface du globe d'une fissure,  
[. . .] l'espoir et d'un éclatement des bornes  
Par quoi retrouver libre l'air et la lumière.  
(P "Commencement perpétuel" 76)

Le poète associe l'ouverture à la lumière. Non seulement accueil, l'ouverture est encore possibilité de départ. L'élan du regard (de la vision poétique) sans cesse arrêté dans l'espace de la mauvaise solitude, ne l'est plus dans un espace ouvert. La quête dont nous traitons étant avant tout une quête intérieure, cet espace-prison qu'il s'agit d'ouvrir, dont il faut se libérer serait, lui aussi, intérieur. A un autre niveau d'analyse il est évident que la volonté de se libérer de son propre espace-prison pourrait être associée à la nécessité que ressent Saint-Denys Garneau de se libérer de l'espace social et de l'ambiance culturelle qui l'emprisonnent. Saint-Denys Garneau aurait aimé être emporté hors de lui-même. Or, être emporté hors de soi, n'est-ce pas littéralement posséder l'enthousiasme créateur? Ainsi le poète écrit-il:

Qui me verra sous tant de cendres,  
Et soufflera, et ranimera l'étincelle?  
Et m'emportera de moi-même,  
Jusqu'au loin [. . .]  
(P "Lassitude" 104)

L'ouverture représente aussi l'enfance sans mensonge et sans artifice. Dans [Après tant et tant de fatigue] le poète qui voudrait un repos d'enfance parle de "s'endormir à coeur ouvert" (P 216).

Dans "Rivière de mes yeux" nous relevons plusieurs éléments essentiels pour la création. Les yeux (le regard, la vision poétique) sont ouverts. Ces yeux sont associés à des rivières, à un ruisseau, à l'onde fluente (l'élément de l'eau dans sa fluidité, sa transparence et son pouvoir régénérateur) :

Ô mes yeux ce matin grands comme des rivières  
 Ô l'onde de mes yeux prêts à tout refléter [. . .]  
 Comme un ruisseau rafraîchit l'île [. . .] (P 39)

Pour qu'il y ait création, les yeux ouverts doivent donc être prêts à l'accueil.

Nous avons constaté que l'espace hostile à toute communication est constitué par des cloisons, des écrans, des murs et des vides. Cet espace hostile suggère, comme nous l'avons noté, l'idée de heurt. Par opposition à cet espace fait d'obstacles, l'espace privilégié est un espace ouvert. C'est aussi un espace transparent. N'oublions point que la transparence est le résultat de l'abolition de tout écran entre la source de luminosité et nous. La transparence désincarne en faisant disparaître l'enveloppe des choses. Il ne s'agit évidemment plus de la mauvaise transparence qui arrête le regard mais de celle qui le laisse s'épanouir. Si l'espace privilégié de la création est l'eau, c'est qu'en effet celle-ci est un élément transparent. Dans son *Journal* Saint-Denys Garneau dit l'importance et la "nécessité d'une limpidité à travers quoi tout paraît tel qu'il est" (J 51). Et dans un autre passage il raconte son effort pour atteindre cette transparence :

Purifier mon regard — purifier la source. Quelle grande chose qu'un regard pur [. . .]  
 Le regard transparent qui est comme une bonne parole. Le regard qui ne s'arrête pas au sens charnel des formes, mais qui pénètre jusqu'aux éléments de salut. (J 82)

La recherche de la pureté du regard pourrait être évidemment associée au jansénisme de Saint-Denys Garneau ainsi qu'à la hantise du péché charnel de toute une société. Nous nous proposons dans la présente étude de discuter l'aspect "mythique" de cette quête poétique. En effet, la recherche de la transparence est évidente dans toute la poésie de Saint-Denys Garneau. Dans "Esquisses en plein air," poème liminaire, nous relevons un crescendo exprimant toute la fascination du poète devant la clarté croissant jusqu'à la transparence.

La voix des feuilles  
 Une chanson  
 Plus claire un froissement  
 De robes plus claires aux plus  
 transparentes couleurs. (P 49)

Voix et couleurs atteignent une transparence qui rend possible le chant poétique. Pour exprimer cette transparence (abolition de la forme), Saint-Denys Garneau

emploie la technique de "l'aquarelle." Robert Vigneault écrit à ce propos: "exécutée avec des couleurs délayées dans l'eau, [l'aquarelle] délivre les couleurs de leur opacité."<sup>6</sup> Ainsi, Saint-Denys Garneau, dans le poème intitulé "L'aquarelle" (et contenant l'élément de l'eau même dans son titre) écrit:

Est-il rien de meilleur pour vous chanter  
les champs  
 Et vous les arbres transparents  
 Les feuilles  
 Et pour ne pas cacher la moindre des lumières  
  
 Que l'aquarelle cette claire  
 Claire tulle ce voile clair sur le papier. (P 50)

Une fois de plus l'accumulation de clarté résulte en la transparence qui révèle au lieu de cacher, et par conséquent est essentielle au verbe poétique. Alors que l'aquarelle désincarne la couleur, la flûte, elle, désincarne et spiritualise le son. Ainsi Saint-Denys Garneau écrit:

Tous les champs ont soupiré par une flûte [. . .]  
 Toute la respiration des champs a trouvé ce petit  
 ruisseau vert de son [. . .]  
 (P "Flute" 51)

La flûte, associée à l'eau limpide, opère une sorte de transparence de son. Lorsque le poète, muet, implore une voix pour chanter, il demande "(une) voix claire, avec la transparence du cristal" (P "Lassitude" 105). La notion de transparence s'applique donc à la voix aussi bien qu'au regard. Par son regard le poète vainc l'espace, le regard étant "Au plus près de l'immuable transparence" (P "Spectacle de la danse" 38) et rend possible une autre conquête de l'espace: celle du mouvement et de la danse. C'est que d'après le poète "la danse est paraphrase de la vision" (P "Spectacle de la danse" 38). La fluidité et la transparence seraient les qualités communes à l'art tel que le conçoit Saint-Denys Garneau.

L'artiste tout comme l'enfant se distingue de l'adulte par la pénétration de son regard. Dans "Nous ne sommes pas des comptables . . ." Saint-Denys Garneau oppose les comptables qui appartiennent au monde du "Bien," au monde du travail rémunéré et des chiffres à un "nous" qui représente les enfants-poètes. Alors que le poète et l'enfant appartiennent au monde sacré et possèdent une vision pénétrante

[. . .] un enfant  
 Qui peut comme lui voir au travers en toute liberté  
 (P "Nous ne sommes pas des comptables" 36)

le comptable, lui, appartient au monde du "Bien" et vit dans l'opacité des choses. Son regard, faible et superficiel, s'arrête à la forme et ne discerne que les apparences.

A propos de cette quête de la transparence chez Saint-Denys Garneau, Robert Vigneault écrit :

il se doit de devenir pénétrant, de *voir au travers* de la réalité opaque, et, par des jeux de lumière de plus en plus subtils, de s'inventer un monde merveilleusement diaphane.<sup>7</sup>

Au temps-obstacle du cadran, linéaire et historico-social, ordonné et pétrifiant, s'oppose le temps sacré de l'enfance. L'enfant voit à travers les choses. L'enfant ne se laisse guère pétrifier : il se refuse à toute image ou rôle figés. L'enfant ne risque jamais de devenir un "en-soi" opaque et lourd. Dans "Portrait," Saint-Denys Garneau décrit l'enfant, être insaisissable, auquel il est impossible de coller une étiquette :

C'est un drôle d'enfant  
C'est un oiseau  
Il n'est plus là (P 45)

S'agit-il d'un enfant? Ou alors d'un oiseau? Avant que nous puissions nommer et par là chosifier, l'enfant disparaît! Sa disparition est d'autant plus saisissante qu'elle est tout à fait imprévue. La séquence passé-présent-futur relève du temps linéaire : l'enfant ignore ce temps qui progresse d'une façon rectiligne. Il vit dans un temps naturel, dans l'innocence et l'intensité du moment sensible. La répétition, dans chaque vers, du verbe "être" au présent souligne cette existence sans passé ni futur. Saint-Denys Garneau décrit les enfants en mouvement incessant :

Ils vous ont sauté dessus [. . .]  
Ils ne vous ont pas laissés  
Avant de vous avoir gagnés  
Alors [. . .]  
Se sont enfuis en riant.  
(P "Enfants" 43)

C'est pour toutes ces raisons que l'enfant crée. C'est lui qui part en voyage en mer, c'est lui encore qui, véritable dieu, "joue" à recréer l'univers.

Un enfant est en train de bâtir un village  
C'est une ville, un comté  
Et qui sait  
Tantôt l'univers.  
(P "Le jeu" 33)

Eva Kushner et Romain Légaré dans leurs livres respectifs sur Saint-Denys Garneau<sup>8</sup> attribuent une grande importance symbolique à ce jeu.

Le temps privilégié de la création est le voyage, donc le mouvement. Si l'immobilité, la pétrification spatio-temporelle constitue un obstacle à la communication, le mouvement par contre favorise la communication. C'est pourquoi l'enfant-

poète, comme nous l'avons déjà vu, était en constant mouvement. Saint-Denys Garneau recherche ce mouvement dans le poème liminaire des "Jeux":

Mais laissez-moi traverser le torrent sur les roches  
Par bonds quitter cette chose pour celle-là (P 31)

C'est que le mouvement signifie vie et créativité. Grâce à une telle aventure (comportant d'énormes risques), le poète découvre des rapports mystérieux au-delà des apparences:

Je trouve l'équilibre impondérable entre les deux  
C'est là sans appui que je me repose. (P 31)

Le voyage pour Saint-Denys Garneau c'est avant tout le départ. Dans le poème intitulé "Autre Icare," par exemple, le poète abandonne tous les appuis, toutes les certitudes:

Et ces liens ingénieux tendus  
à travers des espaces trop vides (P 148)

Ce que le poète craint par-dessus tout durant son voyage, c'est le port qui immobilise et qui met fin au voyage:

Tel un homme  
Sur le chemin trop court par la crainte du port  
Raccourcit l'enjambée et s'attarde à venir  
(P "Commencement perpétuel" 76)

Ainsi, pour Saint-Denys Garneau, l'espace-temps privilégié à la communication s'oppose élément par élément à l'espace-temps hostile à la communication. L'espace ouvert, sans limites ni obstacles, transparent, s'oppose aux murs, aux maisons fermées, à l'opacité. Le temps sacré, celui de l'enfance et du voyage, s'oppose au temps linéaire du cadran.

### *Naissance du verbe poétique*

Pour introduire cette partie de notre étude où nous examinerons la communication même, nous avons choisi de regarder de plus près le poème sans titre qui commence par "Qu'est-ce qu'on peut . . .". Nous avons déjà vu qu'il s'agissait d'un voyage en mer et que le voyageur était un enfant:

"Comme un enfant qui part en mer" (P 85)

Ceci reprend quelques éléments clefs associés à la communication et que nous avons déjà relevés. Seul un être tel l'enfant (être privilégié ayant la vision poétique pénétrante et appartenant au monde "sacré") est capable d'accéder à une communication authentique. Le voyage se fait en mer, espace privilégié de la communication. Parlant du langage et de l'eau, Bachelard dit:



L'eau est la maîtresse du langage fluide, du langage qui assouplit le rythme, qui donne une matière uniforme à des rythmes différents.<sup>9</sup>

Il s'agit là d'un langage poétique. Le voyage en mer serait une quête d'un tel langage. Or "l'eau substance de vie est aussi substance de mort pour la rêverie ambivalente."<sup>10</sup> Nous retrouvons ce double mouvement de vie et de mort dans le poème :

Enfant en voyage tout seul  
 Que la mer à nos yeux déchira. (P 86)

Le voyage entrepris est essentiellement solitaire :

Qu'est-ce qu'on peut pour notre cœur  
 Qui nous quitte en voyage tout seul (P 84)

Autrui ne peut rien pour celui qui entreprend ce voyage. Mais il ne s'agit plus de la "mauvaise solitude" étudiée dans la première partie de notre étude. La solitude de ce voyageur est une condition nécessaire à la création qui viendra. Ce voyage intérieur et solitaire est un véritable tourment, et s'accomplit dans la souffrance :

Qu'est-ce qu'on peut pour notre ami  
 Qui souffre une douleur infinie. (P 84)

Le voyage porte en soi des risques énormes "[et] le voyage est à l'orage" (P 85). Entrepris dans la solitude, comportant une souffrance infinie et de graves risques, ce voyage se termine par la perte de soi :

[. . .]                                    notre cœur  
 Enfant en voyage tout seul  
 Que la mer à nos yeux déchira. (P 86)

C'est alors que prend naissance la parole, car le cœur "se tourmente et se lamente" (P 84). Or, "se lamenter," n'est-ce pas déjà raconter sa douleur, la traduire en verbe? Mais si la création est souffrance et tourment, pourquoi créer? C'est que c'est un impératif : le poète *doit* entreprendre le voyage. La répétition de "Qu'est-ce qu'on peut . . ." souligne cette nécessité, ce sort contre lequel on ne lutte pas. Ainsi, dans une lettre à un ami, Saint-Denys Garneau écrit :

Il est d'une immense importance, et c'est nécessaire au monde, que le poète chante parce qu'il est fait pour chanter, mais il n'importe en rien, pas un grain de sable, que tel soit poète. (L 225)

Et il ajoute un peu plus loin :

Je cherche quel chant j'ai à chanter, ce qui est moi tel qu'il demande à être chanté. (L 225)

Ayant vu quelques caractéristiques de ce voyage ou itinéraire créateur entrepris par le poète, examinons, à présent, quelques "points de repère" de son tracé. L'iti-

néraire créateur commence paradoxalement dans le silence. Dans le poème intitulé "Silence," une division s'opère entre le temps linéaire et le temps sacré, la parole ordinaire et le verbe poétique. Afin de pouvoir entreprendre le voyage en quête du verbe poétique, il s'agit de quitter la parole et le temps ordinaires :

Et ma bouche se ferme [. . .]  
Et ne prononce plus ces paroles dans le temps,  
des paroles en passage [. . .] (P 118)

Il s'agit ici de la parole qui appartient au "temps salissant, [. . .] temps passager" (P 118). Alors, dans le silence créé pourra naître une autre parole, située dans un temps autre. Ce sera la parole sacrée. C'est justement en quête de ce temps sacré et de la parole sacrée que sera entrepris le voyage. Le silence établi est riche en ce qui s'annonce déjà :

Et ma bouche se ferme comme un coffre  
qui contient des trésors (P 118)

C'est le temps de l'attente sans voix

Qui m'entendra, qui suis sans voix  
Maintenant dans cette attente?  
(P "Lassitude" 104)

Le poète muet attend dans une douleur sans fin. Il a abondonné la parole ordinaire et n'a pas encore atteint le verbe poétique. Et pourtant, ce moi "sans voix" évoque et crée par le chant incantatoire (l'incantation se retrouve dans la répétition des termes "quelle, quels" ainsi que dans le rythme). Il crée ce qui "soufflera, et ranimera l'étincelle" (P 104). La voix s'y glissera avec grande précaution :

Quelle voix pourra se glisser, très doucement,  
sans me briser, dans mon silence intérieur? (P 105)

Celui qui au début du poème était "sans voix" a retrouvé sa voix au fond de son silence et de son attente.

Si l'attente est tourment c'est qu'elle se termine parfois par le non-aboutissement, par la carence et le manque. Dans le poème qui commence par "Un poème a chantonné tout le jour . . ." une telle attente déçue est contée. L'attente qui fait pressentir la beauté à venir

On a senti sa présence [. . .]  
Soulevante  
[. . .] un pressentiment d'équilibre (P 127)

s'avère vaine :

Mais cela s'est perdu dans la terre  
Il n'y a plus rien (P 127)

et se termine par “la solitude plus abrupte et plus incompréhensible” (P 128) et par un “silence strident” (P 128). Cette solitude est mauvaise, ainsi que ce silence. Le silence strident s’oppose à l’harmonie d’un silence intérieur dont naîtra le chant poétique. L’itinéraire créateur n’est donc point sans danger.

L’oeuvre poétique naît dans le silence et dans la solitude. Dans une lettre Saint-Denys Garneau explique à un ami: “la solitude est le commencement de la vie intérieure” (L 198), et dans une autre lettre, il parle de la nature de cette solitude créatrice: “La solitude ce n’est ni l’égoïsme, ni l’indifférence, c’est la charité” (L 202). Ainsi, lorsque l’enfant crée l’univers, il désire être seul: “Ne me dérangez pas, je suis profondément occupé” (P 33). Le poète chante la solitude, la bonne solitude créatrice:

[. . .]                    cette amie  
L’accompagnement de cette gardienne  
  
La profondeur claire de ce puits  
Le lieu de retrait de notre amour  
Où notre coeur se noue et se dénoue  
Au centre de notre attente  
  
(P “Ma solitude n’a pas été bonne” 144)

Une fois de plus la bonne solitude amie est associée à la transparence du liquide, la transparence et le liquide étant, comme nous l’avons déjà vu, des éléments privilégiés de la communication chez Saint-Denys Garneau.

Silence, solitude, attente, l’oeuvre poétique présuppose une véritable ascèse et un dépouillement absolu. Ce dépouillement doit être poussé jusqu’au bout:

Quand on est réduit à ses os  
Assis sur ses os  
couché en ses os  
avec la nuit devant soi. (P 206)

Réduit à cette pauvreté fondamentale, Saint-Denys Garneau s’observe:

Je suis une cage d’oiseau  
Une cage d’os (P 92)

Dans son *Journal*, le poète revient souvent à cette ascèse: “Ai-je la vocation de la pauvreté, du dépouillement sensible, intellectuel, etc.?” se demande-t-il, et il répond: “Il me semble que oui” (J 246). Toujours dans son *Journal* il examine le but d’un tel dépouillement: “A quoi va mener l’inventaire que je fais de ma pauvreté?” (J 131). La parole qui naîtra grâce à ce dépouillement extrême sera selon le mot de Robert Vigneault: “[. . .] une parole proférée dans une pauvreté ontologique et littéraire absolue.”<sup>11</sup> Ce sera donc une parole sans mensonge ni artifice, une parole chantant la réalité non souillée, la réalité des os. Dans le *Journal* Saint-Denys Garneau note à propos de l’homme ainsi dépouillé: “il sera réduit à

ce seul tronc vertical, franchement nu. C'est comme il dit, sa dernière expression" (J 239). Un tel dépouillement extrême, c'est déjà la perte de soi. Saint-Denys Garneau connaît l'exigence de se perdre afin de créer; "Mais à mesure que son oeuvre prend une réalité, lui (le poète) périt" (J 113). C'est ce que Eva Kushner nomme "un anéantissement créateur"<sup>12</sup> chez Saint-Denys Garneau. Dépouillé jusqu'à la perte de soi, seul, muet, le poète attend. Et s'il pressent la création arriver et lorsqu'il la pressent venir, l'attente se transforme en bonheur fébrile. Les moments qui suivent sont véritablement privilégiés, heureux. Le poème "La flûte" chante ces moments uniques de l'itinéraire créateur.

Si près [. . .]  
 [. . .] là [. . .]  
 Tout près,  
 Tout contre le souffle.  
 (P "La flûte" 112)

Toute une série de termes soulignant l'approche du chant poétique et à la fois retardant délicieusement son arrivée. Nous retrouvons ici ce que dans un autre poème, Saint-Denys Garneau appelle l'ingéniosité de créer en "divisant à l'infini l'infime distance" (P "Commencement perpétuel" 76). Il s'agit en effet d'une distance spatiale très petite, comme l'indique la série de termes relevés. La répétition de ces termes, les vers très courts, le rythme coupé, tout cela opère une "division à l'infini" de "l'infime distance." Le souffle constitue l'inspiration créatrice même. La flûte sera l'instrument à travers lequel ce souffle chantera. La parole sacrée arrive, représentant l'éternité:

Ses paroles qui ne sont pas du temps  
 Mais qui représentent le temps dans l'éternel  
 (P "Silence" 118)

Devant le verbe, une dernière hésitation

il me semble que je vais saisir une présence. Et je suis craintif devant cette grâce qui attendrit mon âme, et j'ai peur qu'elle me soit retirée. (J 85)

C'est que, comme Saint-Denys Garneau l'explique:

Il (le poète) hésite devant cette confrontation définitive qui consiste à mettre un nom sur ce qui n'en a pas encore. (J 78)

Et bien que vers la fin du recueil il y ait aboutissement de la quête [Ô poésie enfin trouvée . . .] (P 223), il ne s'agit certainement pas d'un état statique. Si le poème intitulé "Commencement perpétuel" exprime le désir de briser les limites du temps-espace ordinaire "Dans l'espoir et d'un éclatement des bornes" (P 76), dans [Ô poésie enfin trouvée . . .] la transgression se fait:

Et par la déchirure transparait la lumière  
Métamorphosant tout. Et je vois clair enfin. (P 223)

Mais cette vision n'est que l'annonce d'un autre voyage :

Ah! Tu me guideras, cher coeur que je possède  
De la bonne façon, vers la beauté suprême (P 224)

Il s'agit donc encore d'un élan, d'un pro-jet toujours à recommencer et jamais atteint :

“Je veux aller toujours vers la bonne Beauté” (P 224)

Dans le poème intitulé “Portrait,” l'idée de ce mouvement est explicitée. L'essentiel dans la quête poétique est le voyage. Le voyageur, une fois de plus, est un enfant. Mais c'est un enfant-oiseau. Il ne se laisse pas cerner; il échappe à toute définition :

C'est un drôle d'enfant  
C'est un oiseau  
Il n'est plus là (P 45)

D'où la très belle et très émouvante conclusion du poème :

Alors il faut le voir venir  
Et l'aimer durant son voyage. (P 45)

Dans *Le livre à venir* Blanchot note à propos d'une telle démarche :

L'essence de la littérature [. . .] elle n'est jamais déjà là, elle est toujours à retrouver et à réinventer.<sup>13</sup>

L'idée du voyage associé au mouvement et évitant l'immobilisation et l'aboutissement est explicite. Ce voyage fut précisément l'itinéraire créateur de Saint-Denys Garneau. Pour ce poète la poésie a été une quête incessante, une quête qui n'en finit plus.

Qui affirme la littérature en elle-même, n'affirme rien. Qui la cherche, ne cherche que ce qui se dérobe<sup>14</sup>

écrit encore Blanchot. N'est-ce pas cela le sens de l'enfant, de l'oiseau qui n'est plus là? La dialectique déchirante entre la solitude et la communion sous-tend la pensée et l'oeuvre entière de Saint-Denys Garneau, et de là vient la douloureuse et émouvante beauté de son expression.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Citons-en quelques-unes: Jeanne Lapointe, “Saint-Denys Garneau et l'image géométrique” dans *Présence de la critique*, Critique et littérature contemporaines au Canada français, textes choisis par Gilles Marcotte (Montréal: HMH, 1966), 123-30; Jean Le Moyne, “Saint-Denys Garneau, témoin de son temps” dans *Convergences* (Montréal: HMH, 1961), 219-41; Paul Wyczynski, “Saint-Denys Garneau

ou les métamorphoses du regard” dans *Poésie et symbole* (Montréal: Déom, 1965), 109-46.

Il ne faut pas oublier tout un numéro spécial qu'*Études françaises* consacrait encore en 1985 à ce poète et intitulait “Relire Saint-Denys Garneau”: *Études françaises* 20/3 (Hiver 1984-1985). Sur la couverture même de ce numéro nous lisons: “L’oeuvre et le personnage de Saint-Denys Garneau n’ont pas cessé d’être présents. On peut les croire dépassés, classés par l’histoire littéraire, disparus de notre horizon, et c’est alors justement qu’on bute sur eux, incontournables: le texte d’une oeuvre qu’on ne finit pas de rassembler (comme en témoignent dans ce numéro d’importants inédits) et la figure d’un écrivain dont l’aventure s’impose exemplaire dans sa radicalité.” De nos jours, les critiques reconnaissent la qualité inépuisée et inépuisable de l’oeuvre de Saint-Denys Garneau.

- <sup>2</sup> Le sigle P renvoie à: Saint-Denys Garneau, *Poésies* (Montréal: Fides, coll. Nénuphar, nouvelle édition, 1972). Le titre du poème (ou la première ligne de celui-ci) et la page de la citation suivront la lettre P.
- <sup>3</sup> Le sigle J renvoie à: Saint-Denys Garneau, *Journal* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1964).
- <sup>4</sup> Le sigle L renvoie à: Saint-Denys Garneau, *Lettres à ses amis* (Montréal: éditions HMM, coll. Constantes, 1967).
- <sup>5</sup> Dans sa “Présentation” (5-6) du numéro spécial des *Études françaises* consacré à Saint-Denys Garneau (cf. note 1 de la présente étude), Robert Melançon de l’Université de Montréal écrit:

Il y a quinze ou vingt ans, Garneau semblait disparu de notre horizon, définitivement classé dans quelque chapitre d’une idéale histoire de la littérature québécoise sous la rubrique: “ravages du jansénisme durant la Grande Noirceur.” [...] En 1969, le *Ciel de Québec* de Jacques Ferron résumait ce verdict dans la figure d’un Orphée caricatural, empêtré dans l’immaturité. La réputation de Garneau était au plus bas.

Depuis son oeuvre n’a cessé de grandir [...]

Robert Melançon conclut cette brève mais combien sage présentation du numéro spécial ainsi:

Aucun article ne propose d’interprétation idéologique ou sociologique de l’oeuvre. Cette omission est délibérée: nous proposons de considérer le *texte* de Garneau. On pourra légitimement prétendre le situer historiquement quand on l’aura vraiment lu.

Notre étude se veut avant tout une telle lecture attentive et approfondie.

- <sup>6</sup> Robert Vigneault, *Saint-Denys Garneau à travers “Regards et jeux dans l’espace”* (Montréal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1973), 20.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 59 (souligné dans le texte).
- <sup>8</sup> Eva Kushner, *Saint-Denys Garneau* (Paris: Seghers, 1967); Romain Légaré, *L’Aventure poétique et spirituelle de Saint-Denys Garneau* (Montréal: Fides, 1957).
- <sup>9</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L’Eau et les rêves* (Paris: Corti, 1942), 6-7.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.
- <sup>11</sup> Robert Vigneault, *Saint-Denys Garneau à travers “Regards et jeux dans l’espace”*, 63.
- <sup>12</sup> Eva Kushner, *Saint-Denys Garneau*, 80.
- <sup>13</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Le livre à venir* (Saint-Amand: Gallimard, 1959), 393.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

## MIMIC FIRES

THOMAS CARY, *Abram's Plains: A Poem*. ed. D. M. R. Bentley, Canadian Poetry Press, \$6.50.

ADAM KIDD, *The Huron Chief*. ed. D. M. R. Bentley, Canadian Poetry Press, \$6.50.

MY FASCINATION WITH our colonial writers begs for some explanation. Living in a turn-of-the-century house in Alberta, sitting in an 1820 Windsor comb-back chair from Nova Scotia, and reading eighteenth-century heroic couplets from Quebec, I relish a literary and cultural heritage that denies the conventional wisdom that Canada is a young country with an infant literature. These two critical editions of two of our earliest colonial poems demonstrably lengthen what their editor calls "the Canadian continuity." And each poet reaches still further into the past to create a mythology based on such historic heroes as Wolfe and legendary heroines as Tapooka.

D. M. R. Bentley introduces *Abram's Plains* (1789) as "the best-known and most important document in eighteenth-century Canadian poetry." He provides a detailed critical context that reaches back to the poem's origins in the English neo-classical and picturesque traditions and then forward to its offspring in the emerging Canadian tradition. Thus Cary is shown as adapting the old-world tradition of the topographical river poem to the new-world environment of the St. Lawrence which Cary intuitively anticipates will be the "shaping force in Canadian society and the Canadian soul."

Beginning with a survey of the Great Lakes, the poem moves "homeward" down the river for a catalogue of the bountiful material resources elaborated on

for commercial rather than aesthetic reasons: "the lofty mountain-pine" is cited for its importance to the tall-mast trade, the "beaver's silken fur" and "martin's sables" to the fur trade. Such appeals to the interests of London merchants have led Sandra Djwa to dismiss Cary as a typical colonial addressing a European audience with no attempt to envision a new cultural community. But such commercial cataloguing is consistent with the moral vision behind the topographical genre. Cary parallels the taming of the "savage soil" with the untamed "savage mind." His heroic account of Wolfe's victory and self-sacrificial death provides the moral exemplum needed to civilize the colony as a truly new world:

Anxious, he hears the shout — "they fly, they fly," "Who fly?" "The foe —" "contented then I die."

Calling for peace forevermore, Cary documents his present view from the Plains: the farmland, the church, the cross, the hospital. We expect these to be symbols of a new order, but for Cary, they demonstrate the savage excesses of the Roman Catholic religion from which British rule will free the colony. How differently Charles Sangster would later treat the Plains. In his "St. Lawrence and the Saguenay" (1856), Wolfe and Montcalm are now honoured by the new nation as heroes equal in nobility, courage, purity, and generosity.

Cary, in contrast, is unconsciously undermining the unity of his poem, a unity that he strives to attain from the opening sentences of his Preface to the closing lines of his poem. Literature in this country, he claims in his Preface, is emerging from the dark, ushered into day "to illuminate our horizon," a metaphor made more concrete and localized at the end of the poem with the fireflies darting across the vast darkness; as they shoot their "mimic fires, / Each insect, *Caesar* like, to rival Jove aspires." But an "apolitical" analysis of

unities is not Bentley's concern. Rather, he brings his knowledge of generic conventions and neoclassical aesthetics towards some New Historicist conclusions. He argues that Cary's use of stale neoclassical diction and popular picturesque conventions are effective in turning an unknown, unnamed land into the "recognizeable, nameable, and classifiable, and therefore known, comforting, and unthreatening." Cary thereby articulates the "economically and culturally motivated desire for peace, order and good government."

Adam Kidd reveals a radically different set of values. Bentley presents Kidd as the romantic counter-culture figure. Though J. S. Mill's comparison of Coleridge and Bentham may be the initial inspiration, Bentley has found in Walter Pater's *Greek Studies* (1895) a new set of binary terms to adapt to the Canadian experience. Pater identified an Asiatic centrifugal tendency in art as a "flying from the centre." Bentley describes this centrifugal tendency as an "enthusiastically affirmed . . . hinterland orientation," contrasting it with the centripetal tendency, or claustrophobically conceived British "baseland orientation." If Cary is the baseland forerunner of Goldsmith and Sangster, then Kidd is the hinterland forerunner of Crawford and Kroetsch.

Bentley's success with redefining these old dichotomies — Smith's native/cosmopolitan, Frye's new world/garrison, Davey's Heraclitean/Platonic, Lee's earth/world — is at best mixed. He clearly has fun with the kind of generalities that provoke lively discussion in the classroom. A quotation from Kroetsch is called upon to define Kidd's radical, decentring position: "Now existing on the circumference rather than in the centre exits me." What Kidd thus shares with many post-modern adherents is his resistance to entrapment and enclosure and his preference for freedom and openness. But Bentley carries on his fun to the point

where he appears to be parodying academic scholarship. What are we to make of a series of such forced analogies as the following? "Moreover, Kidd's aggressive account of the termination of his divinity studies echoes forward in Canadian poetry to the intense dislike of academic institutions expressed by many low-modern and postmodern writers." As a hinterland poem, "*The Huron Chief* anticipates such works as Kroetsch's *Field Notes* and Michael Ondaatje's *Billy the Kid*." Works by John Newlove, Christopher Dewdney, and David McFadden (*A Trip around Lake Huron!*) are also anticipated, "not to mention works by Pablo Neruda, W. C. Williams, Charles Olson, and others." But others are indeed mentioned: Carmen, Davey, Pound, Purdy, and Derrida. "To claim that there is a sense of *différance* as well as of ending . . . would probably be pushing the discussion too far into the critical wilderness; however, it is worth making the intertextual point that . . ." The introduction is riddled with such apologetic disclaimers: "to be sure, it is a long way . . .," "would probably be going too far . . .," "while it would be folly to concentrate too seriously on all these . . ." Such straining detracts from the amount of evidence that proves Kidd to be indeed of a different ilk.

For example, Cary, in his Preface, directs his poem to the refined reader, having polished it in his leisure "to please the lovers of polite learning." Kidd, in his Preface, directs attention to himself as the rude rustic whose poem was "written without much opportunity for correction, on the inner rind of birch bark during my travels through the immense forests." Indian friendships and Christian atrocities "induced" him to write his dramatic poem to counter the conventional accounts of settlement in America. In the poem, Kidd identifies the Christians as inferior creedsmen who satanically misguide the innocent on a self-righteous crusade to



heaven: "Because to you, you think is given / A nigher way to march to heaven." Kidd supports his lines with a note citing Alexander Henry who argued that the Indians fare better "in their 'wild nativity' than under the hypocritical sophism of their *saddle-bag* inspired preachers." Christians deceive, drug, rob, violate, murder, and contaminate the noble tribes. In an additional note Kidd quarrels with his mentor Thomas Moore for collecting misinformation about the Indians from their American enemies who "in the dead of night" would rush upon the Indians to destroy them "with more than a savage ferocity." Kidd's only affinity with Cary is in his faith in Canada as a British colony: "Many of the Indian tribes have emigrated into Canada — and are now prospering, and happily enjoying the manly protection of the British government."

Aside from quibbles about one of the introductions, I have full praise for both volumes as reliable critical editions. The copy-text is the first edition of each poem. The few editorial emendations are limited to accidentals and are listed at the end of the text. (I found no errors in my collation with Kidd's first edition, but I had no access to the first edition of the older-than-my-chair *Abram's Plains*.) There are no extant manuscripts for variants, but a long list of explanatory notes richly annotates the sources, allusions, and obscure references in each poem. Cary's debts are primarily to Pope's "Windsor Forest," Thomson's *The Seasons*, Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, Carver's *Travels*, and Milton. Kidd's are to Moore, Byron, Campbell, Scott, Milton, George Longmore, Mackenzie's *Voyages*, and Buchanan's *Sketches*. Bentley's explanatory notes demonstrate solid scholarship; here, when Bentley notes an example of "echoing forward," he is cautious even though his evidence is convincing: after his detailed account of Tapooka and the

legend of the white canoe, he notes a "probable echo" of *The Huron Chief* in Charles Sangster's "Tapooka." Kidd writes: "Great Chiefs assembled from afar, / Who, having to MANITTO prayed, / Salute the beauteous bridal-star." Sangster responds: "Great Chiefs from the wilds afar; / . . . have prayed to Manitou freely / And saluted the Bridal Star."

Bentley presents these two editions as representing the origins of one or the other of the two traditions in Canadian poetry. The introductions represent two sides of Bentley himself: the scholar and the provocant. But of more importance, his editorial work reconciles one academic tradition with another: he has applied to the format of the inexpensive textbook the scholarly rigour required to produce a reliable critical edition.

DAVID LATHAM

## MUSIC IN WORDS

HELEN VENDLER, *The Music of What Happens*. Harvard Univ. Press, US\$29.50.

M. TRAVIS LANE, *Reckonings*. Goose Lane Editions, \$7.95.

LINDA ROGERS, *Singing Rib*. Oolichan Books, \$7.95.

ERIN MOURÉ, *Furious*. Anansi, \$9.95.

PETER DALE SCOTT, *Coming to Jakarta*. McClelland & Stewart, \$12.95.

DAVID WEVILL, *Figure of Eight*. Exile editions, \$12.95.

LOOKING BACK AT the influence of imagism on twentieth-century poetry, one can see that, whatever its salutary effects, it did lead to an undervaluing of the music of poetry. Poets like Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams are remembered for making contemporary poetry more colloquial, for emphasizing the phrase more than the sentence and line, the speaking voice more than the singing voice, and the results are certainly evident in con-

temporary Canadian poetry and in the poets represented here. In entitling her newest collection of essays, *The Music of What Happens* (the words taken from a poem by Seamus Heaney), Helen Vendler places her emphasis upon the poem as an artifice involving sound and rhythm rather than merely picture, and thus establishes a necessary critical counterweight to the prevailing fixation upon the image and the speaking voice.

The criticism of poetry is especially demanding, Vendler reminds the reader, since the refinement of poetic language imposes a duty upon the critic to be similarly conscious of subtlety and nuance in language. In this respect Vendler's practical criticism is generally freshly illuminating, as in her analysis of a poem by Donald Davie in which she notices the unobtrusive, softening effect brought about by Davie's use of feminine endings. Similarly, in connection with John Ashbery she has noted a hitherto unnoticed subtlety in mood, a monkishness which in spite of the "social joy" in the poems and their "hours of devoted illumination in the scriptorium, see a blank and blighted end."

Among other gifts Vendler has one that can be especially treasured in today's critical climate: she writes well. Remarking on the relationship between art and nature, for example, she comments pithily that art does not "mimetically resemble nature, any more than cider mimetically resembles apples." Writing about the mercurial poetry of Sylvia Plath, she sees Plath as veering in some of the poems from "zero to one hundred like a dangerously swinging needle." In connection with the role of the critic Vendler notes judiciously and memorably that in the hands of an able critic it is not so much that the "rubble of diction" in a literary work "arranges itself into a form; rather, what was previously heard as cacophony is now heard as song." The allusion to

song brings to the surface Vendler's neoclassicism. For her, poetry is above all artifice whose lasting work is the making of beauty.

The sigh of disappointment as Vendler confronts bald and plain poetry is audible in her essays on Philip Levine and Adrienne Rich. She resents such writing not only because it lets down the craft of poetry but also because it inhibits the growth of the critic. For these reasons she feels most comfortable with sophisticated poets like Merrill and Ashbery. Nevertheless, even in the face of disappointment with poets, as in her objection to the journalistic topicality of some of Ginsberg's language, Vendler generously acknowledges that Ginsberg was responsible for "loosening the breath of American poetry at mid-century, influencing poets more formal than he, such as Lowell and Rich."

In writers about whom she has convincing reservations, Vendler usually manages to notice something of value. Even with Harold Bloom, whom Vendler sees as having become so preoccupied with literary echoes that he misses the "independent" beauty of particular poems, even here she praises Bloom for helping to prevent the reduction of poetry to "sensuous, moral, patriotic, ethical, or ideological statement." Vendler's sympathy is severely tried in looking at the work of Anne Sexton, who has been described by Maxine Kumin in an introduction to Sexton's *Complete Poems* as having been "untrammeled" by a traditional education. Vendler's annoyance at this slighting of a knowledge of the tradition of learning is consistent with her practice in writing about modern poets of comparing them with authors in the traditional canon — Ammon with Frost, Merrill with Herbert, Sexton with Dickinson.

Distancing herself from poets like Sexton, who have attracted attention in part because of their shocking subject matter, or poets like Rich, who have strong ideo-

logical programs, Vendler declares that the only value that need be claimed for a poem is its aesthetic value. Here, one is drawn to disagree, even while conceding the damage which has been done to poetry by the excessive ideological preoccupations of some poets. If only in passing, Vendler appears to agree, though, that, in addition to creating beauty, poetry brings new knowledge to light, even if of a delicate, shadowy, psychological kind. In discussing Plath, for instance, she points to Plath's genius in articulating those "wild states of feeling which in the rest of us remain so inchoate that we quail under them, speechless." Similarly, she is grateful to the poetry of James Merrill for not only enlarging our awareness of "what to do with our sentiments" but for instructing us as well in knowing "what our sentiments are." In this and other matters *The Music of What Happens* is the reflection of a cultivated and balanced intelligence devoting itself openly, fastidiously, and generously to the study of modern poetry.

Of the new poetry collections by M. Travis Lane, Linda Rogers, and Erin Mouré, that by Lane is the most accomplished. The poems in *Reckonings*, as the title implies, have to do with the taking of one's bearings, the discovery of a sense of direction, and not surprisingly, perhaps, they are steeped in an attractive religious atmosphere. Lest some be put off by the word religious, I hasten to add that these are not pious or sectarian poems but rather spiritually lively lyrics which are accessible to the most secular reader.

The best of the poems, "Our Young Deacon," centres on a young woman who is filled with supernatural hope even as her body wastes away under the impact of a terminal disease. The poem is superbly constructed, with the major motifs culminating in an arresting image of the angel of death:

The hall was dark  
and dark against the heap

of shadows, pamphlets, overcoats,  
an angel stood —  
crow-haired, with blue wings, heavy veined,  
to hear, as our young deacon taught,  
how sweet is life.

Typically, the poems combine narrative and lyrical elements with some dramatic interest in the better poems, as in "Our Young Deacon" and "November Thaw," which focuses on the death of a child:

Summer will come,  
but not the past  
with its garish, painted elephants  
and the Rocking horse all sugar gilt.

In dry leaves lies  
the cooking stone  
where she rolled her mud pie patties out  
studded with choke cherries.

The images of stone and choke cherries ambiguously mirror, in a manner somewhat analogous to Ransom's famous poem about John Whiteside's daughter, both the memory of the child's vitality and the onset of death.

At times, Lane flirts dangerously with clichés, but usually manages to have them burnished by their linguistic contexts so that they come to seem not only acceptable but necessary:

Last month squid flung their rubber lives  
like gloves along the stony beach  
and died for love.

All in all, a considerable number of the poems in *Reckonings* are intellectually substantial, firmly structured, and patiently polished.

*Singing Rib* by Linda Rogers, as its witty Edenic title indicates, is a collection of poems exploring the state of women against the background of centuries of male domination. Grouped around the central motif of the mirror, the sequence deals imaginatively not only with the subjection of women to nature but thereby to culture, as in "Elles Cultivent Ses Jardins":

The womb is a greenhouse  
where women garden in broken glass.  
Their little fingers dig and sometimes bleed.

Mothers and daughters are busy growing  
flesh  
refracted in mirrors  
open to wandering light.

Although all three of the female poets discussed here deal with gardens as nurturing settings in one way or another, Rogers's handling of this symbol is the most searching and ambivalent.

She pictures women in the section "After the Fall" as living dormant lives, fed by dreams that only art, in the absence of anything but a predatory relationship between the sexes, can sustain:

She is writing herself silent  
a poem without lips,  
healing the wounds her lover makes in his  
music.

Although some banal phrasing and awkward redundancies are distracting at times, Rogers's alternately surreal and allegorical lyrics can evoke a stimulating sense of imaginative release, especially in poems like "Woman of the Dunes" and "Women Who Fall Out of Tall Buildings."

Appended to Erin Mouré's *Furious* are a series of critical observations designed to explain the poetry that precedes them. Displaying an interest, evident among some recent poets, in applying experimental alterations in the structure of language to the writing of poetry and showing some similarity to Gertrude Stein in her use of repetition and incremental variation, Mouré demonstrates an interest in poetic theory that, as in the case of Stein, can lead at times to the triumph of theory over practice. Some of the theorizing, while inconsequential to the reader, is given prominence by the poet in being associated with the title of her collection of poems: "It's the way people use language makes me furious." Me too.

Shaped by such theoretical considerations, many of the lines are fragmented, without being suggestively elliptical, while

others are merely prose set into stanzaic form, as in the following extract:

Eventually I came to miss the mountains, the  
man said  
hands knotted in front of his jacket  
in the Faculty bar of an English university  
in Montréal where the heat stifles

What can one say in the face of such flaccid lines, except perhaps, who cares?

Nevertheless, several poems in *Furious* certainly repay attention, one of these being "Cure," a meditation on the body and on our relationship to other animals, whose formal cohesiveness is as welcome as its unusual theme:

I am thinking of the cross-grain slices  
they cut out of cows, in their centre being,  
their fleshy fullness.

Sometimes I am only the piece of liver in me,  
its cell walls  
permeable & unbutchered  
Its huge slice grows in me, instead of  
children

I am growing this organ  
When I raise it in my arms to show you  
it flops, a wet flag, awkward . . .

Those cows moving in the field, freely and  
captive, their memory timed  
down to the kill floor, so many seconds for  
the head blow,  
so many to lance away the skin.

If the liver were soft enough to hold up  
in my mouth without hurting,  
I could call my memory out of it

I could taste what is in me that won't ever be  
clean.

Peter Dale Scott is the son of F. R. and Marian Scott, a fact of some importance in his ambitious poem *Coming to Jakarta*, which mingles memories of growing up in Montreal and the Eastern Townships with political reflections on the evolution of some aspects of the current international political situation. Reflecting Scott's experience as a diplomat, political scientist, and poet, *Coming to Jakarta* contains poetic ruminations focused on the massacre of 500,000 Indonesians in the 1960's following the C.I.A.-sponsored revolution

against Sukarno. More than this, though, the poem is a meditation on the ubiquitous, historical collusion in violence on the part of all human beings.

Bristling with highly charged historical facts, *Coming to Jakarta* could be called a docu-poem, and is in this respect reminiscent of Pound, who emerges as one of Scott's mentors:

EP the year you heard Steffens  
on the lucidity of Lenin  
not yet at the end of your tether

after the German mark  
inflated a trillion fold  
the author of the Dawes plan

As in Pound, Scott attempts to fashion a vortex in which allusions, ideas, and images whirl into a linguistic unity. As in Pound as well, the focus is divided between the perceptiveness and wit of the social analysis and the growing, complex portrait of the narrator. In these respects one would have to concede Pound's relative mastery even while harbouring one or two doubts about the wisdom of what even *he* set out to do in the *Cantos*. Nevertheless, in his best poems, in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, for example, Pound does manage to sail poetically across the sea of his allusions, which are subordinated by the force of his perceptions so that the allusions don't drown the reader. In Scott's poem, on the other hand, the reader is overwhelmed by the allusions much of the time, worn down gradually amid the procession of three-line stanzas.

What one remembers with fondness from Scott's poem are the boyhood scenes in Westmount and especially in the Lake Memphremagog area of Quebec and Vermont. Here, the watchful child, dazzled like the young Henry James by the social and artistic importance of his parents and their friends, begins to piece together a picture of the modern political stage. Like many open-ended poems of its sort, however, *Coming to Jakarta* is too lengthy

and too repetitive in format, if not in detail. In connection with its inclusion of detail, incidentally, its chief value may be for the biographical light it throws on F. R. Scott and his family.

*Figure of Eight* by David Wevill is an attractive collection of new poems and translations. As with Peter Dale Scott's poem there are a number of references to Asian settings and to Ezra Pound. Wevill's poetry is more reflexive than Scott's and more recondite. The title poem, which is divided into eight sections, considers among other matters the tenuous and elusive relationship between the mind and the external world and in particular the mind of the poet in relation to the external world. Indeed, references to poetry are woven into Wevill's argument in such a way that one finds it difficult, in Yeats's terms, to tell the dancer from the dance. While self-conscious, contemporary poems about poetry are not altogether appealing at this point, Wevill shows himself at times to be skilful at reconciling epistemological theme and poetic form, as in "Premonition":

So far one goes  
has gone, must come again  
to where the pathway and the feet  
are identical, and you are not  
the figure lost or I the shadow left.

The lines capture beautifully both the path of the mind in its inevitably belated attempt to get understanding and experiencing to coincide and in reproducing the figure-of-eight knot symbol which permeates the poem. In the mind's attempt to turn back on experience and on itself in its rage for order, one encounters sameness and difference, which Wevill registers through the music of the verse — in the aural symmetry of "the figure lost" and "the shadow left," for example.

Recurring in elegant variations throughout the book, the figure-of-eight motif conveys Wevill's belief that "Language is Everything," as he puts it in one

of his titles. Only language, it is perceived, can track and in a limited and somewhat unreliable manner retrieve life, which is always and “forever ahead of the sentence one reads/or creates.”

If Peter Dale Scott’s work reveals the influence of Pound, Wevill’s shows the influence of Stevens. At its weakest Wevill’s work reads like warmed-over Stevens, as in “Why Distance is Necessary.” At its best, as in “Interstice,” a poetry emerges whose measures create a distinct and delicate impression:

Somehow not in sight  
a car is burning by the side of a road  
nothing is there to watch it but these words.

In general, Wevill shows in this collection that he possesses not only a refined intelligence and taste but a sensitive ear. In comparison with all of the poets considered here, he has perhaps the keenest appreciation for sound and rhythm as well as a full-enough sense of the poem as artifice, perhaps, to please even so exacting a critic as Helen Vendler.

ROSS LABRIE

## HONKY TONK HISTORY

PAULETTE JILES, *The Jesse James Poems*. Polestar, \$10.95.

MISSOURI-BORN Paulette Jiles pays homage to the folk culture she grew up with in this sequence of poems and interpolated texts on the notorious James gang. And, as if to make sure we do not mistake the origins of *The Jesse James Poems*, the author’s back-cover photo presents her in carnivalesque make-up, strumming a banjo. She has created a new role for herself in this book dedicated to her “Jiles cousins in Butler County”: tribal historian as honky-tonk girl.

The book also offers a new reading of the James gang to counter the popular

one of bad-guy bank-robbers. Jiles adduces an interesting *political* component to their often random violence, seeing them as guerrilla warriors who refuse to stop fighting after the Civil War is over because they have been brutalized and betrayed by their own people. The first poem in the book — also the longest — sets up this idea through the story of Zerelda James, the mother of the “huge famous bandits,” who is first assaulted and then burned out of her farm under cover of battle by a neighbour with whom she has quarrelled.

Jiles gives voice not only to the bandits’ mother but also to their wives. This attempt to give a broad social picture of the period is further supported by the inclusion of newspaper clippings, songs, advertisements, and other ephemera. Much of this evidence supports the book’s argument that the guerrilla warfare of 1856-1865 led inevitably to the bank robberies of 1865-1876, since it had become “too dangerous” for the outlaws to surrender. When the gang tries to do so, James is shot in the chest. He survives, but learns a lesson from the encounter:

... the wound is shutting itself like a  
bank vault

over his safe and valuable heart, nobody  
notices the  
rare skeletons  
of birds or the sudden hair of milkweed, our  
pods  
are not broken,

the soul does not float on the octaves of the  
wind,  
all the wars  
and reasons for wars are lost, but we will  
make up  
our own

reasons. We will make up our own story. At  
Appomattox the federal  
government learned its fatal lesson; that  
anything  
can be solved

by the application of superior force. This is  
what

happens to  
 winners. They begin to believe in winning.  
 And now the federal government believes in  
 guns.  
 So do we.  
 We believe in guns.

As with much of the book, this poem is told in the voice of Frank James. The split in Frank's psyche articulated in these lines, where delicate metaphors of death and transcendence lead into blunt statements about revenge, leads him to turn his little brother Jesse into a perfect killing machine while he himself prays for his own soul's release. Eventually he comes to recognize what he has done:

What I will answer for is not the federals or  
 the  
 bank clerks but that I  
 came back for you at Low Gap, full of  
 persuasion  
 and leading horses.  
 I cocked you like a pistol, you were efficient  
 and  
 fifteen. "And I  
 said: Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For  
 I would  
 fly away and be at  
 rest. Lo, I would flee far away and live in the  
 wilderness." Psalm 55.

These "killer instincts" are described by both Jesse himself (in "Confessions of a Sort," spoken after his death) and by gang-member Charlie Pitts (in *his* "Confession," perhaps the best poem in the book) as something which "inhabits" them and "looks out of" their eyeholes, whereas "the only thing / looking out of Frank's eyeholes is Frank."

This polarization of the two brothers is based in popular history but also owes a great deal to Michael Ondaatje's bandit opera, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. And Jiles cousins or no Jiles cousins, *The Jesse James Poems* is as much a tribute to the author's adult reading of Ondaatje as to her childhood as audience to local legends. Her conception of Jesse in particular owes a lot to Ondaatje's Billy, although the more complex and interest-

ing Frank can also be seen as deriving from Billy in his introspection, as from Garrett in being a "sane assassin." There is also a flavour of Ondaatje in Jiles's association of the marginalization of outlaws with the increasing mechanization of society and its repression of the body.

Ultimately, though Jiles's dialogue with Ondaatje provides contextual richness, it handicaps the poems. It seems that in trying to provide an alternative reading of outlaw culture to balance his macho mythology, she too often pulls back into socio-historical didacticism or jokiness. She's a little *too* self-conscious and detached — everywhere in *The Jesse James Poems* there are flashy lines, intriguing metaphors, acrobatic line-breaks, but what I miss is a strong personal investment in the characters and their lives. The Missouri material in "Turning Forty," the concluding section of *Celestial Navigation*, had a wildfire pathos, humour and authenticity that this book often lacks, and that Jiles fans like me were looking forward to. So read *The Jesse James Poems* for fun — not for a revelation.

SUSAN GLICKMAN

## FATED SYMPATHY

ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN, *The Story of an Affinity*.  
 ed. D. M. R. Bentley, Canadian Poetry Press,  
 n.p.

*The Story of an Affinity* sits in the midst of Lampman's work, in the middle of his career, too large and central to be ignored. In an abridged version it occupies the last sixty-four pages of *The Poems of Archibald Lampman* (1900), and it occupied much of Lampman's attention for nearly a year and a half in the early 1890's when he was at the peak of his aspirations and confidence as a writer. Nevertheless, for years critics did ignore the poem. Among the few who commented upon it, G. H. Unwin, in general a warm admirer

of Lampman, declared: "One has only to read a few pages . . . to realize that in the long narrative poem he was completely out of his element." Now *The Story of an Affinity* has been published by the Canadian Poetry Press as "the first in a series of editions of early Canadian long poems." D. M. R. Bentley, who is also general editor for the series, has provided a complete version of the text, ample notes, and an extended argument for the poem's weight and merit. Bentley has certainly succeeded in producing a useful and reliable text, and also succeeds in showing that the poem deserves serious attention, though he does not address the problems that I think most readers will have with it.

There can be little doubt about Lampman's intentions in *The Story of an Affinity*. If this work can indeed be regarded as, in Lampman's words, "a small novel in blank verse," it can be even more precisely described as a thesis novel. As the title indicates, the narrative is primarily designed to illustrate a theme — in this case, a peculiarly nineteenth-century doctrine of romantic love. Lampman may well have found this doctrine, as Bentley suggests, in Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (*The Elective Affinities*), though it was widely current in works by other nineteenth-century writers, including George Sand, Kingsley, Browning, and Tennyson. In brief, "affinity" is conceived of as a "fated sympathy" between a particular man and woman, whose predestined union constitutes a "bond . . . sacred and inherent" that transcends social law, elevates, inspires, and fulfils both partners, and sanctifies their passion. It is sexual love idealized by way of the Romantic yearning for the sublime and adapted to Victorian preoccupations with domestic happiness and social improvement. The concept has not worn well in our own century, and our patience with Lampman's poem may be sorely tested, accordingly. What is a post-feminist

reader to do, for instance, with the muscular heroism of the protagonist Richard Stahlberg (the German means "steel mountain"), or with the long-suffering heroine Margaret Hawthorne, whose symbolic identity is emphatically floral, without the hint of a thorn? And what is a post-Freudian reader to do with the following passage, in which Richard's discovery of Margaret asleep in an orchard triggers an apocalyptic understanding?

A vision, rare and beautiful to him  
As any by a Saint in Patmos seen,  
Had slid beneath the cloud-bands of his soul,  
And flooding all with one enchanted gleam  
Had driven them far asunder. At one stroke  
Life rose beneath him like a magic tower,  
Whereon for the first time, naked and free,  
He stood in the clear light, and felt, and saw.

Our patience may be tried almost as sorely by the generic conventions of the poem, which are, with respect to narrative, a realistic treatment of romance motifs, and with respect to poetry, an adaptation of the domestic idyll as developed and made popular by Tennyson in "Dora," "The Gardener's Daughter," "Enoch Arden," and other pieces. As narrative, *The Story of an Affinity* adheres much too closely, for current tastes, to the norms of traditional realistic fiction: it is omniscient, predominantly linear, stylistically homogeneous, and subject to a resounding closure. As a domestic idyll, it insists upon artifice and allusiveness, and also upon humble domesticity as the context of moral heroism: conventions that have led many twentieth-century critics to dismiss Tennyson's efforts in the genre as "bathetic odysseys," though there have been some recent attempts to rehabilitate the form. In short, *The Story of an Affinity* is written on a theme and in a mode that are distinctly alien to current critical predilections. Yet if readers will exercise some historical tact and imagination, they will discover in it considerable interest, depth, and beauty.



Bentley makes a suggestive case for the poem's significance as a "Herculean narrative" — that is, one that traces "the mental and spiritual growth of a physically powerful hero" — in relation to other works of Canada's "pioneer or post-pioneer culture" such as Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie* and Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*. He also identifies and illuminates the poem's profound indebtedness to Matthew Arnold's studies of culture and literature. Most important of all, he has restored a text that was badly chopped up when Duncan Campbell Scott edited *The Poems of Archibald Lampman*. Scott made numerous cuts, most notably deleting more than a quarter of the second of the poem's three parts. In the complete version, the shapeliness and integrity of *The Story of an Affinity* become sufficiently evident to call into question Unwin's summary judgement on Lampman's narrative powers. The narrative is enriched by a complex pattern of relations and types among the characters, by an effective pacing of narrative time, and by a skilful and crucially significant modulation in the symbolic atmosphere of light and shade as the story proceeds. It acquires further substance and resonance from numerous literary and mythological allusions, from Lampman's customary brilliance in the creation of symbolic landscape, and from an important critique of the social landscape in Part II. I do have a question as to whether or not Lampman was capable of dealing adequately with the psychic and social violence that he reflects upon in *The Story of an Affinity*. All the evidence suggests that he was a remarkably good man, with a stubborn faith in human benevolence, perhaps to the extent that certain spaces of human experience remained opaque to him. To my mind there is an incongruity in *The Story of an Affinity* between the consistency and temperate tone of the narrative and the sub-

ject of violent interior forces that it engages. Nevertheless, the poetry is often highly accomplished, and the poem as a structure is carefully, lovingly wrought.

I quite agree, then, with Bentley (and have argued elsewhere myself), that *The Story of an Affinity* deserves to be taken seriously — I do not mean uncritically — as one of the principal "long poems" of late nineteenth-century Canada, and as a fascinating index to Lampman's strengths and limitations as a poet. Perhaps precisely because its conventions now seem alien to us, it should now be worth more attention.

Bentley's conscientious and sensible editing has produced an excellent text. As he points out, he was fortunate to have for a copy-text the authoritative fair-copy holograph in the Library of Parliament. Some reference might have been made to the rough drafts in Lampman's notebooks in the Public Archives of Canada, but while these would likely have revealed a good deal more about Lampman's method of composition, it is unlikely that they would have resulted in a more reliable text. Bentley's explanatory notes are largely devoted to identifying or suggesting the possibility of allusions to literary sources and antecedents, and should be of great value to anyone interested in the issues of influence and intertextuality in nineteenth-century Canadian poetry. No list of intertexts can be comprehensive, and I would add some scriptural passages to the classical, Romantic, and Victorian models emphasized in this edition. There is no question, however, that Bentley definitively documents the poem's principal sources in Wordsworth, Arnold, and Tennyson. He deserves thanks for this scholarly edition of *The Story of an Affinity*, and for throwing further light on textual defects in *The Poems of Archibald Lampman*, thereby underscoring the long-recognized need for a critical edition of "the works."

LEN EARLY

## ONE-MAN SHOW

JOE C. W. ARMSTRONG, *Champlain*. Macmillan, \$29.95.

IN THE MIDST of reading Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and Mowat's *Virunga*, as well as assorted mystery/crime novels, Joe Armstrong's *Champlain* lands on my doorstep. Then I'm slightly dismayed to see in Armstrong's Preface that René Lévesque thought Champlain pretty dull stuff: "Not very stimulating, the old founding father. His wife seems to have been a lot more fun." Said wife, Hélène Boullé (1598-1654), was only 12 years old and her husband 43 when she married the founding father in 1610. A marriage contract stipulated that the union should not be consummated until two years later. And very little more is known about Madame, except that she came to Champlain with a large dowry, and years later turned out to be a pretty good businesswoman. But he was dead by then (1635), so what was René Lévesque talking about?

Joe Armstrong, map collector and historian, started thinking about the origins of French culture in Canada after the 1976 advent of a separatist government in Quebec. And in 1988, after the Meech Lake Accord and Jacques Parizeau's return to the Parti Québécois, the subject of French cultural roots seems even more relevant. However, Samuel de Champlain stands on his own, needs no reference to earlier or later politicians. Seemingly he was everything and did everything: explorer, map-maker, historian, colonizer, seaman and navigator. . . . The list goes on and on, an honour roll of accomplishments, a litany of what one man could do in a fairly brief lifetime.

Champlain's early life is obscure. Armstrong says he was born in 1567; other sources claim it was 1570. Five years a soldier in the French army, Champlain sailed for the New World in 1599, the

first of his twenty-nine voyages across the Atlantic. He visited the West Indies and Central America; then present-day Maine and Nova Scotia. In 1608 he explored *La Grande Rivière de Canada* (the St. Lawrence), and founded Quebec. Earlier, in 1603, Champlain and the French settlers at Tadoussac had agreed to support a federation of northern Indian nations against the formidable Iroquois farther south. This agreement was made in exchange for the right to settle on Indian lands. And to win the support of his Indian allies, "Champlain put on a one-man show with his musket, and, for an encore, he promised a bigger and better performance back at the settlement."

That agreement of the French with Montagnais, Algonquin, Etchemin and Huron Indians to fight the Iroquois had some deadly consequences. It made sure the Iroquois chose the English side against the French in future wars. And despite marvellous (to Indians) European firearms and some early victories, the Iroquois didn't stay impressed very long. The defeat of the French and their Indian allies at Syracuse in 1615 was a disaster. And Champlain himself was badly wounded by arrows.

Over the thirty years of Champlain's involvement with colonization in New France, his political struggles at home were nearly as strenuous as Iroquois wars in the New World. Money demands for the colonies were insistent and continual; his leadership was constantly threatened. But thankfully, Champlain had inherited a large estate from an uncle in 1601, leaving him personally financially secure. This estate is described as having a value of "five hundred salaries," and one wonders: whose salaries, ditch-diggers' or noble-men's?

Forty of Champlain's maps and illustrations from his journals are included in this book. They change all the sureties of modern cartography; they make every-

thing familiar strange again. Whales lollop in black and white oceans; mountains look like mountains, not shadings of colour; and storm-tossed sailing ships battle angry seas. Everything in the illustrations is a combination of imagination and reality; battle scenes are stretched and distorted in order to condense everything into the picture. And incidentally, we are told that the only authentic portraits of Champlain himself are those he did himself to illustrate battles with the Iroquois. He comes to us as a line-drawing out of time, Hélène's explorer husband, incapable for centuries of consummation of their ghostly marriage.

Samuel Champlain was not always a *parfait gentil knight*: he held grudges and wasn't always reliable. But it seems to me that none of these trivial imperfections matter a damn! The guy was simply amazing — no other word for it. There were rarely more than a hundred settlers at Quebec, Tadoussac and Montreal during the Champlain era. They starved and laboured and died over that period; they endured the *Canadian winter*, a more horrible foe than the Iroquois. But thirty years after the founding father's death in 1635, New France had a population of 2,000, complete with governmental apparatus and legal system. "Let us now praise famous men"?

I can't think why René Lévesque should make his denigrating remarks about Champlain. The sheer physical vitality of the man seems endless; his explorations mapped all of eastern Canada and northeastern coasts of the United States. He was the linchpin of New France.

A few questions remain in my mind: what was the source of Champlain's obsession and drive? Where was the root of his courage and persistence? A simple why? It's easy to say patriotism, and certainly he was patriotic; he was also religious, and that played a part as well. But

Champlain didn't make a big show of his patriotism and his "Frenchness" as such; nor was religion really prominent in his life. Despite marriage to the child Hélène, it would seem that women were not extremely important to him either. (New France was his child.) And the journals are rarely informative about his personal life. Fame, in those media-absent times, amounted to the expression on another person's face when they met a so-called famous man or woman.

Three hundred and fifty years have cloaked much of Champlain's career in deep obscurity. And despite loyal friends and compatriots, none of them seems to have felt the man's greatness. In some present-day people's minds, he remains the absent-minded explorer who mislaid his astrolabe. (That early navigational device eventually ended up — not so strangely — in an American museum.)

Despite curiosity and interest, I don't intend to pursue Champlain's life any farther than Joe Armstrong's book. To learn more, or even guess at more, I'd have to read the Champlain Society's hefty six-volume edition of Champlain's journals. But having once read, from start to unhappy ending, all 2,000 pages of Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, I know my own limitations.

AL PURDY

## TENDRESSE & HARGNE

JEAN ETHIER-BLAIS, *Le désert blanc*. Leméac, \$12.95.

ANDRÉE FERRETTI, *Renaissance en Paqanie*. L'Hexagone, \$14.95.

VINGT ANS APRÈS avoir gagné le prix France-Canada pour ses *Signets 1 et 2*, Jean Ethier-Blais reçoit le prix France-Québec pour *Le désert blanc*, recueil de cinq nouvelles qui traitent de gens ordinaires, de drames banals qui font ressortir tout ce qu'il y a de pathétique dans la vie

quotidienne. La première nouvelle, "Les perdrix," raconte l'histoire d'un jeune garçon de sept ans, dont le père l'initie à la chasse. Prétexte anodin, à première vue, mais qui permet toutefois une tendre évocation de la conscientisation d'un esprit innocent, touché profondément par la réalité de la mort. L'initiation à la vie d'adulte entraîne nécessairement la perte de l'innocence de la jeunesse.

"Delloise," écrite à la première personne pour introduire de la variété, nous présente l'histoire touchante de deux vieux qui se connaissent depuis longtemps et qui sont liés par un amour réciproque mais jamais consommé. C'est un récit de la solitude et du regret, du manque de communication qui empêche les êtres de se connaître. Mais au-delà de cette triste histoire d'amour non avoué, il y a la plus grande tragédie de l'aliénation. Ces deux personnes sont des exilés, des Canadiens français de retour à Montréal après un séjour de quarante ans à Paris. Cependant, à leur retour, ils trouvent que tout a changé et que toute réintégration à la réalité québécoise actuelle leur est désormais impossible. Incertains de leur identité dans ce nouveau pays qui ne semble plus être le leur, ils se réfugient dans les manières et la mentalité du passé, symboles de la dualité inconciliable chez le Canadien français; l'héritage français se heurte de front à la réalité de l'appartenance nord-américaine. Le conte le plus court du recueil, "Le palmier," placé au milieu pour en former le noeud, constate le plus précisément ce que l'on pourrait appeler en quelque sorte le leitmotiv: la recherche d'une signification à l'existence. Un cadre brutalement mis à la retraite après plusieurs années de fidèle service doit se confronter à lui-même.

A travers la tragédie, on peut discerner une lueur d'espoir, une occasion à ne pas manquer pour redécouvrir la vie et apprendre à en voir la vraie beauté. Cet optimisme naissant est à contraster avec le

pessimisme noir du "Désert blanc," nouvelle dans laquelle toute la stérilité et l'aliénation d'une classe sociale — la haute bourgeoisie d'Outremont — sont évoquées de façon pénétrante par l'auteur. Un jeune homme, frisant la trentaine, habitant toujours sous le toit de ses parents, connaît une existence banale — le désert blanc. Malheureux dans son travail, il l'est davantage en famille. Leur maison, encombrée de meubles anciens et d'ornements inutiles, reflète parfaitement leur vie figée. Vivant dans cet univers irréel, dans cette distorsion du temps, Charles n'a pas la force de caractère pour s'y échapper. Déjà il affiche une attitude non seulement défaitiste mais aussi aliéné, ayant perdu contact avec la réalité. Une ultime tentative de faire voir à ses parents le néant de leur existence échoue. Le mal est trop profondément ancré, la communication est impossible. Charles vivait avec ses parents et ne les connaissait pas et eux à leur tour ne connaissaient pas leur fils. Réquisitoire impitoyable et toujours actuel.

"Un début de réponse," par contre, nous suggère que tout n'est pas perdu, qu'il y a raison d'espérer. Comme la plupart des personnages d'Ethier-Blais, Hélène, Montréalaise de quarante ans en vacances en Tunisie, semble chercher le dépaysement pour mieux se retrouver, pour mieux réexaminer sa vie, remettre en question les idées reçues et meubler le vide. La prose la plus évocatrice de tout le recueil fait naître un exotisme qui sert à "prolonger cette quête d'autre chose, d'un inconnu." Hélène n'a pas les réponses à ses questions, mais le vent, la lumière, les odeurs lui parlent d'un mystère prometteur, d'où le titre. Elle ne sait pas ce qu'elle est venue chercher, mais elle sait que tout est possible: "Que ce mystère me transforme et m'apporte la joie."

La tendresse n'est pas absente non plus du récit d'Andrée Ferretti, *Renaissance en*

*Paganie*, quoiqu'elle soit diluée d'une bonne dose de hargne, ce que l'on ne retrouve pas chez Ethier-Blais. Elaine Rivière, jeune philosophe en train de faire des recherches sur la nature de la rébellion, voit surgir sur l'écran de son ordinateur les fiches d'Hypatie d'Alexandrie et d'Hubert Aquin. Après avoir consulté quelques livres de référence, elle décide que ces deux personnes — rebelles à leur façon — conviendront parfaitement à ses recherches. Cette extraordinaire circonstance — pour dire le moins — sert de prétexte à un long dialogue entre les deux défunts séparés de seize siècles, dialogue dans lequel ils se racontent avec passion et emportement. A part leurs initiales, ce qui lie ces deux individus est leur "rébellion contre toutes les formes de l'assujettissement." Cependant, le problème, c'est que l'auteur a voulu mettre sur un pied d'égalité les situations respectives d'Hypatie et d'Aquin, alors qu'elles ne s'y prêtent pas. Hypatie, mise à mort de façon horrible sur les ordres de l'Église chrétienne de plus en plus puissante pour avoir voulu garder ses propres croyances et poursuivre ses recherches en mathématiques et philosophie, parle pour toutes les victimes de la persécution religieuse de toute époque. Sous la plume de Ferretti, c'est une figure noble et tragique, d'une dignité exemplaire qui fait d'elle un parfait symbole de la lutte pour la liberté d'expression. Par contre, le portrait qu'elle nous donne d'Aquin révèle un être profondément antipathique, un homme rancunier, misérable et faible. C'est un mégalomane qui prend sur son dos tout le poids de "l'échec" de l'indépendance du Québec. Dès le début il avoue avoir voulu entendre son peuple "se reconnaître et s'aimer dans un vivat unissant [s]on nom et le Québec." C'est sa "noire lucidité," semble-t-il, qui donnera aux chercheurs "de l'esprit à leurs idées sans hardiesse, de la dimension à leur vie sans dépassement." Il est orgueilleux, plein de lui-même, se

considérant le seul dépositaire du savoir, de la culture: "je souffrais de la médiocrité petite-bourgeoise et de l'indigène culturelle de ceux qui détenaient... les menus pouvoirs consentis à notre société."

Le nombrilisme qui semble affliger Aquin (ou est-ce Ferretti?) l'amène dès les premiers instants de sa rencontre initiale avec Hypatie à plaider la cause de son peuple, à faire l'éloge de sa langue au dépens d'une autre "décharnée, désâmée" (devinez laquelle), et à s'expliquer dans les termes restrictifs de sa québécoïté. Hypatie, dont les paroles sont rapportées par Aquin, se raconte par contre dans les termes universels de son appartenance à la race humaine. C'est son histoire qui nous touche, c'est sa lutte qui nous affecte, car c'est une lutte qui touche l'humanité tout entière. Vouloir comparer l'intolérance meurtrière d'une Église intransigeante et persécutrice à la situation d'un Québec moderne qui s'affirme de plus en plus devient risible à la longue. Aquin agit comme un enfant qui, n'ayant pas obtenu ce qu'il voulait, se retire et se contente, comme tous les êtres petits et impuissants, de s'invectiver contre ses ennemis: on nous sert toute une litanie de diatribes difamatoires contre "l'asservisiteur" (les Anglais), contre Trudeau, contre le Parti québécois et René Lévesque, même contre son propre peuple. Il parle de "notre âme collective" mais s'installe au-dessus des autres, se donnant trop d'importance, débordant dans l'emphase. Selon lui, le Québec est raté, son peuple opprimé vit sous le joug d'un régime totalitaire, l'avenir est compromis à jamais. Il ne lui reste plus qu'à se brûler la cervelle. Se peut-il que l'auteur génial de *Prochain épisode* et de *Trou de mémoire* fût si mesquin? C'est nettement ce qui ressort de ce récit dont le ton pamphlétaire escamote malheureusement les qualités: écriture dense, lyrisme envoûtant, allusions recherchées. Ce qui aurait pu être un véritable péan envolé à un nouvel amour à recommencer dans

une Paganie libre de tout totalitarisme nous agace à la fin par son parti pris strident et déplacé.

MARK BENSON

## POESIE & ESTHETIQUE

ALEXANDRE AMPRIMOZ, *Bouquet de signes*. Prise de Parole, \$9.95.

HÉDI BOURAOUI, *Reflet pluriel*. Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, FF 100.

JACQUES BRAULT, *Poèmes I*. Editions du Noroît, \$20.00.

JEAN-PIERRE ANDREOLI-DE-VILLERS, *Le Premier manifeste du futurisme: édition critique avec en fac-similé le manuscrit original de F. T. Marinetti*. Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, n.p.

SEPTIÈME RECUEIL DE poésie d'Alexandre Amprimoz, *Bouquet de signes*, l'étape la plus récente dans une trajectoire qui continue à mener le poète vers l'exploration langagière, témoigne de diverses influences. Rimbaud comme Saint-John Perse, sémiotique et humanisme, sensibilité raffinée ou calembours ludiques: autant de présences qui donnent lieu à une richesse ainsi qu'à une variété de niveaux de lectures. Depuis son premier recueil, *Chant solitaire suivi de vers ce logocentre* (1978), Amprimoz semble avoir franchi l'espace qui distanciat le poète de sa propre écriture. Personnelle, socialisée et idéaliste, la parole poétique chez Amprimoz s'approprie le réel sans pour autant tomber dans le piège du commentaire social sec et nihiliste. L'une des constantes de ses poésies, ce serait sans doute la simplicité stylistique qui fait foi d'une esthétique délicate. Dans "Alchimie du vert," composé de versets à tendance persienne, on lit: "Après l'antique catastrophe les opales et les agathes furent longtemps invisibles. Ce n'était qu'en rêve que les enfants roulaient olives, amandes, émeraudes." La portée de la poésie amprimozienne n'a cependant pas toujours comme objectif d'atteindre l'es-

thétique transparente du vers fragile, car les calembours ("un jeu de mots / c'est le café / où le génie / communique / avec l'idiot") se présentent comme bourgeons à éclater sous l'œil du lecteur. *Bouquets de signes*, feuilles signifiantes selon la perspective du sémioticien qui nous offre le recueil en question, évoque la vision de celui qui sait "inventer / sa lumière / comme les peintres de jadis." Passé, présent ou encore avenir? L'instance productrice se situe en tout cas dans le présent de la création poétique, mouvement qui entraîne le lecteur dans un dédale spatio-temporel qui dépayse ce dernier tout en lui dévoilant le pouvoir enchanteur de la parole.

Né en Tunisie et actuellement Master de Stong College à York University, Hédi Bouraoui a publié une dizaine de recueils de poésie en France, au Canada et aux Etats-Unis. *Reflet pluriel* est un corpus au coeur duquel le poétique et le visuel se recourent grâce aux dessins subtils et primitifs de Gérard Sendrey. Puisant une certaine inspiration dans le conte de fées aussi bien que dans la mythologie grecque. *Reflet pluriel* tranpose les images d'une époque révolue dans un cadre contemporain:

Maîtrisant les gratte-ciels, l'Escargot  
se fait épervier  
Se piège dans nos terres infestées  
des fusées et  
Une floraison de cités en fleurs  
Reste bouche bée devant  
L'Ogresse qui consomme l'Absence

L'apport visuel des dessins concrétise le côté abstrait des textes sans que la nature fuyante de ces derniers se trouve en conséquence altérée. En effet, "Sur les crêtes de l'attente / Les désirs éventrés / Rament vers la racine / De l'arc-en-ciel." C'est justement le thème du désir qui semble soutenir la portée humaine du recueil: "je rôde sans secours pour loger un mot dans le coeur des connivences." La tentative n'est point toujours sans échec tou-

tefois car le “Savoir éventré dans le chavirement des siècles / Dans l’hésitation se tissent des baisers-voiliers d’un demain malade.” *Reflet pluriel* donne lieu à réfléchir sur l’évolution de l’homme que d’aucuns diraient dérisoire; il faudrait noter pourtant que les poèmes ne sont pas totalement dépourvus d’espoir puisque “Ton sol imbibera l’encre de ta sagesse et les oeillets / De la tendresse orneront les fronts des gouverneurs-épouvantails.”

C’est avec grand plaisir que l’on reçoit la réédition de trois textes marquants de Jacques Brault: *Mémoire* (1968), *La Poésie ce matin* (1971) ainsi que *L’En dessous l’admirable* (1975) republiés sous le titre *Poèmes I*. L’itinéraire parcouru par le poète dans ce recueil fait foi d’une richesse d’expérience pour ne pas parler d’une plénitude qui dépasse de loin les limites de ce compte rendu. Mort, amour, peine, joie, mémoire, oubli: Brault est celui qui a su capter l’essence dialectique de ces derniers sans à aucun moment abandonner le centre focal de son oeuvre. En effet, c’est l’individu sous diverses manifestations qui forme le noyau de la poésie de Brault. Qu’il s’agisse de “l’homme usiné,” du “frère cadet par la mort” ou encore du chômeur qui “rôle sur les toits pelote les cheminées,” la citation en épigraphe de Emily Dickinson “nous sommes toujours en danger de magie” en dit long sur la curiosité et la naïveté avec lesquelles le poète expérimente l’existence.

Si le poète est sensible au pouvoir de la contingence — “Dans ce pays personne mutisme de rigueur / aucun rire ni brisure / l’horizon est terreur” — il n’ignore pas pour autant les attraits de la séduction qu’exerce l’intimité partagée avec l’autre:

J’ai dans me bouche le miel de ta bouche et  
de mon corps  
dans ton corps  
O l’étrange pays ma belle étrangère de cet  
amour le nom  
que je ne connais pas de tes bras

Autour de mon cou comme la nuit pleine de  
femmes  
souveraines et cet étrange pays

L’enracinement du poète dans le *hic et nunc* de l’instant vécu ainsi que le pouvoir de la parole rendent impérieux le besoin de se partager avec autrui d’autant plus qu’il est question à un moment donné d’une vision apocalyptique révélant l’homme démuné de toute capacité verbale:

non je n’aurai jamais fini de pousser mes  
mots devant moi  
jusqu’à vous  
du milieu de cette planète pourrie dont la  
peau creève un  
peu partout  
du milieu de ce temps de petits d’homme  
flambés aux  
odeurs de napalm  
dans le blasphème de l’aube sur les cadavres  
yeux ouverts  
bouches crevées

Somme toute, la difficulté d’être dont témoigne Brault semble être contrebalancée par une curiosité à la fois incommensurable et mûre, une soif de connaissances se centrant surtout autour de l’être humain.

Conservé depuis 1978 à la Beinecke Rare Books Library of Yale University, le manuscrit original de Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, intitulé “La fondation du Futurisme et son manifeste,” semble avoir été négligé et par les spécialistes de l’oeuvre de Marinetti et par les exégètes du futurisme. Ce n’était après le don des archives Marinetti à Yale University qu’a pu commencer e l’examen critique du manuscrit autographe, chronique de l’émergence du premier mouvement d’avant-garde européen.

A partir de la publication du manifeste le 20 février 1909 en première page du *Figaro*, nul artiste ne pouvait tenter de se libérer des mouvements préexistants sans prendre connaissance du premier manifeste du futurisme. Dans le monde littéraire de l’époque, de nombreux manifestes avaient été publiés pendant que Marinetti

se taillait une place dans le milieu artistique. En effet, on a vu paraître dans *le Figaro* "Le Symbolisme" (1886) de Jean Moréas, le "Manifeste du naturisme" (1897) de Saint-Georges de Bouheliér ou encore le "Manifeste de l'humanisme" (1902) de Fernand Gregh. Il n'est donc guère surprenant que Marinetti ait choisi *le Figaro* comme messenger d'autant plus qu'à cette période Paris était le centre de l'Europe intellectuelle et artistique. Que Marinetti ait éprouvé le besoin de créer de nouvelles traditions, de formuler une esthétique que l'on dirait totalisante se concrétise dans la forme même du texte. S'inspirant du *Manifeste communiste*, le *Manifeste du futurisme* comprend une introduction pour ceux qui proposent cette rénovation et une série de onze principes. Dès sa parution, le manifeste a été traduit en italien, en anglais, en russe, en espagnol et en allemand afin de répandre la parole futuriste sur toute l'Europe.

Insistant sur la nécessité que l'art ait pour sujet principal la vie moderne, Marinetti partage les convictions de Baudelaire et de Rimbaud, des impressionnistes et celle de son maître, Emile Zola. Il estime également que le génie artistique se produit à force de "manger à l'Inconnu pour enrichir les insondables réservoirs de l'Absurde!" Cette insistance sur l'irrationalité annonce de toute évidence le sur-réalisme.

Les commentaires préliminaires de Andreoli-de-Villers sont d'une utilité louable comme il s'agit d'un examen de la genèse, des circonstances au sujet de la publication et des aspects révolutionnaires du manifeste. La portée de l'oeuvre n'est cependant pas confiée uniquement aux lettres. Comme le signale Andreoli-de-Villers, Marinetti s'est attaché à oeuvrer pour le renouveau de la vie sociale et politique: "Nous voulons exalter le mouvement agressif, l'insomnie fiévreuse, le pas gymnastique [. . .]"; "Nous voulons glorifier la guerre — seule hygiène du monde — le

militarisme, le patriotisme, le geste destructeur des anarchistes [. . .]"; "Nous voulons démolir les musées, les bibliothèques, combattre toutes les lachetés opportunistes et utilitaires." De par ce désir de renouveau total, on pourrait dire que cette oeuvre annonce le premier mouvement d'avant-garde du vingtième siècle. Le rythme de cette première avant-garde est donc celui d'une projection en avant, car le futurisme a pour objectif d'être incessamment en marche, toujours préparé à délaissier les fruits de sa remise en question.

Jean-Pierre Andreoli-de-Villers est sûrement à féliciter de son travail minutieux; il a su capter le ton et l'ambiance des circonstances qui ont donné lieu à l'un des manifestes esthétiques et sociaux les plus importants de l'époque contemporaine. L'appareil critique n'encombre nullement le texte original et, tout au contraire, permet au lecteur de saisir la valeur révolutionnaire de ce texte exceptionnel.

KENNETH W. MEADWELL

## CHEZ LES FEMMES

*L'Emergence d'une culture au féminin*, éd. Marisa Zavalloni. Les Editions coopératives Albert Saint-Martin, \$16.95.

PAULE DOYON, *Le Bout du monde*. Les Editions du Boréal Express, n.p.

MADELEINE FERRON, *Un singulier amour*. Les Editions du Boréal Express, \$14.95.

PENDANT LES ANNÉES soixante, le féminisme a lutté pour la transformation de la société et de la culture. Des changements importants sur le plan social ont été identifiés au mouvement des femmes: participation accrue des femmes au marché du travail, modifications dans les structures familiales, débats sur l'avortement, accès aux espaces masculins. Mais "ces transformations dans les pratiques sociales se jouent-elles aussi au niveau



symbolique et culturel? Peut-on associer le féminisme à la transformation de l'imaginaire collectif, en particulier chez les femmes?"

Ce sont là deux des questions adressées d'abord dans un colloque à l'Université de Montréal et ensuite dans les textes réunis par Zavalloni. Son titre en suscite d'autres: qu'est-ce qu'une culture au féminin? Peut-elle exister réellement dans une société patriarcale? Cette étude interdisciplinaire et transculturelle pose des questions longtemps débattues et d'autres inattendues; elle esquisse des réponses multiples, contradictoires, ambiguës ou d'une évidence flagrante; elle examine notre façon de poser des questions et des gestes. Ses implications pour les recherches féministes sont claires: il s'agit de réviser sans cesse, de continuer à reformuler nos postulats et nos méthodes dans tous les domaines, afin de redéfinir la place des femmes dans les discours divers et inconstants. On se demande pourquoi Zavalloni a divisé le livre en deux parties (sciences sociales et humaines, d'une part, et philosophie et littérature de l'autre), étant donné l'interdisciplinarité de l'interrogation.

Un des mérites de ce volume est la diversité des réponses à la question d'une culture au féminin: c'est à la fois rassurant et révélateur de constater que les auteures ne sont pas toujours d'accord sur ce que c'est. Une trop grande homogénéité nuirait au dynamisme. Zavalloni voit cette culture comme un projet ou "un effort visant à créer une identité collective qui puisse nourrir et enrichir l'identité des femmes en tant qu'individus," tandis que Michel regarde vers une deuxième étape où "surgira une nouvelle culture androgyne qui rétablira dans leur dignité retrouvée aussi bien les femmes que les hommes." Jean, aussi claire et perspicace que toujours, nous explique que notre passé historique et nos mythes n'ont été traduits que par les hommes; on a surtout

besoin d'autres histoires, d'autres versions — au féminin et au pluriel. Il faudrait aussi écarter "le féminisme égalitaire" qui veut "donner aux femmes *la permission* de participer au modèle patriarcal," un modèle où le savoir patriarcal "a instauré ses règles du jeu" et "donne aussi ses limites à l'expression du libido" et du pouvoir. Collin, cependant, critique certains efforts féministes qui ont souligné et donc exacerbé les comportements basés sur les différences sexuelles, ainsi laissant les femmes figées en opposition au pouvoir masculin:

Est-ce en effet d'un mouvement contraint ou autonome que relèvent l'indifférence au pouvoir, l'écriture fluide, la non-violence, le goût de certaines matières, la sensualité polymorphe, toutes ces dimensions récemment réhabilitées par un certain mouvement féministe?

Ses conclusions résistent à une réponse trop facile aux questions qui alimentent les grands débats du mouvement. D'autres écrivaines, dont Mary Daly, Louky Bersianik et Nicole Brossard, semblent être peu préoccupées par les "dangers" de la féminisation de la culture. Elles identifient le corps et le langage comme des espaces symboliques où le féminin peut et doit s'installer, d'où leur valorisation de la différence et leurs jeux de langage.

Quelques auteures examinent la maternité avec la réflexion soutenue et la perspicacité qui caractérisent le volume. La maternité est un domaine commun tout indiqué entre les théories et les pratiques féministes, et est ici perçue comme un des points de départs possibles de l'élaboration d'une nouvelle épistémologie féministe.

Chambart de Lauwe, dans un essai sur les images véhiculées et leur intériorisation, fait allusion au rôle traditionnel de la mère. On le retrouve dans le roman de Paule Doyon. Dans un style trop conventionnel, Doyon raconte les expériences d'une famille qui s'établit en Abitibi en

1916. La "petite mère" prie, fait la paix et le pain et se résigne aux travaux domestiques. C'est peut-être le point de vue de la jeune narratrice (Sara a douze ans) qui empêche une observation plus nuancée des personnages et des faits. Malgré les expériences déchirantes de la famille, le roman se révèle intéressant surtout comme exemple tardif du roman du terroir. Ce n'est pas pour rien que Sara est émue par *Maria Chapdelaine* au point de se promettre d'écrire les histoires de son pays. Néanmoins, la fin est surprenante et puis-ante. May, sa soeur, parle de son accouchement dans une lettre à la famille qu'elle a abandonnée :

Elle avait essayé de remonter jusqu'à Eve pour tenter de comprendre comment cela avait commencé, cette enflade de situations : enfant-mère, mère-enfant jusqu'à la fin du monde. . . . Comment arrêter cette prolifération ? Comment arriver à faire que dans le monde il n'y ait plus que des adultes et plus jamais d'enfants [*sic*]. Et que tout finisse. Une fois pour toutes.

Dans les dernières pages, May, ensorcelée par la solitude, trouve les moyens de se débarrasser des entraves de l'amour.

La solitude guette les femmes et les hommes dans les histoires de Madeleine Ferron, aussi. La famille unie et la mère forte sont aussi peu présentes que l'amour idéal ou le bonheur parfait. Les personnages sont inoubliables, et nous troublent dans leur vulnérabilité et leur silence. Que ce soit Irène, essayant de fuir son ennui et de recommencer à neuf ailleurs, Dolorès, gardant toujours le sourire face à son existence de Cendrillon, ou Gonzague, qui supporte mal l'imposition du commercial dans le pays de son enfance, personne n'arrive à articuler sa rage, son désespoir, sa peur. Ferron maîtrise l'art difficile de la nouvelle et a perfectionné l'évocation de l'insolite et de l'invivable à peine cachés sous le quotidien.

La fresque sociale ici est bien différente de celle décrite par Paule Doyon, mais les

personnages semblent être autant emportés par leur désir de trouver ou même de bâtir un pays où tout est possible, même le fragile amour. Désir inachevé, mais qui protège ce qui reste de l'espoir et qui motive bien des luttes.

JO-ANNE ELDER

## FAMILIAR WAR

MYRON TURNER, *Playing the Numbers*. North Dakota Quarterly Press, n.p.

IN A SHORT PREFACE to *Playing the Numbers*, Myron Turner states that in his poetry he is recreating "the mythology of [his] family," and wishes to pass this mythology on to his children and nieces and nephews "so that they could know the extent to which their story is never far from war either as a fact or as a metaphor that shapes consciousness." But these are not "war poems" that seek to remind the reader of heroic acts committed by soldiers; instead, Turner's notion of war is one of familial relationships, everyday existence, and the conflicting forces that form the inner life. World War II and Turner's youth at that time in the East Bronx, New York, serve as a backdrop.

*Playing the Numbers* is full of detail, unlike the elliptical conciseness of many contemporary poets' work. He has many memories and feels they are all important; his poetry is one long remembrance. Because he writes with passion and love, Turner's memories become important to the reader; we share with him the emotions he is experiencing. In a series of poems on his father he writes:

I photograph  
him on the beach. We are visiting  
my sister in Paso Robles — the three  
of us in the same place for the first  
time in eleven years — never  
enough money or enough love.

Later, "when the photographs come back," he has an epiphanic insight regarding his father:

my father's face fills a sun-struck  
frame, his blind eye  
wide open to its darkness, the good  
one squinting in the painful light  
and his thin hair torn from his head  
in the wind and mouth with a black  
slit wedged between the lips  
as though he were about to  
or just now uttered  
a cry.

Ultimately, *Playing the Numbers* is a wonderful celebration of life. Myron Turner is a poet who deserves more recognition than he has received; he is an excellent craftsman whose work is accessible without being superficial, and emotionally moving without being sentimental.

Like Turner's book, Beth Jankola's *Shadows in the Glass* explores the self in relationship to others; both writers seek to transcend deeply rooted inner conflict. Over the ten years that I have followed Jankola's writing, I have been impressed by her willingness to experiment; she is not a poet who finds a particular voice and then never again explores other ways of writing. As with Turner's poetry, Jankola's work deals with a renunciation of old ways of being in favour of the psychologically threatening ground of a new self. *Shadows in the Glass* examines with spontaneous immediacy the poet's confrontation with the divided self. She is constructing a newer and more durable self with which to meet everyday life:

You are under strain  
she said

A large fat tear escaped from  
under my left straining eyeball

My heart is strained I said  
disappearing again

into my brain storehouse of  
my jewelled inner life

Gems

I try projecting onto screens

Images  
my x-ray vision finds behind  
tormented eyes

Jankola writes with compassion that comes with maturity but also with suffering and insight into existence. In "My Daughter Said" she writes:

I'm scared.  
What are you  
scared of  
I asked?

I'm scared  
of being scared  
she replied.

And so am I.  
And so am I.

Her refrain, "And so am I," reveals her honesty and compassion. But to what perception does Jankola ultimately come? "Apologia" suggests an answer:

I made them up  
Gave them character  
from within my own view  
assessed them  
made them into people I knew  
I simplified them

then

reacted to what I had made up  
behaved as if what  
I invented was real

and  
of course

they did the same to me.

Instead of seeing other people, we see our projected image of what we feel or believe about them to be true. This insight is not without its positive side; fruitful relationship arises where we can avoid projecting images onto other people.

Lowey is a competent poet but he is still young, not necessarily in years but in maturity of vision. In "The Land Unravelling" he writes:

Furrows unravel,  
farm houses take root  
by gravel roads  
where mowers rust;

husks of car bodies  
 hunch in the field,  
 mottled dogs chase the sun  
 as the town discovers  
 its one hotel:  
 paint it green and brown.

Lowey's poetry is full of such everyday things. In "Barbershop Quartet" he discusses the arrival of "four American lads / who resemble The Beatles" and who will give a performance "that almost sounds like" the real Beatles. Other world events and personal insights are combined to describe a world of lost innocence and impending corruption. But Lowey's work lacks something that is present in the work of Turner and Jankola. His poetry displays his compassion and empathy for other people, but without depth or intensity of insight. In one poem he writes sympathetically of Sylvia Plath; Plath's work is nothing if not intense and powerful. But Lowey must decide if he is willing to risk entering psychologically threatening territory. Turner and Jankola make such a commitment; Lowey still veers away.

STEPHEN MORRISSEY

## MONTGOMERY

*The Selected Journals of L. M. Montgomery*,  
 Volume II: 1910-1921. eds. Mary Rubio &  
 Elizabeth Waterston, Oxford, \$29.95.

IN PRESENTING Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Journals* to the public, Elizabeth Waterston and Mary Rubio are performing a service of great significance to the study of Canadian literary and social history. Another cause for rejoicing is that, thanks to the happy combination of their editorial skill and Montgomery's splendid writing, the *Journals* are also an invaluable contribution to the body of Canadian literature.

Rubio and Waterston have trimmed a work that is, by its nature, without artistic

form into two (and before long, no doubt, three) self-contained but inter-related books. In shape, Volume II ends where it begins. It opens in February 1910 with the tremendous success of *Anne of Green Gables*, followed rapidly by Montgomery's liberation from servitude by the death of her grandmother, her marriage to the Reverend Ewan Macdonald, and the beginning of her new life with him in Leaskdale, Ontario. In 1919, motivated perhaps by the death of her dearest friend, Montgomery started copying her old journals into uniform 500-page ledgers. For two years she wrote in her current journal as she copied her old ones, narrating the present while reflecting on the past (thus, incidentally, linking Volume II of the *Journals* to Volume I). On March 13, 1921, where Volume II ends, Montgomery finished copying her Cavendish diary, the last year of which occupies the first pages of this book. In spite of its circular form, however, the "plot" of Volume II remains suspenseful, and, like Volume I, closes in uncertainty. Ewan has become pathologically depressed, and the agony of living with him combined with her duty to hide his illness from his congregation seems likely to drive Montgomery, too, into nervous collapse.

Rubio and Waterston have gently pruned Montgomery's journals into something like a triple-decker, but Montgomery herself gave this life-work its preliminary shaping. Until 1919, she kept her journals in miscellaneous notebooks as a private exorcism, without much thought for their future. When she undertook to make them uniform, she began also to illustrate them with snapshots as the continuing story of her life. Then, at some later time, she decided that her children should eventually publish the journals, but, before they met the public eye, she edited them somewhat, cutting out and replacing certain pages. What remains is what Montgomery wanted us to see.

In their introduction to Volume II, Rubio and Waterston speculate that the journals “will spark debate about whether the various periods of distress [Montgomery] registers were the result of genuine physical and mental fatigue arising from circumstances beyond her control, or were the product of an overwrought mind.” Hilary Thompson, in her review of Volume I (*Canadian Literature* 111), draws attention to the feature of the journals that answers this question. We are not spying on Montgomery; she was using her future readers as confidants. Montgomery led two lives, and in each there was a hidden socially unacceptable component at variance with her conventional daily activity. In one of her lives, she was the model wife of a capable small-town Presbyterian clergyman; privately, she had to conceal his insanity as well as her own rebellion against the intellectual, moral and social stuffiness their position required. In her other life, she was a respected novelist who, almost alone among hundreds of cheated authors, was bold enough to sue and defeat her first publisher, the rapacious L. C. Page. But she earned her fame by writing novels in which virtue inexorably triumphs, whereas the “circumstances beyond her control” in her life and in the world proved that such optimism was false, however faithfully her public was willing to buy it.

In no case was Montgomery “living a lie” — she wished passionately for a world and a life in which her own optimism would be vindicated, and she valued social order and treasured her family above everything — but her inner and outer worlds never coincided. Certainly, the journals served as an expression of what she felt compelled to hide from the world, but at some point they also became a means of explaining and justifying herself to posterity.

Of course, Montgomery suffered terrible conflicts, but one is selfishly tempted

to ask whether, if her life had been easy and pleasant, or if her nature had permitted her either to accept fully or to reject fully one side of her dichotomies, she would have written *Anne of Green Gables* (which for almost eighty years has formed part of the mental equipment of millions of women), the other novels with which she won worldwide fame for herself and Canada, and these beautiful and disturbing journals. Like the best fiction, the journals lead us to an understanding of human nature that extends beyond the time, place and characters at hand. The novels, on the other hand, lead us to an understanding of Montgomery’s ideals.

Technically, Volume II of the *Selected Journals* is less than perfect. The annotations are so unselective that information most readers would need to understand the text is mired in sketchy World War I history, disquisitions on automobiles and aspirin, confusing summaries of issues that the text itself makes clear, and repetitive identifications. Since the notes are unobtrusive, their excesses can be ignored, but the fact that they are not indexed makes them almost useless to scholars. This is the more unfortunate because they contain biographical and bibliographical information that only the editors possess. One can only hope that Volume III will include a comprehensive index.

LAUREL BOONE



## LOVE STORY

L. M. MONTGOMERY, *Akin to Anne: Tales of Other Orphans*, ed. Rea Wilmshurst, McClelland & Stewart, \$18.95.

WHAT MAKES L. M. Montgomery so marketable, so popular, eighty years after the publication of *Anne of Green Gables* and forty-six years after Montgomery's death? This new collection of nineteen stories may suggest some of the answers to that question. Unlike the short stories collected in *The Road to Yesterday* (published by Montgomery's son in 1974) and like the stories in *The Doctor's Sweetheart and Other Stories* (1979), the stories in *Akin to Anne* were all published in periodicals during Montgomery's lifetime. Rea Wilmshurst "discovered" the forgotten pieces while visiting the Montgomery birthplace in Prince Edward Island, and she was given permission to collect and edit stories from the 360 she found. *Akin to Anne* is the first of four projected volumes, arranged by theme.

With the exception of the first (and best) story, which appeared in 1933, the stories in *Akin to Anne* were published between 1900 and 1911. Not surprisingly, these "new" stories share the tone, style, and subject matter of the Anne and Emily books and of the story collections *Chronicles of Avonlea* (1912) and *Further Chronicles of Avonlea* (1920). If much is familiar, and if these stories do themselves deal with similar subjects, what is to be learned from them about Montgomery's writing and the secret of her astonishing, continuing success? Precisely because the stories in *Akin to Anne* use and reuse the same techniques and the same themes, we can conveniently examine in them Montgomery's play with formula. We are able to see here where the writer transcends the limitations of a chosen convention and where she succumbs to them.

## CANADIAN LITERATURE

A quarterly of Criticism and Review

**Winner of the 1988  
Gabrielle Roy Prize and  
Medal for Criticism,  
Awarded by the Association  
for Canadian  
and Quebec Literatures**

### Index to

*Canadian Literature*

Nos. 1-102

Price \$29.95

Plus postage and handling:

Canada \$1.55 Other: \$3.55

### CL's Index Supplements

To Issues #103-107 \$6.95

To Issues #108-111 \$5.95

To Issues #112-115 \$5.95

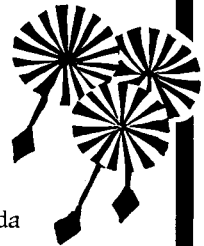
To Issues #116-119 \$5.95

### Plus postage and handling:

Canada \$.50 each Other \$1.55 each

Available from *Canadian Literature's*  
business office

Business Manager  
*Canadian Literature*  
#223-2029 West Mall  
University  
of British Columbia  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada  
V6T 1W5



Those not predisposed to find Montgomery irresistible will pause over — perhaps even laugh outright at — the innumerable coincidences, the number of children of lost half-brothers or half-sisters suddenly recognized and immediately cherished by heretofore unheard of aunts or uncles or cousins, the sure reward for good deeds or sacrifice, the happy endings. Montgomery uses the pattern of unhappiness — surprise — happiness in each story, whether she is describing little Joyce's willingness to sacrifice her beloved doll so that dying Denise can hear the famous Madame Laurin sing to her, or whether she is telling of Miss Sally's loneliness and her new guests.

And yet even the skeptical or cynical reader will probably find in these predictable tales something that pleases and touches the feelings. How is this? The stories deal repeatedly with orphans or lonely spinsters, but they also retell, in sometimes ingenious ways, the same story of love sought and love gained. The insistent morals and happy endings belong to the romances of Montgomery's period and to the Victorian reading material of her childhood that formed many of her own habits of mind and writing, but the love-search pattern thrives in our own times, in best sellers and popular films. Montgomery was, in fact, often exploiting an archetype rather than merely manipulating a formula.

Powerful though the love-quest pattern is, it alone did not make Montgomery an enduring success. As in the best of Montgomery's writing, much wish-fulfilment is offset by shrewd insights into character or situation. For example, Miss Cynthia (in "The Softening of Miss Cynthia") refuses to take her half-brother's orphan to raise; only when the boy is grossly overworked by a neighbouring farmer and is on the brink of death does she repent her selfishness and adopt him. The sentimental sweetness of the resolution does not hide

the fact that guilt and fear soften Miss Cynthia, not compassion. Or there is the thoroughly believable, unrepentant, child-abusing Mrs. Elwell, who at the end of "The Running Away of Chester" slams the door on the boy and on the conscientious Miss Salome who thinks she should return Chester to his own people. The same story also suggests that good people, such as Miss Salome, encourage evil when they determine to stick to their own narrow rules about what is right rather than investigate unwelcome evidence in front of them. And Grandmother Jasper, in the first story of the volume, "Charlotte's Quest," is a grim reminder that some people do not ever forgive — even in death — even their own children.

The poorest of these stories are formulaic and crudely sentimental, and I would guess that the canny Montgomery knew exactly what they were worth and who would buy them. The good stories have characters we would care to meet again — and whom Montgomery herself evidently found promising. The wise, quiet little heroine of "Charlotte's Quest" (1933) was created many years after Emily, but may have been in Montgomery's mind when she wrote *Jane of Lantern Hill* (1937). Surely Miss Sally and her youthful servant Juliana ("Miss Sally's Company," 1904) in their idyllic, hospitable cottage "Golden Gate" are reincarnated as Miss Lavender Lewis, Charlotta the Fourth, the Echo Lodge in *Anne of Avonlea* (1909). Montgomery never wasted good material.

With the publication of Montgomery's journals, poetry, novels, letters, and short stories, we should know as much about her range of expression as is possible to know. As *Akin to Anne* suggests, there is little about Montgomery's writing we have not already experienced — and much we will continue to enjoy.

ELIZABETH R. EPPERLY

## LOWRY PAST

*Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano*. ed. Gordon Bowker, Macmillan, \$20.00/\$16.95.

GERALD NOXON, "On Malcolm Lowry" and *Other Writings*. eds. Miguel Mota & Paul Tiessen, Malcolm Lowry Review, \$15.00.

*The Letters of Malcolm Lowry and Gerald Noxon 1940-1952*. ed. Paul Tiessen, Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$27.95.

THE LOWRY INDUSTRY, continuously active, shows all the signs of impending eruption: rumblings of a new biography, of a revised edition of the Letters, a definitive study of the poetry, a new book of critical letters, a study or two of *Under the Volcano*, possibly an authoritative text of *October Ferry*. It may well be time, then, to look at the first outpourings of the ignivome mountains, in anticipation of what is yet to come.

Gordon Bowker's Casebook looks back at what has been. A useful collection of articles on *Under the Volcano*, it brings together such well-known studies as: Lowry's "Preface to a Novel" (1948); Dale Edmond's reading of the "immediate level" (1968); Victor Doyen's "spatial reading" (1969); Andrew Pottinger's account of the Consul's murder (1976); and Ronald Binns's "Materialism and Magic" (1981). There are the celebrated reviews of 1947 and 1962, as well as more recent assessments by Malcolm Bradbury, Richard Cross and Brian O'Kill. Bowker's Introduction is lucid and intelligent; his balance of the "immediate" and "symbolic" readings in perfect equilibrium; and all in all he offers a reasonable survey of the standard Lowry criticism of the past forty years. Even so, the book is a little disappointing. Bowker misses the chance of including anything really new (the lesser-known reviews of 1947, for instance); he fails to mention important early studies by Douglas Day and Tony Kilgallin; and takes up too much space with the easily available pontifications of

Stephen Spender. In the end, there is a sense of a lost opportunity — the failure to have summed up the past in such a way as to anticipate the future, as Bowker did so brilliantly in his recent *Malcolm Lowry Remembered* (Ariel, 1985). This Casebook is a handy compendium, accurately edited and handsomely presented, but lacking the sparkle of Bowker's earlier work.

The other two volumes are more specialist, catering to the scholar rather than the general reader of Lowry. Although printed by two university presses, both with a fine record of Lowry scholarship, the books are complementary in that the reading of either is enhanced by the other. The Malcolm Lowry Review at Wilfrid Laurier University recently published Gerald Noxon's novel *Teresina Maria*, rescuing it from undeserved oblivion, and the two editors of that venture, Miguel Mota and Paul Tiessen, have tried to do the same with Noxon's "On Malcolm Lowry" and *Other Writings*. This time, however, one cannot feel the effort is quite as worthwhile. The student of Lowry will be grateful for Noxon's memories of Lowry at Cambridge (originally published in *Prairie Schooner*, 1964), for the printed version of a 1961 radio broadcast of other recollections, and for a previously unpublished letter of Noxon to Conrad Aiken. Nevertheless, the general standing of Noxon's writings remains dubious. There may be some interest in his film criticism, but that from the Cambridge era is what one might expect from an intelligent undergraduate of the Empson age, while that from the later years is too infrequent to be of enduring value. Noxon's creative writings are also fragmentary: three chapters of an unfinished novel, *Clegg's Wall*, are not without interest; and a number of the poems reveal a minor talent; but one is still left with the uncomfortable feeling that were it not for the Lowry connection (asserted by the



very title of this volume) interest in Noxon would remain minimal.

Paul Tiessen might well have incorporated some of this material — the recollections of Lowry, the letter to Aiken, some of the poetry and fiction — as appendices to his other volume, *The Letters of Malcolm Lowry and Gerald Noxon 1940-1952*, for a number of references are made in those letters to Noxon's work in progress, and Lowry's comments upon Noxon's writing is less meaningful without the texts. This criticism apart, the edition of the *Letters* is superb. Tiessen's contention that *Under the Volcano* might never have seen the light of day without Noxon's active and sympathetic help is amply documented; the correspondence gives numerous insights into Lowry's creative method (elucidating one or two hitherto unknown allusions); and details of Lowry's life unmentioned by Douglas Day are here presented fully. My only quibbles with this beautifully printed and thoroughly documented account of an important relationship would be that Tiessen occasionally seems to accept Lowry's euphoric view of the closeness of the friendship on Lowry's terms, and (a trivial detail) follows Lowry's own error in spelling the name of his Cambridge friend as 'Harrison' instead of 'Harrisson'.

This volume will eventually be followed by a new and more extensive biography, and by a fuller and more accurate edition of the Lowry letters; but it will remain the definitive account of a small but significant part of Lowry's life, and by setting such a high standard in its treatment of both the life and the letters it will make the student of Lowry acutely aware of deficiencies in the standard accounts of both. (Why did Douglas Day virtually ignore Gerald Noxon? Why were these letters overlooked by Margerie Lowry and Harvey Breit?) Tiessen's canvas is small, but it is beautifully worked, and his exquisite

summary of the past makes me look in anticipation for what is yet to come.

CHRIS ACKERLEY

## LOWRY & LIFE

HERIBERT HOVEN, *Malcolm Lowry*. Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, DM10.80.

HOVEN'S BIOGRAPHY holds the reader's attention with a carefully sketched blend of text, quotations from Lowry's work, and pictorial documentation (more than sixty photographs, reproductions of manuscripts, etc.). As required by the series "rowohlts monographien," and for the benefit of the reader, Hoven added an appendix with statements by friends, colleagues, and critics of Lowry as well as an up-to-date bibliography, which facilitates further readings of and on Lowry.

I see the strength of Hoven's *Malcolm Lowry* in the number of issues it raises. Although he does not have the space to deal with them in great detail, his ability to arouse the reader's interest does not suffer. It is refreshing to read a biography that confines itself only to raising the issues which should be dealt with in more detail in other places. This strategy actively involves the reader, and the biography becomes a guide to the 'field' of Lowry-studies.

Lowry's work was heavily intertwined with his life, to the point that he included personal letters and diary entries verbatim in his novels. Hoven particularly stresses this trait in Lowry's work/life by quoting extensively from both the work and letters. The effect is an account of Lowry's life which at times appears to be pieced together from his work. Accordingly Hoven states that Day's central claim, namely that Lowry's main concern was his own person, has to be modified: Lowry's only topic was the *artist* Malcolm Lowry. Likewise Lowry perpetually feared that his

work would catch up with his life or, worse, overtake it altogether.

Lowry writes about the paramount theme of modern art, alienation, by using illness as an extended metaphor. This choice puts him in close relation to Thomas Mann, who uses a similar strategy in *Doktor Faustus* as well as in *Der Zauberberg*. This approach to the condition of modern man appears to be connected to Adorno/Horkheimer's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. These authors reach the conclusion that with the emergence and dominance of instrumental reason, man has destroyed all harmonical relations between humans and, more than that, man is also alienated from himself. Lowry's work reflects this conclusion in an image of the world hopelessly drunk and incapable of returning to a "healthier" path.

In order to interest German readers in Lowry, Hoven stresses the profound German influence on Lowry's work. Be it literature from Goethe to Hesse, or Expressionist film and theatre, Lowry showed an insightful admiration for these artists. Noteworthy, also, is the treatment of politics in *Under the Volcano*, and the topic of "Metafiction." *Under the Volcano* is seen in connection with the Spanish Civil War and the reluctance of the democracies to be wary of fascism. Lowry's later work, to which *Dark as the Grave* is the threshold, emerges as focused on the process of writing which establishes a union of life and work.

Hoven touches finally on Lowry's relationship to Canada. On the one hand, he hailed Canada as paradise and, on the other, reproached it for wanting to become a second United States, which in the days of McCarthyism was even less of a compliment. To Lowry it appeared as though the Canada of the 1950's preferred "campsites to trees and Coke stands to human beings." Hence in Lowry's later work Canada lost its function as saviour.

Hoven's *Malcolm Lowry* is a biography of considerable value. To the layman it gives an excellent introduction, and to the expert it provides new perspectives.

STEFAN HAAG

## ELIZABETH SMART

ELIZABETH SMART, *Juvenilia*. Coach House Press, \$12.95.

ELIZABETH SMART, *In the Meantime*. ed. Alice Van Wart, Deneau Publishers, n.p.

ELIZABETH SMART, *Autobiographies*. William Hoffer/Tanks, \$25.00.

ACCORDING TO Alice Van Wart's foreword to *In the Meantime*, thirty-two years separated the publications of Elizabeth Smart's first book, the now classic poem-novel *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* in 1945, and her poetic prose work, *The Assumption of Rogues and Rascals* in 1977, which also saw the publication of a slim volume of poetry, *A Bonus*. In spite of this relatively small output, by the time Elizabeth Smart died in 1986 at the age of 73, Canada had claimed her as one of its most distinctive literary stylists. If there are still a few people who do not know about Smart's personal history, they might ask themselves, given her talent, why her literary yield was not more abundant. These three books, recently and posthumously published, undoubtedly provide several answers.

One answer is that during and in between the events of her turbulent life Elizabeth Smart continued writing. When her cottage in England was sold, a mass of letters, diaries, scrapbooks and MSS was discovered. According to *Autobiographies*, she won a dollar for a poem when she was ten and became convinced then that words would always be her chief preoccupation; she admits that she often read for style rather than story.

*Juvenilia*, also edited by Alice Van Wart, documents the first eight years of Elizabeth Smart's writing life covering the years 1926 to 1933. It includes stories, letters, photographs, drawings, poems and reproductions of some original manuscript pages which show a neat, uniform print. From the age of 12, it would seem that Smart was already concerned with visual and literary style and form, and her obsession with words is apparent in a delightful short story, "The Last Dictionary," in which two male bachelor friends go shopping for their fifty-sixth dictionary, because in them you can find "the most absolutely elegantly beautiful words." There is also ample evidence in these early pieces of the thematic thread that was to run throughout her work. The first line of the first story, "Heartless Baby," reads: "The woman came weeping into the room; her baby had died just yesterday." From the time she was 12, Smart was concerned with the relationship between love, pain and loss.

While it is obvious that the pieces gathered in *Juvenilia* were written by a youthful mind, it cannot be denied that as a child and young adult, Smart was very precocious. She had a vivid imagination, a keen sense of humour, was already working with satire and irony, especially in the stories that revolve around the social stratum in which she was brought up. Nor was her affluent upbringing lacking in exposure to literature, music and travel, and Smart's astute intelligence never stopped capitalizing on all that her privileged family offered. The letters at the end of the volume indicate that her relationship with her family, especially her mother, was a close and mutually devoted one.

*In the Meantime* is a collection of poetry and prose, much of which was unpublished or no longer accessible. The selection spans a period of forty years from 1939 to 1979, and contains some of

Smart's most revealing and moving work. From the first lines of "Scenes One Never Forgets," in which a 63-year-old narrator admits that she still wakes up in the middle of the night screaming for her mother, to the lesbian eroticism symbolically identified with mother/daughter figures in "Dig a Grave and Let Us Bury Our Mother," to the questioning of the mother theme of "In the Meantime: Diary of a Blockage," all deal with a figure that Smart wrestled with all her life.

It is impossible to read these pieces and not be reminded of various recent feminist texts, such as Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* in which she states that the two-person, mother-child relationship is circular and unproductive, or Nancy Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering*, which claims that often daughters do not abandon their mothers as love objects, but remain deeply identified with them. Because a daughter begins life psychically merged with her mother, as she gets older she may fear annihilation of the self, but she also longs for that primal oneness, a oneness that Smart sought in all her relationships and which she admits always evaded her. It is an astounding discovery to realize that while Elizabeth Smart's most famous work, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, was loosely based on her relationship with the poet George Barker, it would appear that at least in her writing, she came closest to retrieving the primal oneness of the mother/daughter relationship through a lesbian episode, as depicted in "Dig a Grave and Let Us Bury Our Mother." It is a powerful story which not "only the body's language can say," but which also "join[s] the mind and the heart that overflow with sympathy to action." While the book comes full circle in many of the poems, such as "Rose Died," a flawless and moving poem about her dead daughter, and in the last story, *In the Meantime: Diary of Blockage*, one cannot help but wonder if perhaps

Smart's question "Was the Mother idea a dead-end, a mistake?" isn't valid. Although she asserts that a relationship between mother and daughter is more lasting than the most passionate sexual love, one wonders after reading all of Smart's writing if the struggle to retrieve that first love, the search for an equivalent to the impossible maternal fusion, was not regressive.

*Autobiographies* is the kind of book that you cannot put down, not only because of its literary merit, but also because, as Smart herself writes, "People are greedy for details. A set scene establishes order." In a recent issue of *Brick* (Spring 1988) Alice Van Wart claims that because Smart was most concerned about craft, the events of her life did not necessarily correspond to those in her writing, and that it is fallacious to interpret her life from her art. The art of self-invention has played too large a role in twentieth-century literature for the reader not to be aware that autobiography is not necessarily based on verifiable facts of a life history. For some writers (I am thinking of Sartre and Nabokov) the writing of an autobiography is a process of self-creation, a process through which one gets to know oneself and even change oneself, if that is what is desired. Smart was too aware of language not to know that knowledge of the self is inseparable from the practice of language. She might have been aware that her writing was not an attempt to provide an image or picture of who she was in "real life," but surely she was aware how the recording of certain facts would be perceived and interpreted, and the picture we are left with in *Autobiographies* is unmistakably clear.

While *Autobiographies* is fascinating in that it contains notes and early drafts of what became Smart's two masterpieces, it was also one of the most exasperating and frustrating experiences I have had while reading autobiographical material. More

than half of the book consists of journal entries and letters written between 1940 and 1947 when Smart was involved with the poet George Barker. There are a few instances early in their relationship when Barker appears to have been loving and supportive of her work, especially in a letter to her in which he suggests changes in an early draft of *By Grand Central Station*. Other than that letter, however, Barker can only be *perceived* as "cagey," "insulting," "abusive," without "respect or consideration," hateful," "selfish," "callous," given to "betrayals and repudiations," and "lying." Smart on the other hand is *perceived* as a woman who was willing to subsume not only her art but her entire life to the whims of George Barker. One gets weary of reading how she continuously supplied him with money, how without him she could only "be a deadweight," how if he left her she "could no more write a book . . . than a

*Out-of-Print*

CANADIANA BOOKS  
and  
PAMPHLETS



HURONIA-CANADIANA  
BOOKS

BOX 685

ALLISTON, ONTARIO L0M 1A0

*Catalogues free on request*

fish on the deathbrink," how as a mother of his children she can only sit by and wait for his "instructions for the conduct of their hours and lives" — the list goes on and on.

When, at the age of 30, Smart writes "I need a house, a husband, money, a job, friends, furniture, affection, someone to look after the children, clothes, a car, a bicycle, a destination," we realize that perhaps what Smart wanted above everything else was the realization of some notion of perfect passion, love, marriage, harmony. By the time I came to the end of this book where the last line written shortly before her death reads "a consenting adult moves on," I truly wished that this courageous woman, blessed with such a formidable talent, had moved on just a little sooner.

LOLA LEMIRE TOSTEVIN

## BACKDROP & GARMENT

LOUIS DUDEK, *In Defence of Art: Critical Essays and Reviews*. Quarry Press, \$29.95.

ANGELA BOWERING, *Figures Cut in Sacred Ground: Illuminati in "The Double Hook"*. NeWest Press, \$22.95.

"NO MATTER HOW prejudiced and eccentric, forthright opinions always make good reading." Louis Dudek's remark applies to his own writing, although his opinions are well-informed and conservative rather than eccentric. His selected literary reviews, *In Defence of Art*, cover a range of topics but focus on modern poetry, modernism, Canadian literature and Quebec. What emerges above all from this volume is the sense of a strong personality grappling with the problems that beset the arts in an age of crisis. In the midst of novelty, turmoil and uncertainty, he advocates the steady force of secure lit-

erary values — values which he asserts rather than proves, but which he asserts sincerely and intelligently.

Dudek is a dedicated humanist. He condemns the irrationality, mediocrity, nuttiness and nihilism of popular culture; as a remedy he proclaims the enduring validity of tradition, sanity, taste, artistic unity and "universal values." Stated so baldly, this list makes him sound like a naïve moralist, but he is neither. His judgments are notable for their common sense; for example, when he debunks the "raging ego" of his friend Irving Layton, the "old familiar Anglophile nostalgia" of the first edition of *The Malahat Review*, and the earthy pretensions of Beat culture. He has a talent for challenging insights, which we may not accept but which provoke us to find a counter-argument. Ezra Pound was a "cultural puritan." Roy Campbell's poetry has "a tremendous energy of a superficial kind... that makes one read ahead with constant admiration." Poets are not ahead of their time; "they are usually sensitive recorders of a painful change, attached to the past, unable to live with the present." Dudek emerges from these pages as a combined modernist and humanist (two terms that do not always cooperate), who persists in debating the great twentieth-century issues which, he freely admits, have already grown old. He is a "solid old-fashioned defender of literary values" who defends principles of balance in the midst of disorder. Most important, he discloses a strong moral imperative behind judgments that condemn the messy, violent and cynical, as they affirm "moral truth" and "wisdom."

Dudek successfully presents himself as an intelligent, concerned citizen. Students of his poetry will find a stockpile of ammunition here, but others may be disappointed. These two-to-three-page reviews, mostly from the *Gazette* and the *Globe and Mail*, originally introduced a new

work or author to the general public. There is no detailed treatment of any subject, only a series of impressions and quick judgments. The form encourages hasty generalizations about art, religion, technology and cultural history from the Renaissance to the present. The book makes good reading, but my impression is that the whole is smaller than the sum of its parts.

If Dudek's criticism is reasonably old-fashioned, Angela Bowering's is decidedly new, an "archeology" of *The Double Hook* that "attend[s] to the text as an illuminated surface that renders its deposits visible." In practice this critical excavation produces a meticulous reading of the novel's figures (images, gestures, symbols, rites, characters) through microscopic attention to their language (connotation, evocation, cross-reference, etymology, mythical echo). For Bowering, a figure is any formal enacting of signification, with the proviso that its performance is a mask that reveals only by concealing. It is the sporadic lighting up of a shadowy ground. What distinguishes the book especially is its intense, imagistic, incantatory style: "The earth extends itself as a backdrop and garment for the creatures that fear its crevices, lie in its creases, disappear into the fissures, get lost in the ground of their being." What are the differences between crevices, creases and fissures? The question misses the point that the repetitive style passionately evokes Watson's maternal landscape.

In *Criticism in the Wilderness*, Geoffrey Hartman calls commentary of this sort a "philosophical poem"; it is criticism at its most creatively responsive. If the phrase describes Bowering's book, then I would praise the poetry over the philosophy. That is, her study is an intellectual rhapsody treating *The Double Hook* with the reverence due a sacred text. The critic-as-shaman constantly presses toward

a mysticism of language and being fused in ecstatic vision: "Everything chimes together, in ritual, in art, in custom, in memory, in the ground pattern of the world's origins which are always taking place now." As philosophy, however, the book is more questionable, although my conception of philosophy might seem dreadfully pedestrian to Bowering. Some ideas, if stated more modestly, seem obvious. Others inflate simple notions until the exaggeration risks bathos. Terms such as glyph, hieroglyph, eidolon and cuneiform are used mostly for their resonance. Her insistence on paradox becomes counter-productive when the intricate style produces inconsistencies. For example, the *illuminati* "are 'characters'; not representations, but presentations. What they present is the illumination figured by the whole narrative as it opens our eyes to the spectacle that mingles what the text calls 'glory' and fear." If characters are "figured," that is, tropes, then they must be representations, no matter how presentational they seem. Their spectacular "presence" remains a rhetorical effect; in Watson's terms, the glory is always "reflected" or transfigured.

This minor inconsistency reflects a larger one: a theoretical conflict between figure and ground. Bowering's fascination with sacred illumination and timeless unity conflicts with her contrary commitment to fragmentation, riddles, doubling and darkening. She might reply: of course, this is the double hook of glory and fear. But to my mind, the relation between these contradictory critical needs remains unresolved. In other words, her deconstructive archaeology based on indeterminacy and counter-myth lapses into a nostalgia for the absolute, as she joins Robert Graves in praise of the White Goddess. In any case, my few comments cannot do justice to a rich, illuminating and nicely irritating book.

JON KERTZER

## ILLUMINATION

ANGELA BOWERING, *Figures Cut in Sacred Ground: Illuminati in "The Double Hook"*. NeWest Press, \$22.95/\$12.95.

SHEILA WATSON'S poetic novel *The Double Hook* is 134 pages long; Angela Bowering's intriguing study of it is 116 pages long. The obvious question arises: can *The Double Hook* bear the weight of such extensive analysis? The answer seems to be that it can.

In her Introduction to Bowering's text, Shirley Neuman notes that Sheila Watson has always avoided "isms," including feminism, and suggests that Bowering has been faithful to Watson's independent spirit in her reading of *The Double Hook*. While it is true that Bowering does not adopt a specific theoretical position, it is evident that her meticulous analysis of this text is informed by the ideas of a variety of contemporary critical theorists.

One such source of information would seem to be the work of Michel Foucault, whose *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* Bowering cites. She describes her own critical technique as a kind of archaeology: "I attempt to see the book afresh, freed from certain established critical assumptions and attempt a critical method that addresses the text more as archaeology than as explication. That is to say, I have attempted to attend to the text as an illuminated surface that renders its deposits visible." Bowering's archaeology differs from Foucault's historicism, however, for her reading of the text is transhistorical. She seeks to uncover, beneath the novel's verbal surface, the mythological ground of its meaning.

While Bowering draws selectively from a range of post-structuralist theorists, the critical school which seems to have had the greatest impact on her approach is Black Mountain poetics. She cites Robert

Creeley and Charles Olson, as well as Canadian postmodernist poets/critics George Bowering and Robert Kroetsch. The Black Mountain influence is clear in her treatment of language: "Language turns out to be a life sentence in which metonymy and metaphor form a network of energy exchanges: in it, memory manifests itself as a pattern in a field of force." Bowering reads *The Double Hook* rather as if it were a postmodernist long poem, focusing closely on the language of the text and on the symbolic resonances of the characters, which she treats as "illuminati." She uses this term "in two distinct but inseparable senses. First, I intend those figures that appear in the pages of medieval manuscripts, illuminating — that is to say, "lighting up" — the script of the text while figuring forth the divine action implicit in the sacred writing which is their ground. Second, I mean to suggest the more colloquial "illuminations" signifying the perceptual enlightenments that occur in a single moment in the mind either of a 'character' or of a reader."

Bowering's close attention to the language of Watson's text involves a detailed examination of syntax: "The grammar of creation on the first page of *The Double Hook* lies latent in the naming of the figures bound by prepositions, 'in' and 'under,' and by a redundancy that is an insistence on the lamination of language and on the presence of myth." She also devotes considerable space to the etymologies of key words, particularly names. For example, her discussion of the linguistic roots of Ara's name takes up two and a half pages. This may seem excessive, but Bowering argues that "These knotted etymologies are present in [the novel's] shaping and are, I am convinced, consciously woven into its pattern," and she cites Watson's comments on her own work and on that of others to support what might seem somewhat extravagant readings of proliferating significance into the simple

and compressed language of Watson's text. Bowering's own language is highly figurative and complex, constantly reminding the reader of the textuality of both *The Double Hook* and *Figures Cut in Sacred Ground*.

Her excavations of the linguistic ground of Watson's text lead Bowering towards myth, but not towards a single all-encompassing mythology. Rather, she discovers connections within the novel's language among figures from a wide variety of mythological traditions — Amerindian, Greek, Biblical, Celtic, Teutonic, etc. — which combine to form a sacral text which is to be read as parable and prophecy. What it prophesies, according to Bowering's reading, is a rebirth of civilization through the recuperation of a female divinity.

In her Introduction, Neuman remarks, "The Ideological and political formulations of feminism play no part in this novel or in this reading of it," but goes on to point out that Bowering's reading uncovers "a remembering of an empowering myth of women." It is in her interpretation of the significance of the enigmatic old woman who fishes for both darkness and glory that Bowering's work is most powerful. "The old lady," Bowering says, "is a spectre of the occulted female in the divine order." She represents the goddess of origin, the female divinity found in nearly all mythical systems whose identity and power have been repressed and fragmented since the inception of patriarchy. Watson's novel prophesies a new order in which this female principle is recognized and accepted; it tells us "how men might begin again . . . by midwifery which sympathizes and, in sympathy, gives birth to its own female forms of wisdom; thus it relinquishes the hold which Olympian will and violence have on the world."

In focusing on language, myth and ritual in *The Double Hook*, Angela Bowering does much to elucidate the rich inter-

textuality implicit in this spare text. Although her erudite excursions into etymology and mythology occasionally threaten to become excessively digressive and at times seem repetitious, her exploration of the work's mythic implications does much to illuminate this visionary novel. In particular, her exegesis of the strange figure of old Mrs. Potter contributes greatly to our understanding of Sheila Watson's parable of darkness and glory.

LINDA LAMONT-STEWART

## POUR S'EPANOUIR

MICHEL SAVARD, *Le Sourire des chefs*. Noroît, n.p.

SOME YEARS AGO, Doug Jones identified the dominant tendency in québécois poetry as "a relation to an ideal vision, some moral or spiritual absolute." By contrast, according to Jones, Canadian poetry in English is defined in relation to "a concrete and historical space." This distinction might appear odd in light of Quebec's "société distincte" and tenacious memory (*je me souviens*). But emphasis on territory, language and history is the logical outcome of loyalty to an "ideal vision" of Quebec that was reiterated in parish pulpits for over two centuries. As Gaston Miron has it in *L'Homme rapaillé*, the secularization and politicization of québécois society transformed the Virgin into the "Compagnon des Amériques," "Terre de Québec, Mère Courage" without any diminution of idealistic intensity. The number of abstract nouns in the following passage from Miron's "Recours didactique" is indicative of the visionary idealism that has marked québécois poetry:

La poésie se pose en termes soit d'élucidation ou de libération, soit de témoignage ou d'inventaire. Et plus récemment, de revendication et d'affrontement. Elle pousse sa négativité à l'endroit des fausses valeurs, ses



pouvoirs de dénonciation vis-à-vis l'appauvrissement de la qualité d'homme, sa force de projection d'un homme prévisible.

Given this ideal, poetry must then find the means, in time and space, to realize it —

Pour s'épanouir, une poésie a besoin d'une terre, d'un espace, d'une lumière, d'un climat, d'un milieu où elle plonge ses racines

— as if poetry pre-existed poems, the vision its expression, the Word the words. What is more, the vision does not translate directly or easily into action: a programme of political action is not apparent in a string of absolute abstractions such as Miron's praise of certain poets "[qui] opposent à notre inertie une volonté de nous construire et d'assumer, à travers eux et nous, l'humanité."

The collective effort of québécois poetry, encouraged by Miron, flourished as a protest movement in the 1960's and early 1970's, but suffered a severe setback on 15 November 1976: one poet became an important government official, others turned to linguistic games and novel-writing, but poetry as a visionary, intellectual force fell silent. There seemed to be no *poetic* answer to the challenge that Miron issued in 1957 and expressed so eloquently in his own work.

This answer has finally come in the poems of Michel Savard, written between 1981 and 1987, and collected in *Le Sourire des chefs*. The poet promulgator of ideals is now the poet observer of customs; Miron's promise in "L'Octobre" —

nous te ferons, Terre de Québec  
lit des résurrections

— has become a painful memory in Savard's "nationalismes":

ainsi nous sommes  
tous d'octobre peut-être.

The "cuite d'indépendance" is mechanical, ceremonial:

ce vingt-quatre nous foulons  
pétards cannettes et affiches  
illisibles . . .

It's the morning after. In fact, Savard begins the collection with "Le petit déjeuner":

au pied du jour  
réviser la liste des pratiques  
inscrites dans les voies du corps  
jus de fruits cigarettes et cafés  
petits cadres patiemment  
sous lesquels se glissent  
les larves de faits de gestes  
qui feront autre ce jours  
de ton histoire au monde.

Savard's emphasis is physical, corporal, particular. The individual enacts a daily ceremony that guarantees his "inertie." There are only trivial, fatal uncertainties that one can observe on the street or hear on the radio: will a passer-by come into the café? "pleuvra pleuvra pas"? Trade names, worn-out slogans, cliché turns of phrase dominate and fracture consciousness; "la routine au trait prolongé" is the only social glue of this "débris d'humanité" for whom "tout se détache" in the absence of spiritual and political commitment.

A brick wall is Savard's image of reproach to these ghettoized individuals. The wall has an integrity that the individual and his society do not. It is "digne dans ses briques serrées" like a row of teeth. This brick wall is a solid object resistant to all idealization —

sa physionomie rouge  
aveugle et recuite  
n'offre de surface qu'hermétique  
et plane . . .

l'opacité moite du mur de briques  
tranche net

— to romanticization also: "l'ancestrale muraille" is reduced to an "ombre chinoise." The solid object gives rise to poetry in a movement that is the inverse of Miron's platonic ideal in search of concretization. The wall's physical properties are personified, and then the wall itself:

si le mur était des notres  
il serait de ces oncles lointains

qui parlent peu et parlent l'accent  
rocaillieux de la campagne.

From personification the poet can finally move to abstraction. The wall is lent admirable qualities; it is "la rectitude même." The movement is from physical image to corporal metaphor to moral abstraction, rather than the reverse.

The third section, "cela," is a vision, but a glimpse of present horror rather than of a future ideal. The limit of abstraction is again constructed from physical images: tanks, walls, streets, room, a café, rain — all now signs of "cela":

à l'aube  
cela s'installe  
grincements de chenilles  
sur les graviers cela se poste  
aux claires-voies  
aux embrasures  
et braque les allées.

Images of the first sequences are taken up again in a repetition of images that is itself an echo of the daily routine that is at once struggle against and assent to "cela." This picture of complete oppression is an absolute constructed of details against which the situation of Quebec is seen to fall short of "l'extrême limite."

In "nationalismes," the final sequence, all of the images of the earlier sections are repeated and ironically coloured, as stock is taken of a people "toujours à refaire force retrouvailles," a people characterized by a pointless tenacity that provokes "le sourire des chefs." Ironized also is the poetic movement that Miron heralded, in echoes of images and phrases — Lalonde, for example:

"Nous savons," la belle affaire  
"que nous ne sommes pas seuls."

The "petit peuple" of Quebec is not defined by its revolutionary solidarity with other oppressed peoples, but by its folkloric distinctions — "banc de neige érablère et harde / de chevreuils." "Bêtes de survivance," the Québécois are "à mi-

chemin de rien du tout," separated even from each other, "devenus ces visages clos" and hence

à la merci de ces voisins  
dont nous goûtons la force  
et le parler synthétique.

Savard issues a political challenge as heartfelt as Miron's, but one that is less naïve because indirect and fully conscious of the failure of earlier nationalistic assertions:

ainsi nous sommes  
las l'Histoire et ses grands H  
nous épuise et peut-être aujourd'hui  
serions-nous contents d'un match nul.

Patriotism has become "le Grand Coude / à la sante de la Mère." But the irony is not only a satiric contrast between Miron's vision and the present, it is also a contrast between "cela" and conditions in Quebec.

Where Miron attempted to direct a vision of the ideal towards collective effort and political expression, Savard documents a sort of blindness, the failure of the vision to realize itself in revolutionary political action. At the same time, Savard undertakes a radically different poetic project: to make poetry from separate, physical images as one would build a wall from bricks, so that this verbal structure can overcome "le mur des silences." For Savard as for Miron, poetry is a call for collective action. But when the poetry of "ideal vision" and "timeless reality" fails, it is the turn of poetry of space and time. Politically, Savard reaffirms Miron's challenge; poetically, he (re)invents the ideal by a radical inversion of technique and conception.

BARBARA BELYEA



## INTERIOR MIGRATIONS

MARIA JACOBS, *Iseult, We Are Barren*. Netherlandic Press, n.p.

ANN YORK, *Agapanthus*. Sono Nis Press, \$6.95.

ANNE MCKAY, *in the house of winter*. Pulp Press, \$7.95.

THREE GIFTS OF MIGRATION: two poets (from the Netherlands and Australia) and a poetic form (from the land of Basho). The toll of migration also: Iseult in Brittany, Walsh in Provence, all of us in the house of winter.

The collection by Toronto poet Maria Jacobs begins, as did her first two, with vivid flashbacks to childhood, relatives, friends, children. While the new poems, still ingenuous but now more technically venturesome (though to my ear the two ghazals do not quick click), stand firmly on their own, one can get an added pleasure coming fresh from the earlier. Compassionate lines to an uncle at 80: "Now hang on: / Indian summer's here / please don't sleep it away," are more poignant if we've made this stand-in father our own, shared cups with him, read last year's tender tribute. Stories of Eli, Joe, Lena, Naomi resonate behind the simple reference, "Jews my mother saved." And memories of a young girl's astonished pride in her mother's courage enrich the tear-summoning mature prayer "I want reluctantly / to follow / footsteps / Wenceslas / in fear of death / her page."

Most moving is the section on Tristan and Iseult. As in her first book, Jacobs writes here in the voice of each participant — but this time without the prose scaffold. First, the story is already known (though the reader should have in mind the primary legend, not just love potions and Wagner). Second, the new poems, themselves more powerful and thoughtful, need no scaffold. Eloquent as tragedy in the courtly love tradition ("I am ready but still / I hold back for a little, / the pleasure of longing / will leave when we

meet"), they point also to complex subtexts: fate-of-the-earth echoes in "the keenest peace / for all the while / we can hear the rumble nearer"; intimations of other relationships in Iseult's lament: "I think you are dead now / to me."

The poems of Victoria poet Ann York have grown in technique, imagery, and passion. Where her first book was, to my ear, merely competent in its treatment of aboriginal myth, though touching where it referred to family and the pains of emigration, the second is vital, full of exciting leaps (the occasional one leaving me behind). The title poem gives a modest indication of York's skill: sensual, critical of herself and others, mourning failures, acknowledging desire — "knowing sweet flesh always / bends me down." More passionate and disturbing is "Beneath his Overcoat" with the image of the man with shotgun, child-destroyer, now coming for her, while she crouches, "waiting for his crushing feet / and arms and lips / and gun," then fleeing to a dreamstreet filled with rows of urns "brimful with ash / and O my pretty ones / what good are these?" York has a wonderful aptness of image: "a town / with a toad at its heart" and "a bewilderment of sunlight / stitches the sky to small river stones."

Most successful, I think, if less technically showy, are the Walsh poems with which the book concludes, the story of Irish-American flier and poet Ernest Walsh dying of tuberculosis in Provence. The poems are written variously in the voice of Walsh, his mother and daughter, an old woman of the town, and a former lover, Kate, who ends the book with:

We ask for clarity, not knowing how to wait  
for truth. Dear Walsh, what matters is you,  
lover,  
... a child of ours,  
from this villa, this small sunlit window.

It is a mourning for a "small death" and a celebration of any life, not one "that set the crazy world on fire" but that was im-

portant too: "we should remember him." We should remember everyone.

After these passionately colloquial outpourings one must stop, be silent, wait for the dark-adapted eye to see the brushstrokes in this third haiku collection of Vancouver poet Anne Mckay. Haijin and non-haijin worlds are often two solitudes. Coming from the latter, at first I rush by one of mckay's best:

reflecting  
in the shadowed room  
the eye of the rockinghorse

Slow down. Take in the darkness. The room vague and large. Wide-angle. Almost nothing. Then a glint. Zoomed-in detail. Rocking-horse eye. Tension between foreground and background. Repressed motion — the unrocking horse. Not just vivid but haunting. Why? Because light reflects here not off the seen but off the seer? Because it is sad this small eye shining for itself in a forgotten room? Because toys and childhood are left behind? We too. And because we have so little time or patience to reflect.

The book migrates from: spring, summer, and remembered childhoods; though love songs ("a separate season"); to autumn and the house of winter. Half the poems are three-line haiku; half, longer (four- to twenty-line) poems. The former move from the opening affirmation: "... and yes to this wild rain / this april rain / tempered with tulips" to the closing non-closure: "... and a place now / for those songs / she couldn't sing." In between, the brush draws with precision: "for the fourth time / rearranging the roses . . . / he will come soon." Some of the three-liners in the wintry section are, I think, less strong individually than from their linked and cumulative effect. Of the longer poems, some (a lover placing stars) retain a haiku pure-sensation flavour. Others, no less good, are more narrative. Some are more witty ("he just bent /

down and took my mouth / and my mouth / just went"). One has a playfully cummings-like tone ("but young / was there / and heat / hung with scarlet hurry"). The variety adds to one's enjoyment of both the pure haiku and the others. An interior well worth the narrow road in.

ROD ANDERSON

## ANOTHER HISTORY

ANNE CAMERON, *Stubby Amberchuk & the Holy Grail*. Harbour Publishing, \$19.95.

GAYE HAMMOND'S jacket art, a winged baby dragon, promises a transforming inner journey. In her ambitious remythification of the romantic Mallorian (Christian) demythification/perversion of the dragon's symbolic power, Cameron devises a Gothic structure which is unnecessarily labyrinthine because her two very active "knights," Stubby Amberchuk, fastball player, and Megan Crawford, lady wrestler, seldom confront the dark as they crusade for their Holy Grail — a Canadian identity in a lesbian relationship. And the creaking of *deus ex machina* is evident as she forces the minor characters into 'Camelot.' Sex is not her major subject; this manipulative 'Arthur' in quest of a cause champions a self-indulgent New Age 'designer' religion while flaunting the emblem of the winged dragon, a symbol of creative self-realization.

Cameron's cavalier attitude is reflected in her narrative style. The patronizing voice that chronicles her heroines' troubled childhoods in the first and last sections of this five-part novel is indistinguishable from the one that rehashes prehistory in the "Foreword," or from that of the cockapoo-cum-baby dragon's cockamamie regurgitation of the creation myth. This last, Part Two, "While God Slept," is slipped in between the other sections like a creationist's tract; a tactic that is

flagrantly deceitful — it quite belies the symbolism of the winged dragon. Her thesis (God is a woman who fell asleep after the Creation and that's why the world's in a mess) perpetuates the image of Woman as a capricious, irresponsible creature. As if sensing the weakness of her cock-and-bull story she blames the baby dragon for "errors," and dismisses disbelievers. Expecting readers to extrapolate is unfair when the novelist continually sends out false signals. Moreover, cuteness is never a substitute for wit. Neither are limp one-liners, stale jokes and bad puns. And she furthers the misconception that four-letter words are liberating.

The cockatrice tells us that money, not religion, causes the world's ills; the reverse is shown. The picayune problems of the lovers (neither noticeably religious) and the novel's potential conflicts are defused when Stubby inherits a fortune from money-grubbing Ada Richardson. Cameron develops this blind gambler as a sort of Mommy Warbucks to L'il Orphan Stubby, instead of providing the Cervantesean romp the scenario suggests. The cockadragon has "lived" for only a thousand "whatevers"; still, long enough to see that religion rides postillion to money through history, and that each is a manifestation of the inner and the outer quest — obsessive lust for either is a drive to self-aggrandizement. "Religion," as Napoleon astutely noted, "is what stops the poor from murdering the rich."

*Stubby* is brilliant in conception if not in execution. The parallels between the Arthurian dilemma and Canada's quest for multiculturalism are obvious; however, the author draws on them as a theme only so far as to support her biases. The best section, Part Three, appropriately Rabelaisian, cleverly satirizes the quest of Sir Lancelot du Lac, reincarnated as Royal Divine, who settles a commune on Vancouver Island. But even this triumph is marred by inconsistencies (not post-

modern ambiguities). Royal is Megan's "founding father." Stubby is born of a mixed marriage (Ukrainian, English). The union of the girls symbolizes a paradisiacal Canada: they are the Goddess. While a reasonable person would not deny lesbianism as a part of the mosaic, taken prescriptively in the genealogical context Cameron provides, it is the end of the line.

Balance and movement are the major components of great art and of a good life. Cameron, in a misguided attempt to provide models for both, has mistaken Arthurian "stabilite" for stasis, and movement for substitution. She has merely replaced male with female knights, a male God with a female, and added yet another dimension to patriarchal repression of the "Mothers." In life, Madame Sauve does a walkabout in Olympic Plaza in place of the Queen. Substituting one anachronism with another blurs issues; until women receive equal pay for equal work we have no freedom of choice. All else is a Quixotic jousting at windmills. The thinking person would not reinstate, in this overpopulated world, the dragon of the fertility cults (subsumed by Christianity's serpent of evil), but replacing it with the baby dragon, Cameron's symbol of her "Tinkerbelle" religion, swings the pendulum too far.

Visiting Shanghai in this, the Year of the Dragon, I went to a temple with a friend, a modern Chinese. Amid gold Buddhas, ivory dragons, clanging bells, bonging drums, and chanting red cosacked priests, he said, "I don't believe in all this, but we still carry this burden of our history. Your country, so young. . . ." "We're young," I said, "but [thinking of *Stubby* and remembering that Arthur's downfall was caused by forces from within as much as from without] we're stifling our creativity — with someone else's history."

MARJORIE BODY

## EXOTICA

DAVID SOLWAY, *Modern Marriage*. Véhicule, \$8.95.

GRANT BUDAY, *The Venetian*. Oolichan, \$8.95.

EACH TIME I encounter books written 'in exile' as is David Solway's in a sense, or those set far away and long ago, as Grant Buday's portrait of Marco Polo certainly is, I think of 'Haile Selasse's umbrella.' My mother-in-law, a well-travelled Scot, knew the late Lion of Judah in the early 1960's. On one of the many occasions on which they met (the Emperor's daughters lived for a time in my mother-in-law's home town, Edinburgh, and she lived for a time in Ethiopia), at an Ethiopian umbrella factory, my mother-in-law expressed admiration for the goods. Showered with umbrellas (as it were) she managed to refuse all save one, which duly took up its place in the tiny hall closet of her Edinburgh home. It was this umbrella which sheltered me on my walks about that city — and more than an umbrella it was by then because of the aura of its origins. All the same, it was rather plain in appearance and did not bear up any better than countless others I have used and worn out.

So it is, it seems to me, with books with strange geography. They begin with a natural advantage. They are imbued with the glory of the unfamiliar, and if at all well written can achieve a magical intensity formed partly of that strangeness. It may, in fact, be a state of mind analogous enough to the early days of love, to be just as blind. Those who do not share my taste for books by Canadians not written at home, tell me so.

In any case, *Modern Marriage*, David Solway's double sequence of sonnets, set on the one hand in Greece and on the other in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, is well written indeed. Although I would quarrel with the inclusion of a

couple of the poems, the rest achieve the lovely public stance of the form, in conjunction with a quixotic personal tone. Here David Solway brings to mind the great New Zealand poet, John Baxter, although he does not quite have Baxter's spiritual breadth (nor does he intend to, I think). Solway's stance is more of the man born out of being true with his times than of a man struggling for the truth:

born on a fault  
in the assumption, extruded through rents  
in the labyrinth, knocking over salt  
at table and breaking mirrors.

But this is as consciously spiritual as he gets. For the most part he successfully mixes tough talk and romance. I am not sure that I would want to receive these poems in the mail — they were conceived as letters written to the poet's wife — but they give great pleasure by their wit and craft.

Oddly, or perhaps not so oddly considering what I have already said, the sonnets written closer to home are slightly less distinctive than the others. Instead of the direct drive of speech and feeling, there is much about nature. Too muted a voice, in places, to carve out any space. Still, all in all, this is one of the best poetry books I've read in a long time.

Grant Buday's Marco Polo, shown in the final year that he spent at the court of Kublai Khan, about which, the introduction informs us, historians have said almost nothing, is a man struggling in a web. Court politics, the enigmatic personality of the Khan himself, self-disgust, fatigue, homesickness, the lust for new experience, Polo's fear for his father Niccolo's life, all play a part. The rich, rhythmical, visual prose paints this life in a series of stills which yet move inexorably forward to a fantastic dénouement. The writing is beautiful and never precious and manages to give the feeling of slight dizziness that all travellers experience at the dis-

junction between what they expect and what they perceive. The characters are, in the end, tragic, and deserve a larger stage: how I would like to see this book three times its present length.

Still, as it is, it is a small nearly perfect jewel:

"But I want out," maintains Polo, in response to the receding figure.

"To where?" Matteo squints at the last illumination trimming the clouds above the hills. "In Lisboa I knew an old Jew," he begins suddenly. "He sat like this." Hoisting an invisible robe he squats. "And everyday at sunset I could find him in the Alfalma, at the same turn in the street, on the same step overlooking the harbour and the ships. He came from Marrakech, had a long silver beard, a gold ring in his ear. He claimed kinship with Rabbi Mores ben Maimon, whoever that is. He used to look at the stars, saying that in the teachings of the zohar it is stated that to study their movements is to observe the, how did he put it, the wheeling of ideas."

Now, some of this is 'Haile Selasse's umbrella' — the rubbed-off effect of Polo's fame and of foreign lands; it may even be possible to work out a system of measurement: so many percentage points for each arcanum, but I doubt that it matters.

MARILYN BOWERING

## BETWEEN THE LINES

EMILY HEARN, *Race You Franny*. illus. Mark Thurman, Women's Educational Press, \$4.95.

MARYLEAH OTTO, *Tom Doesn't Visit Us Anymore*. illus. Jude Waples, Women's Educational Press, \$4.95.

THOMAS H. RADDALL, *Courage in the Storm*. illus. Are Gjesdal, Pottersfield Press, \$8.95.

CHILDREN CERTAINLY HAVE a lot to learn about the world, and reading — after trial and error — is the main way that they learn. So writers for children are eternally faced with the problem of instructing their charges. The best of them, Beatrix Potter

and Maurice Sendak and their company, remember what it felt like to be children and talk to their readers with common humanity; the worst preach to their readers from the pulpit of their experience. Their urge to teach is not a fault in itself, but it comes to nothing without a willingness or ability to spin a good yarn. These storytellers have something pressing to teach, but they have not all got the same knack for narrative.

*Race You Franny* is an engaging story about a young girl's friendship with a boy and his dog. Franny tells the story of their meeting, and quarrelling, and reconciliation. The story is told perhaps too quickly, with little suspense between quarrel and reconciliation, as if the author does not quite remember the intensity of childhood friendships. Maybe it is too much to ask for emotional development in a picture book. But the real point of the story is in what is left unsaid: the heroine is in a wheelchair. Though the illustrations make it clear almost immediately, the heroine's situation is deftly and delicately handled. In fact, since I am the sort of reader who misses the illustrations completely the first time through, I did not even notice that she *was* in a wheelchair — remarkable, since I am in a wheelchair myself. I liked the subtlety of the book a great deal on that account. Hearn's book lets the illustrator do his job well; he is allowed to add colour, telling detail and vivacity to an already cheerful and understated text.

Maryleah Otto in *Tom Doesn't Visit Us Anymore* deals with a difficult subject less successfully. Charlotte, a small child, recounts the reason why Tom, one of her father's friends, is no longer allowed to visit: he touches her in a way she does not like, she tells her parents, and they advise him to get professional help. The story is accompanied by black and white illustrations, quite realistic, yet with comic potential. The pictures, however, could use a better vehicle. Although the back cover

tells readers that the book is intended for youngsters under six, this is really the kind of book that suits some misguided parents more than it would ever suit a child. Admittedly, it provides some information about what a child should do if faced with a similar situation (tell her parents), but the story could provoke more fears than it allays. True, Charlotte's parents are models of understanding, but that the perpetrator is a close family friend, and that he is banished from the household, is alarming, to say the least. Yes, I know the subject is of real importance: so is murder, but it need not be the focus of a children's book. Children read for delight; if instruction is a by-product, so much the better. But surely a story should not exist only to carry a message.

Thomas H. Raddall does know how to tell a story. His *Courage in the Storm*, expertly illustrated in black and white crosshatching by Are Gjesdal, is unique. It departs from some of the tired conventions of children's literature by making the bold assumption that kids do not always want to read about other kids. Instead, it takes as its subject a woman named Greta, who lived many years ago. She must earn some money to support her son, so she makes some brooms and sets out across a river with her horse to sell them in the nearest town. She gets lost and nearly loses her life. The story, which would appeal to both adult and child, is a suspenseful, touching, and powerful exploration of tenacity in the face of danger. More than this, it is full of fascinating details about the life of a person who does not live in a modern or urban setting, but in an old farmhouse, lit by lanterns and heated by firewood. Raddall even provides information about how to make brooms, for any readers so inclined. What Raddall knows is that readers of any age take delight in stories that show us how one of our number manages to get on with it. His story makes it clear that it is difficult to survive,

and yet people do manage. The "lesson" he has for his reader, if it can be called that, is that life is hard, but with luck and courage, you may just make it. That "lesson" is really what children (and adults) seek in a story. Raddall never has to articulate a message. What a good story says to any delighted reader is always between the lines.

JOANNE BUCKLEY

## LOCHHEAD

*The Red Jeep and Other Landscapes: A Collection in Honour of Douglas Lochhead.* ed. Peter Thomas, Centre for Canadian Studies, Mount Allison Univ., Goose Lane, \$13.95.

DOUGLAS LOCHHEAD, poet, bibliographer, librarian, professor, administrator, scholar, has recently retired from the position of head of the Department of Canadian Studies, Mount Allison University. *The Red Jeep and Other Landscapes* is a tribute from the university and his colleagues. Rather than have a *festschrift* contributed to by the leading scholars in Canada — which, considering Lochhead's importance and the respect in which he is universally regarded, they might easily have done — those in charge of the project chose rather to include work by his more immediate friends and colleagues that dealt with themes which, as director of Canadian studies and as a human being, they knew were dear to Douglas Lochhead's heart.

Since Canadian Studies is a bilingual discipline and since the Tantramar Marshes over which Douglas Lochhead delights to drive his red jeep were first settled by the French, it is only fitting that one of the best articles, "Pelagie-la-Charrette: Paysage Intérieur, Paysage Extérieur," a lucid, beautifully written analysis of Antonine Maillet's novel by Andrew G. Gann, should be in French. In French also are three of the eight poems written for



Douglas Lochhead by Alex Fancy. These poems try to do Lochhead further honour in that they express themes, attitudes, and to a lesser degree, formal mannerisms that suggest the poet to whom they are addressed. As a poet, Lochhead receives a further tribute in that Michael Miller has set his poem "Of Course This is Celebration" from *High Marsh Road* to music.

Lochhead's interest in the landscapes of time and place quite apart from literature is reflected in "Sign Language," Thaddeus Holannia's photographs; in John G. Reid's attempt to invest Henry May's account in Hakluyt with some special interest in the Maritime Landscape; in Larry McCann's "Of Sleighs, Trams, and Jeeps," a study of successive modes of transportation in Halifax; in Eric Ross's pioneer attempt to solve the mystery of the Scots of Carriacou in the West Indies; in Carrie MacMillan's fine article, which is essentially a review of *Canada Home: Julianna Horatia Ewing's Fredericton Letters*, insofar as the contents of this volume are linked to the thesis of Malcolm Ross's "A Strange Aesthetic Ferment"; and in Nancy Vogan's *The Maritime-Leipzig Connection*, an original piece of research based partly on documents in Lochhead's possession and dealing in part with his own ancestry.

Kinship with Lochhead, a scholar in Canadian literature, is demonstrated by Richard Paul Knowles' discussion of the expulsion of the Acadians and the repulse of the invading American rebels as treated in Mary Vingoe's play, *Holy Ghosters*. My own favourite in this volume is Gwendolyn Davies' "'A past of Orchards': Rural Change in Maritime Literature before Confederation," which I consider to be an original, thought-provoking, and important essay that throws a sharp and much-needed light on Maritime attitudes towards rural and urban living.

Clara Thomas's introduction, undertaken because of the illness of Hugh Mac-

Lennan, is an excellent summary of the volume's contents and a further tribute to Lochhead, dealing as it does with an area of his career that is perhaps too lightly represented in the book as a whole, his years spent at Massey College in Toronto. I personally would have welcomed what is not in this volume at all, some in-depth account of the role played by Lochhead in conjunction with Raymond Souster in founding and keeping alive for many years the League of Canadian Poets by labour that sheer efficiency made look easy. A fitting close to the volume is Margaret Fancy's "To Remember a Landscape: a Checklist of the Works of Douglas Lochhead," where eighteen pages of the bibliography of one of Canada's best bibliographers is a terse and fitting tribute to the extent and range of Lochhead's work.

*The Red Jeep and Other Landscapes* is a many-sided tribute to a many-sided individual. The common thread that unifies this book is the faith that its contributors share with Lochhead that the society with which they are most involved is a distinctive society evolved in a distinctive place, that it has had a distinctive past, and that efforts to increase our knowledge of its time and place in relation to itself and other societies are very much worthwhile. Since I share these assumptions, I heartily approve of this volume.

FRED COGSWELL

## BRUTAL CHRISTMAS

SUSAN MUSGRAVE, *The Dancing Chicken*.  
Methuen, \$19.95.

SPANNING THE ACTION of five days, from December 24 to 28, this novel is a satiric look at the Holmes family over a decidedly unfestive season. Action in *The Dancing Chicken* is a combination of sporadic violence and furtive sex, while most of the characters are scarcely more

than caricatures. Cod Holmes is a lawyer who, though defending a client on a grisly murder charge, spends most of his time flitting from woman to woman; when the sentence is being pronounced, Cod is musing about "the new Greek restaurant up the street" to which he invites his secretary for lunch. Nora, his wife of twenty-five years, is obsessed with dieting, starch-blocker tablets and cosmetics, and so tired of the humdrum that she tries to manoeuvre an affair with one of her husband's partners; after defending herself from a psychopath about to rape and kill her by shooting him in the face, she calmly prepares and applies a grapefruit facial, "waiting for her pores to tighten." Cod's 86-year-old mother, with her abhorrence of life's "brutal, unstoppable sexuality," mistakenly harbours the criminal in her cellar, thinking him to be her long-dead husband. The teenaged daughter is mixed up with a motorcycle gang and drug dealer. The older son, whose wedding takes place on Boxing Day, is supposed to be a capable lawyer, but because of his sketchiness no real basis exists for any confident judgement. There are also an obese nurse, Grace, who is determined to show her gratitude to Cod; the law partner, Leonard, who seems most attached to his chihuahua Iris whom he keeps on a jewelled leash; a cross-dressing, presumably male judge who announces "her" pregnancy; and Helen, the opinionated wife of another partner who, in her desperation for an audience, uses "people as a kind of sink to push things down." Such figurative crudity is symptomatic of the larger problems in this disjointed, frenzied, bizarre narrative.

The title, as the last few pages disclose, comes from a San Francisco peep show Cod had once paid a quarter to see.

As the music played a slow striptease, the bald emaciated chicken began to hop around. A few grains of rice fell on its head, the chicken ate them, and the light went out.

Cod had left "feeling cheated" and wanting "that bird to have a decent bite to eat." Musgrave's novel stays at the titillating, peep-show level, never assuring me of much comparison for the oddities on display. For all its simple jocularity the satiric edge of *The Dancing Chicken* works against probing for insight or awareness.

PATRICIA DEMERS

## EMPIRES OF AIR

DON AUSTIN, *The Portable City*. Arsenal Editions, \$7.95.

DON AUSTIN, *The Lost Tribe*. Pulp, \$7.95.

HALFWAY THROUGH the final story in *The Portable City* we are told,

Since this is a Canadian story, here we must take its bulk upon our shoulders and endure a small portage. . . .

Have you enjoyed it so far? Don't despair. Things will happen later on. It'll pick up. . . .

What can you tell about the author's own life from what he has written so far? To what extent does he emulate R. Brautigan, D. Barthelme, K. Patchen, or L. Cohen? To what extent imitate?

The answers to all these questions are: quite a lot. Often Austin is too prosaic for Brautigan's sweet fancy, or too deaf to the shapes and sounds of words and phrases for Barthelme, or too gentle for Cohen, but just as often, he succeeds in the difficult art of balancing on the tight-rope of postmodern prose poem. On the one side sentiment, on the other obscurity, and on the wire itself, the damned metaphysical presence of the author.

There are too many stories where daily life is huffed and puffed full of significance, where characters bemoan "this feeling of lostness" and strangers say to each other, "I want to live," where diarists intone Rod McKuen phrases — "there seems to be this point at which everything that has happened in the past becomes beautiful. . . ." There are too many stories

whose cutsey titles are their content: "And now he was beginning to feel uneasy about the weather." When he tries his hand at Borges (a Borgesian device, that, to avoid mentioning him as an influence/imitation) he is too halfhearted in his annotations and quotations to convince one of textuality.

Too seldom, as in "I Saw Cortez," Austin gives way to his authentic (if one can use such a word) lyric voice within the firm buttressing of the clipped fantasies of magic realism. Here a vision of past heroes ends poignantly with his apprehensive address to a child: "But there is only daybreak in your eyes and your face is a ship at dawn on the western sea. And I am shipwrecked in another ocean altogether." He is best as philosophy, musing on imagination itself, creating stories that are fragile creations, "empires of the air that rise above me vast as television and expire like a dog's breath on the cool midnight air." There are buildings in Austin's portable city that do not evaporate on the page, that can be carried away for use elsewhere, focus on truths about the human imagination, in theory or fact — like the way a misheard phrase might inspire you to change your life.

Austin's second collection *The Lost Tribe* shows up his limitations more clearly: forty-one stories, too many and too short and too much the same. There are still stories, like the opening "The Wild Sea," which capture that elusive imaginative truth by hovering over the possible invention of mermaids and mermen; but the gloss of wonder is rubbed off many other pieces by formulaic sentiment (such as "We are movies we have seen ten times"), weak lines such as "in these terrible times I find myself living in a certain city" (an opening line), or a too arbitrary vault from the prosaic to the surreal/symbolic: for example, "what do you do when your mind collapses and you become a sky-watcher, a delirious dreamer

attending a picnic at the edge of the abyss?" When *my* mind collapses, that's simply *not* what I become.

As Austin muses, "you have to pull it out just right, or it breaks" — it's tight-rope stuff, this. M. S. Merwin (a more likely influence than others mentioned) succeeds more regularly by giving you a sense that every word is meshing with a cool purpose. Austin is best when he stays at one level, as in the haunting parables of "The Woman in the Well" or "The Beautiful Alphabet" (which of course people can't tolerate). Or in "Afternoon in Hero Square" where a half-page brevity makes Austin take care that his icons cohere. But in this and many other stories we also sense that metaphysical presence, the moralist/philosopher who had been hiding behind all that postmodern stuff and wants meanings.

Yet even in the midst of his "reflections" Austin can catch you with a well-turned phrase, such as "Sometimes I'm alone so long I can taste myself." Perhaps his constructions should be lingered over like curious machines, their author's instructions ignored; perhaps I am too tied to development, conclusions:

There are people who read only prose. They are the kind of people who take showers in such a way that the water breaks over them evenly like a suit and they carry their wallets with them in the bath in order to counteract the sensuality of it.

But if we *are* dealing with surreal artefacts, I'd prefer Austin's exhibits to be more elegantly framed than by this curling, misprinted edition.

DAVID DOWLING



## WILDERNESS CITY

JEAN MCCALLION, *Tough Roots*. Penumbra, \$9.95.

JOHN NOLD, *Willing Victims*. Penumbra, \$9.95.

STEVE LUXTON, *The Hills That Pass By*. DC Books/Les Livres DC, \$8.95.

POETRY OF THE city, poetry of the country. There has always been a poetry of the country in Western civilizations, starting with the Greeks, and it has survived in Europe through many changes in literary tastes, ranging from the highly sophisticated pastoral to the outpourings of various romantic spirits. Most cities until recently were, after all, within easy range of the country. But, if satire is excepted, does not the poetry of the city come into being in the Paris of the nineteenth century with Baudelaire, and through him to Eliot and the writers of our day who are consciously exploiting the impact of the industrial city on their sensibilities? I am asking, not answering the question, which is an inadequate shorthand for a very complex phenomenon — think of Villon, for example.

In Canada today, one finds an intriguing blend of the two streams in many poets' work, partly because of geography and the necessity of earning one's living in large centres. And as wilderness access — simple on the Pacific Coast — has diminished in Toronto and Montreal, the city-country experience has produced a mainstream verse which clusters around two poles of imagery. There is the log-cabin, mountain, blue-jay, trees, on the one hand, and on the other a second-floor flat, cigarette butts in the coffee, neon lights outside and the inevitable girlfriend with the sheddable undergarments. Not all these are mutually exclusive; indeed John Nold's friend tells him as they meet in the forest that she isn't wearing hers.

The common experience of city and wilderness, and love in both, has, in fact,

led to the production of hundreds of poems which are virtually indistinguishable from one another even though most writers by this time know a cliché when they see it. But what they don't avoid is lines like the following: "In this same old booth / I clutch my coffee cup / and watch . . ." (Luxton) and "Half an hour over coffee / drags. Then one goodbye kiss / cool, quick, . . . permanent" (Nold).

It is manifestly unfair to both these competent writers to pull lines out of context to prove a point. They are both sensitive to the impact of the wilderness and show a curious kinship in their perceptions of the animal world. Nold's "My Shadow Falls in the Dream of a Fox" is echoed in Luxton's more intensely realized imaginary book of the beavers "a gorgeously illustrated classic / wherein all traps / lie broken / while the fiends plunge / from their heights at last / howling through human faces." The landscape, in Nold particularly, is infused with the memories of lost love, and although some of the poems are diffuse, he can come up with elegant fantasy: "Your new lover / sinks his teeth into my crisp / green pepper heart." "Owls," a psychological novel compressed into two pages, makes up for the weaker poems, for it shows the poet's genuine tenderness married to forceful imagery. (Why, by the way, do his publishers talk about "syntactic innovation" when there is not one shadow of such a thing anywhere?)

Steve Luxton's Wordsworthian sensibility is more marked than Nold's and more sophisticated in that he is aware of his literary influences. As an immigrant to Canada, he has transferred his vision to the Canadian landscape, which he sees with precision in the carefully crafted poems which open the volume: ". . . the coat of a snow weasel / waltzing among mice / on a blade / of winter light." "Meditations While Standing Among Cut Wheat" is perhaps the finest example of

Luxton's ability to resolve complex feelings and issues into simple but effective language: "I turn from the void / from the crevices of words and cravings / to the smooth slippage of my own shadow." But this Luxton represents only half the story. The other side to his talent is a city world, a post-Joyce medley of poems where jazz rhythms, dislocated syllables, free association, invented words, and sharp literary wit create echoes of Eliot and, in particular, John Berryman, whom the poet acknowledges as his mentor. Whereas in the nature poems there is always resolution within the framework, in these poems the dislocation of language reflects a continual disillusionment with life and an inability to finish anything. But although there are few resolutions, there is much energy, as in the long "Loony Tune," and if Luxton could put together his disparate selves, his unified vision might produce some surprising poetry. He is certainly the most original of the three writers in this review.

Jean McCallion's "Tough Roots" belongs to a sub-genre of poetry which is becoming more and more popular as Canadians look back at their immigrant roots. Stretching a point, one could say that in its way it is country poetry, for it is frequently composed of one-third historical nostalgia, one-third Chinese ancestor worship, and one-third Grey's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard." Honest, unassuming, and sociologically valuable, the poetry rarely gets off the ground. This volume is typical, in spite of the poet's efforts to vary the presentation of pioneer experiences by using different voices for the various incidents which befell her Welsh great-grandparents when they came to farm in the Ontario wilderness. The human condition being what it is, writing has to be very good indeed to illuminate birth, hard work, tragedy, death in new ways.

G. V. DOWNES

## WOMAN'S WAR

JOAN AUSTEN-LEIGH, *Stephanie at War*. A Room of One's Own Press, \$12.95.

THIS NOVEL'S COPYRIGHT page mentions that "every effort has been made . . . to ensure that manners, customs, and attitudes of the period, real people who lived at that time, and facts relating to the war, are accurately represented" and the dedication includes those who shared their expertise in various fields and their reminiscences of World War II with the author. Generally, though not uniformly, Austen-Leigh has been well served by the experts. How she has used their information to shape her narrative is another matter.

The idea behind the story is good: the passage from innocence to experience of a privileged young Canadian woman mainly in wartime England. On the road to self-assertion and discovery, Stephanie Caruthers-Croft has many adventures. Her war operates on two levels. The first deals with the inner conflicts with which she must contend as she grows into womanhood; the second concerns her own involvement in the war itself. The novel is unfortunately flawed on many counts, but the main difficulty is in the telling of the tale. There are the usual pitfalls inherent in first-person narratives. Although some depth fleetingly appears in persons such as Geoffrey or Uncle Richard, it is quickly dispelled by the persistent flatness of the heroine. Stephanie's is a world of caricatures whose actions can all too often be foretold, a world of hyphenated names (which the late Hugh Garner would have indelicately called "scissor-bills"), of cucumber sandwiches, of afternoon tea and/or sherry, eccentric relatives, stiff upper lips and irresponsible aristocrats who inevitably come through when the crunch is on. It is also a world where lovers must be French. ("There was something about the cast of his face, brown eyes, and

expressive mouth that could only be French.”) Quebec’s opposition to conscription is once again trundled out, thereby obscuring French-Canadian participation in the war (in fact, 50,000 Québécois were on Active Service by 1941 and one of the units involved in the Dieppe raid, to which she refers, was from Quebec). Her editors do not even take the trouble to correct the French spoken by a Frenchman: “Vous êtes [*sic*] charmante.”

Her dialects and conversations do not always ring true. A black porter on a Canadian train speaks in this fashion to Stephanie: “. . . Wal, Miss, yew all alone, ain’t yew? Jes’lemme know if thar’s anythink I kin do fer yew. Name’s, [*sic*] Sam.” Quite apart from recurrent punctuation problems such as this one, this poor fellow sounds like a cross between Andy Devine and Gomer Pyle! Later a survivor of the Dieppe raid implausibly speaks of the action to the patrons of a pub: “. . . It was a fucking slaughter. Christ, we never had a chance to show what we could do. Somebody mucked it up, by God. And what did the whole bloody exercise achieve? Damn all.” The word “achieve” and the expression “damn all” are not part of this man’s vocabulary. Nor does the singing of “O Canada” by frustrated, overtrained Canadians seem probable in an English pub. The situation she creates simply does not warrant such outbursts of spontaneous patriotism. Canadians, tired of being bridesmaids in the fighting, sang less strident and much more earthy songs. Besides the words to “O Canada” were not common knowledge to English-Canadians in those days. And an awareness of a burgeoning Canadian identity remains vague at most throughout the novel.

Austen-Leigh’s attempts at creating verisimilitude are creditable, but there are occasional lapses. There was a South Saskatchewan Regiment at Dieppe but they were not a Rifles unit. Her statistics concerning the raid are most inaccurate. No

units suffered 90 percent fatal casualties on that August morning. Three thousand Canadians did not die that day. Of the 5,100 who landed, 907 were killed, 1,946 were taken prisoner, 568 of these having been wounded. When referring to the sinking of the HMS *Royal Oak* in October 1939, Austen-Leigh mentions severe damage to the *Repulse* as well. Despite a myth that has persisted to this day, *Repulse* was not damaged. In fact, she was not even at Scapa Flow but had sailed for Rosyth some time earlier. Gunther Prien, captain of U-47, did think one of his targets was *Repulse*, but he was mistaken.

Predictability is yet another of this novel’s flaws. The subtle planting of a clue is a delicate operation in writing. But Austen-Leigh too frequently wires ahead. In hockey they call it telegraphing a shot and the result is the inevitable blocking of the shot. In *Stephanie at War*, this reader knew from the very first hint that: a) Pam would be killed in the torpedoing of the *Athenia*; b) Tim would go down in HMS *Hood*; and c) Charles Fairweather would take *WindSpirit* over to Dunkirk to do his bit in saving the B.E.F. Far too many clichés illustrate the progress of the war. Excerpts of Churchillian rhetoric, through Vera Lynn’s “We’ll Meet Again” to St. Paul’s silhouetted against the burning London skyline, are just too much. I was insufficiently inspired to struggle along with Stephanie. Meade’s *Remember Me*, Levine’s *The Angled Road*, Vaillancourt’s *Les Canadiens errants*, Birney’s *Turvey*, Findley’s *The Wars* and other books kept getting in the way.

GILBERT DROLET

## FRYE

ROBERT D. DENHAM, *Northrop Frye: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$50.00.

A RECENT SURVEY of critical journals conducted by the *Library Quarterly* identified

Northrop Frye as "the most frequently cited living author in the arts and humanities." Robert Denham's new annotated bibliography of writings by and about Frye provides ample evidence of this great scholar's astonishing productiveness and influence: it takes Denham about 2,500 entries spread over 450 pages to cover his subject — and, of course, Frye and his translators, critics and disciples are still very active in contemporary literary criticism.

Denham's listing includes just about everything Frye has written or recorded, up to June 1987, from germinal *Anatomy of Criticism* to unpublished correspondence, lecture notes, interviews, dialogues, sound and video tapes, films — even the editorials, reviews, polemics and humour columns Frye wrote for his undergraduate newspaper are included, all totally paginated and annotated. The fully annotated listing of secondary sources seems equally complete, as Denham has included not only the various full-length studies which have been written about Frye, but also dissertations, book chapters, articles and reviews in every language from Japanese to Serbo-Croatian.

Cataloguing Frye is a task for which Denham is eminently suited. He has been on Frye's trail for years, and in fact his own name appears next to almost twenty items in his bibliography (including his Scarecrow Press listing of 1974 and the subsequent *Canadian Library Journal* addenda which appeared three years later). Also, he is, as a scholar, clearly both meticulous and exhaustive, for although there are a number of misprints, the entries are comprehensive and the organization logical.

I checked a number of items for bibliographic precision and found only one error (Eric Gans's review of *The Secular Scripture* in *Diacritics* vol. 8 should read "Summer 1978" not "June 1978"). Denham's annotations are generally very help-

ful (especially in the sections on unpublished manuscripts and correspondence), providing just enough information to remind readers what a certain book or article is about, or to help them decide whether or not the item is worth consulting.

GRAHAM FORST

## BROSSARD

NICOLE BROSSARD, *Louvers*. trans. Barbara Godard, Guernica, \$5.95.

NICOLE BROSSARD, *Le Désert mauve*. L'Hexagone, \$16.95.

NICOLE BROSSARD published *Amantes* in 1980. Except for *D'arcs de cycle la dérive* (1979), a limited edition poem and engraving, this was her first book of poetry following the publication of the retrospective *Le Centre blanc* in 1978. She was widely recognized by then as the major radical feminist and postmodern writer in Quebec. *Amantes* continues the experimental direction Brossard had established in her poetry, while also marking a fresh stage in her theoretical development. A set of love poems written for another woman, *Amantes* is richly erotic in language and theme. Along with the prose work *Le sens apparent* (1980), it indicates the direction Brossard was to take in her writing through the 1980's.

Brossard makes use of unexpected interfaces in traditional literary genres to work out, in language that is sparse, condensed and rigorously precise, her compelling vision of women choosing to occupy all dimensions of space on their own terms by beginning at the vital centre. Therefore, the novel *Picture Theory* (1982) picked up in narrative form major images and expressions from *Amantes*. In doing so the novel further opened thematic perspectives, particularly those related to the complex bonds which form in

all areas among women who express their love for women. Brossard's latest prose work *Le Désert mauve* (1987), a challenging novel in language and form, is both a lyrical celebration of women's love for girls and women and an urgent quest for vital truths which have not yet found form in the traditions of dominant culture. It is a matter of making a different kind of sense.

The language of love between women has broad connotations in Brossard's work. Always present is the sensual pleasure of being fully awake to one's body, its emotions and sensations, along with the further joy of shared ecstasy. Concrete images evoking relations of intimacy abound. Intense emotional experience is accompanied by intellectual awareness, a sense of self and a sense of the other: knowing who one is — as a fully integrated individual — and where one is, asking questions about what each particular situation means. By virtue of its special nature, lesbian love serves as a metaphor for women's radical transformation: "orgasm like a process leading to the integral." The experience of sensual fulfilment is never detached in Brossard's work from themes of language. Love known is love expressed. The taste of lips is inseparable from the taste of words, however hard the right ones are to find. To know love is to speak, read and write. Love brings production of texts where women reclaim submerged memory, imagine new forms, envision futures and utopias, emerge into the reality of a social and cultural landscape congenial to their experience and knowledge. Lesbian love poetry and fiction in the radically revolutionary writing of Nicole Brossard offer perception of unknown universes whirling within and flowing through other unknown universes, ranging from the most personally intimate to the most lost in space.

Brossard writes with the assumption that both the personal and the poetic are

political. *Lovhers* and *Le Désert mauve* explore important ramifications of the inseparability of these areas. Both books contain characters who write, read and appreciate the texts of others: words have unlimited power to move the imagination. The title of the first section of *Lovhers* is "(4): Lovhers/Write." The book's theme and structure is established by the figure 4, in whose graphic form one can see the spiral so central to Brossard's vision. The number 4 suggests wholeness and cyclical completion in its association with such notions as four primordial elements, four seasons, four compass points. Such is the nature of the full love between the women, for whom the number 4 could also suggest the look of complicity and passion between them, two lucid eyes gazing into two lucid eyes:  $2 + 2 = 4$ . "The Vision" in which the passion grows intense and which then opens onto women's autonomous space contains four parts: *Vertigo*, *Spiral*, *Sleep*, *Excess*, each of which in turn contains four parts. The title "Lovhers/Write" establishes from the start the inseparable relationship between lesbian love and writing, for the delirium of love between women means a dynamic sense of identity: "integral presence," gives "the body back intelligence" and brings the energy to assault conventional constructs of reality, particularly as they serve the blind interests of power in the modern city. Erotic images insist upon the excitement of meeting at new intersections. As the two lovers arouse each other, through their bodies as well as their texts, as new questions form out of the difference between the women, and as words and voices of other women are quoted, they grow "igneous" and their rapture is enhanced. Its relevance is broadened; its nature as exciting process is emphasized; primordial memory surges forth, and images of what might be socially and culturally for women swell like a passion



from the sea: "we can conceive anything."

As ardour intensifies in *Lovhers* to the point of vertigo and excess, new states of consciousness are reached. *Lovhers* and readers feel themselves "slip gently into the continent of women." Succumbing to the temptation of women in love they move through the looking glass to "pass through / take shape and choose [themselves]," to explore their "ultimate intimate elsewhere." Brossard uses her fragmented language to evoke the experience, not describe it. Word play suggests the intense emotion surpassing words, "with a tongue that has visions," leaving the reader to move herself in the openings among the words and images. Barbara Godard's translation conveys the richness of this poetic experience admirably, for her English text has almost as rich evocative powers as the French original. It is a shame, however, that *Lovhers* does not contain the drawings and photographs which so enhance *Amantes*.

In the final section, "My Continent," the *lovhers*, moving in "the spatial era of women," claim their geographical, conceptual and cultural space; they have been brought into the world by their love, their awareness, their language and the exchange of their experience. The result is dazzling, with the poet's voice stating in the end that her "body is enraptured."

The search for new modes of being in space is also the subject of *Le Désert mauve*, where indescribable and unlimited possibilities appear in the desert, the novel's dominant metaphor. The same anger found in *Lovhers*, against patriarchal institutions responsible for the torture of women and the repression of their experience, is expressed with particular vehemence in this novel. Also stressed, both thematically and structurally, is the importance of women writing, women reading texts written by women, women "translating," whether in their own lan-

guage or another, so their active involvement in the text gives it the extra shot of energy needed to ensure it circulates in society and works its transformational and generative magic.

*Le Désert mauve* is the story of a tale. It begins with the text of a short novel written by a certain Laure Angstelle, "Le Désert mauve." A copy of this novel within the novel was found in a second-hand shop in Montreal by another character, Maude Laures, who, strangely fascinated by its mysterious author and its tantalizing characters and events, decided to translate it. The final part of *Le Désert mauve* is the second book, her "translated" version of the first: "Mauve, l'horizon." Between these two books is the long central section in which the "translator" uses her imaginative and spiritual powers during the process of working through the meaning of the book and its various elements as she prepares to find her own language and perspective on the tale. She gives free rein to her own inventiveness and no doubt winds up thinking what neither the characters nor the first author thought—such is the joy of shared experience and free expression. It is this process, this creative work with words, this active reflection on the questions raised by the book's fiction, which represent the major element of the novel's action. There is lots of room left for the reader to enter into the action by imagining and telling her own version of the enigmatic events.

The three variations on Mélanie's story establish the anecdotal subject of *Le Désert mauve*. Fifteen-year-old Mélanie lives in the Arizona desert at her mother's motel, a place of empty images and social ritual. The essential danger inherent in such superficiality becomes clear in the end. Driving her mother's Meteor at breakneck speed across the desert, Mélanie is a centre of awareness and ardent energy seeking knowledge, yearning to

push back horizons in order to discover the mode whereby she might pass as an integral woman into human society. Her mother's lesbian lover has helped her learn to read and to discover "la splendeur du mauve" of the desert. The story traces the steps of Mélanie's initiation in her urgent thirst to retain her freedom while bringing myriad hidden riches into the light. Unfortunately the initiation brings knowledge not only of the desert but also of the sordid reality of human society.

Each chapter of Mélanie's story is interwoven with a chapter containing the faceless, nameless "homme long," who haunts the motel and the novel in mysterious association with threatened violence and explosion. The modified form of his name in "Mauve, l'horizon," "l'hom'oblong," suggests a negative force imprisoning the dawn, the richest moment in the desert for Mélanie. "L'homme long" or "l'hom'oblong," a scholar who feels only contempt for humanity, seems to be one of those who are an absolute threat to the desert and all it means, as they impose their sterile formulas — their so-called knowledge — on it, bringing the destruction of atomic blasts. In the end of both fictional novels, the woman who offers knowledge and passion to Mélanie, while confirming the legitimacy of her quest, is shot while dancing in Mélanie's arms, presumably by "l'homme long." The meaning of this cruel death is not explained, although it suggests that mankind's reality, spreading dangerously to destroy life everywhere even into the vast and powerful desert, has absolutely no room for women's dynamic energy and vision. Above all, the inexorable mechanics of this hollow reality cannot tolerate the lucid gaze and the free expression of those who have truly known the desert, its mauve and fluid treasures. Blindly, anonymously, unemotionally, the social machine crushes and exterminates free spirits.

Despite the final destructive act which marks the end of Mélanie's quest, Brosard's novel is not a tale of defeat, since the story is told and retold by women who read each other's texts, translate them, imagine and invent them in different ways. The story told by Laure Angstelle about Mélanie does not lie forgotten. Its message is transported across space and time by Maude Laures, who enters actively into the creative process, finds the necessary words, brings the story to a new community. The act of translating is the act of transforming dangerous language patterns and old mind sets, building new community. Barbara Godard expresses well this particularly rich notion of translation as a collective process of transforming and bringing forth meaning in her Preface to *Lovers* when she describes translation as: "a conglomerate, not a unitary, structure . . . a practice of reading/writing and, as such, the historical adventure of a subject," while the translator is "an active participant in the creation of meaning." Translation, inspired by ecstasy, is thereby a richly poetic and profoundly subversive practice.

LOUISE H. FORSYTH

## FORBIDDEN TERRITORY

CLAIRE MARTIN, *Love Me, Love Me Not*. trans. David Lobdell, Oberon, \$12.95.

LOUISE MAHEUX-FORCIER, *Isle of Joy*. trans. David Lobdell, Oberon, \$12.95.

IT SEEMS AS IF Quebec women have always been trying to write about love while their men — and, with them, the mainstream of Quebec literature — were preoccupied with politics. In 1881 Laure Conan found herself taken to task for pouring out in *Angéline de Montbrun* what was too obviously a personal passion; she was directed by her nationalistic clerical mentor to turn her attention to the glories

of Quebec's French past. In the 1930's Jovette Bernier and Eva Sénécal again tried to write about passion and love between man and woman, going against a tide of regionalist literature glorifying rural life: their novels were condemned by the critical establishment as inappropriate. It was only with the approach of the Quiet Revolution that women writers felt it safe to move beyond the familiar framework of the traditional Quebec family to venture into the forbidden territory of romantic love. Once again, however, their work was doomed to marginality in a Quebec preoccupied with rediscovering its own cultural identity and fighting the political battles of secularization and independence. While writers more in tune with the times, like Marie-Claire Blais or Anne Hébert, have long ago been translated into English, the translators are only now beginning to catch up with the work of women of that era whose vision is more personal than political.

Or perhaps, as feminists used to claim, the personal *is* political. Reading Claire Martin's short stories in the pages of *Liberté*, the review that was in the 1960's a gathering place for Quebec nationalist intellectuals, it is impossible not to feel her tales strangely out of place amidst the cries for a new Patriots Rebellion. Claire Martin herself, of course, was not oblivious to these issues: in 1965 she began publishing her autobiography, *In An Iron Glove*, which remains one of the most powerful indictments of the old, repressive Quebec of the *grande noirceur* (this, more politically oriented work of Martin's was translated into English soon after its publication). Despite her understanding of the larger political issues, however, Claire Martin continued to publish her short studies of passion and infidelity, precisely because she was able to see the relationship between the possibility of writing about this topic and Quebec's new freedom from ideological oppression. As she

wrote in the *Revue Dominicaine* (July-August 1960), the ideology of traditional Quebec had functioned to keep love out of the literary canon, just as the authoritarian father she describes in *In An Iron Glove* had managed to remove all traces of affection from family life. The short stories in Martin's 1958 collection *Love Me, Love Me Not* (in French, *Avec ou sans amour*) about unhappy marriages and extramarital affairs thus represent, as much as more famous works like *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel*, a form of protest against the ideological constraints of pre-1960 Quebec.

It is at times necessary to replace these stories in their original context to review their freshness, because many of Martin's characters seem like relics from another world, in their preoccupation with make-up, corsets and matching shoes, bag, and gloves. Dated, too, is the disconcerting emptiness of their lives, devoted to the incessant activity of organizing their various rendez-vous, waiting for a lover's arrival, packing for adulterous escapades. Yet Martin has the ability to enter into and illuminate the experience of characters whose existence had been largely unrecognized by Quebec literature — old maids, women stranded in emotionless marriages, women leading lives on their own. Martin's constant focus is the vagaries of love and desire, surging up in the void of a monotonous existence, sustained by jealousy, worn down by infidelity or simply by the routine of married life. The stories are tightly written, involving the reader in character and situation in the space of a few pages and often ending with a surprising twist. The translation of Martin's clear and classic prose is highly readable, with the exception of some infelicitous lexical choices and a few errors, perhaps typographical ("expiating" for "expatiating," for example).

The revolutionary nature of the work of Louise Maheux-Forcier is more appar-

ent to a contemporary reader. In the mid-1960's she had declared her independence from established literary values and was among the first writers to make sensual attraction between women a centre of her fiction. One recent book on the Quebec novel includes Maheux-Forcier alongside previously canonized figures like Hubert Aquin and Anne Hébert, but such recognition has been slow in coming.

*Isle of Joy (L'Île Joyeuse)*, the second work in her novelistic trilogy which also includes *Amadou* and *Une forêt pour Zoé (A Forest for Zoé)*, tells the story of the adolescent Isabelle's passion for the temperamental Stéphane and his fiery companion, Julie. But at the centre of the novel, linking it with Maheux-Forcier's other work, is a vision of childhood freedom and communion with the world, symbolized by the golden island whose evocation frames the narrative. A tribute to the transforming power of poetic vision, *Isle of Joy* is also a powerful statement of revolt against the hypocrisy and meaninglessness of bourgeois life, a rejection of the traditional Quebec values that must have seemed shocking when it first appeared in 1964. Yet Maheux-Forcier's sensuous language, competently if somewhat literally translated by David Lobdell, is enough to involve the reader totally in the world of Isabelle's imagination, without reference to ideologies and events that fall outside the scope of the narrative. Strangely contemporary in its poetic vision and linguistic power, *Isle of Joy* is a work whose translation now seems long overdue.

MARY JEAN GREEN

## CONTEXTES SOCIAUX

MONIQUE LAFORTUNE, *Le Roman québécois: reflet d'une société*. Mondia Éditeurs, n.p.

THIS IS A TEACHING manual prepared by an experienced CÉGEP instructor for

community college students in Quebec. Following the socio-critical tradition popularized by Jean-Charles Falardeau in the 1960's, its author demonstrates that the Quebec novel is not an airily detached creation:

au contraire, il témoigne du contexte historique, idéologique, politique, moral et social dans lequel il s'inscrit, et rend compte des valeurs et des préoccupations des Québécois à des moments précis de leur histoire.

Monique Lafortune divides her book into the usual three chronological sections; these are followed by a short guide to the analysis of a novel and by lists of review questions and study assignments. There are indexes of the novels and novelists mentioned in the book, but the critics cited and themes discussed are not indexed.

The earliest period examined (1840-1930) is designated "période de l'idéologie de conservation" and is exemplified by eight "romans du terroir" or rural novels. The difficulties encountered in establishing precise chronological limits are apparent:

Les romans *Un homme et son péché*, *Trente arpents* et *Le Survenant*, bien qu'écrits respectivement en 1933, en 1938 et en 1945, ont été classés dans la période s'étalant de 1840 à 1930 parce que c'est le Québec de cette époque qu'ils décrivent.

On the other hand, no novels except "romans du terroir" are included for this first century, thus eliminating significant works like *Les Anciens Canadiens*, *Angéline de Montbrun* or *Pour la patrie*.

The coverage is more varied in the second section, devoted to "la période des mutations (1930-1960)" and illustrated by seven novels (*Les Demi-civilisés*, *Bonheur d'occasion*, *Les Plouffe*, *La Bagarre*, *Poussière sur la ville*, *Mon fils pourtant heureux* and *Les Chambres de bois*). Here, as in the other sections, individual novels are introduced by a brief résumé of their content, after which the characters,

the themes and the salient features of the fiction are summarized in separate analytical chapters.

The third section, entitled "période moderne (1960-1985)," is understandably the longest. Eight novels are presented (*Le Libraire*, *Le Cassé*, *Une saison dans la vie d'Émanuel*, *L'Avalée des avalés*, *Salut Galarneau!*, *Le Matou*, *Les Têtes à Papineau* and *Les Faux-fuyants*), bringing the survey up to the year 1982. The chapter describing the "heroes" of the contemporary novel draws heavily on a 1975 thesis by Michel O'Neil and others, which analyzed the attitudes and reactions of eighty-four fictional characters of the 1960's and 1970's; here, as elsewhere, the author makes use of relevant thesis material not usually cited in general studies of the novel.

The closing chapter of this third section offers a synthesis of the evolution of the Quebec novel over the past half-century, making reference to several novelists (Anne Hébert, Yves Thériault, Jacques Ferron, Hubert Aquin) whose works, despite their importance, had not been studied in the earlier pages. Finally, two theoretical chapters, "Analyse de l'histoire" and "Analyse du récit," provide a simplified account of the critical approaches of Barthes, Bremond, Genette, Todorov and their Quebec disciples, illustrated by examples from the novels discussed.

In short, this is a well-organized and useful introduction to a major aspect of the Quebec novel. There are some factual errors: Bagon "le coupeur" does not kill La Scouine's calf in Laberge's text; Claudine does not strike her son with a stick in *Le Torrent*; in *Le Libraire*, Saint-Joachim is not a village; most of the action of *L'Incubation* does not take place in Montreal; Monique Larue's character is named Klaus, not Klauss; the author of *The New Hero* is Ronald Sutherland, not Sulkerland. The inaccuracies, however, are minor; on the whole, the text is well

informed and it reflects faithfully the methods and interpretations characteristic of sociological criticism of Quebec fiction.

The volume's physical appearance is clearly intended to attract and interest its potential users: a boldly lettered metallic cover, illustrated section titles, sub-headings in heavy type, plot graphics, chronological tables and boxed chapter summaries enliven the book. The text is readable, the notes are adequate, and the bibliographies are helpful (except in the first section, where the list of articles is too limited). Monique Lafortune's textbook is an attractive and up-to-date guide, a far cry from the moralizing manuals of two generations ago.

DAVID M. HAYNE

## QUI SAIT?

PAUL ZUMTHOR, *La Fête des fous*. Éditions de l'Hexagone, \$16.95.

IN THIS THE FIFTH novel of the noted medievalist Paul Zumthor, a hypnotic adventurer, both visionary and crackpot, brings together a band of three misfits between 1472 and 1482 and holds them in his sway for another ten years while in pursuit of his mad dream. The first pages of the book give us a hint at the identity of the adventurer, otherwise called only "Maître" for the first two-thirds of the book: the first of the misfits, a petty Aragonese nobleman, himself known mostly by his childhood nickname of Mozo, gets involved in a tavern dispute over the adventurer's name, "colonne ou colombe ou pigeon, qui sait?" Only in the third and last chapter does the novel clearly identify this madman as Christopher Columbus. Anonymity, uncertainty, the breakdown of order and the lack of a perceptible boundary between knowledge and madness are the subject and fabric of this novel.

Three chapters, one for each of the estates of medieval society, those who pray, those who fight, and those who labour, sketch out the lives of four men drawn into the orbit of the visionary. In the first chapter, "Le feu: Histoire du soldat," the nobleman pursues his father's murderer across France, Italy, and into Germany, hiring himself out as a mercenary soldier to pay his way; when he finally corners his enemy, both he and his victim have exhausted their motivation, and he retreats, without having realized his vow of vengeance, back across Europe to Cadix, where, accident or fate, he encounters his Maître for a second time and attaches himself to the visionary, this time for good. In the second chapter, "La terre et l'eau: Aventures et malaventure d'un marchand et d'un marin," the merchant Bernat de Bousignac abandons his native Périgord, his wife, his comfortable and respectable situation in pursuit of uncertain new markets, new goods, new horizons; in his decline he encounters the vagabond sailor Rodrigo, whose speech fuses proverbial-sounding wisdom and utter nonsense in the manner of the Middle French *sottie*, and they too fall into the orbit of the mysterious Master. The last chapter, "L'espace: La folie et la science," brings meaning to what has been up to this point an incomprehensible deterioration of the universe. The scholarly monk Antonio de Marchena, himself confronting the uncertainty of his entire life's study, has been asked, as one of Europe's leading astronomers and geographers, to determine whether the king should risk the heavy sums necessary to finance the madman's project. Antonio's interrogation, both of Columbus and of himself, takes place during the early days of January, while the mad disorder of the Feast of the Fools whirls madly about them.

Zumthor portrays here a world in decomposition, a crumbling of the old order of which the Feast of the Fools is but one

representation among many. He draws on many of the uncertain legends surrounding Columbus, like the mystery Columbus himself made of his background and which has led some to think he was of Jewish origin; Zumthor uses this uncertain assumption for the irony in the simultaneous expulsion of the Jews from Spain and departure of the Jew in quest of a new world and a new order, both on the command of the same king. The characters have lost faith, and all find renewal in the madman's vision, a Baudelairean departure across space and time into the unknown.

Language and narrative, like the universe evoked, break loose of their moorings. The story is told in scraps of conversation and in confused internal monologues leaping backward and forward over the characters' lives; much of what happens occurs in gaps in the narrative. Point of view changes abruptly: in the opening pages the soldier, watching a prostitute, describes himself through her eyes; everywhere "I," "you," and "he" all take their turn designating the same character from within, translating shifts in the character's perspective on himself. The novel ends on a wild evocation of flight before the yawning jaws of Time, Jews fleeing their persecutors and ships leaving port, all in syntactic chaos terminating in the image of sinking into quicksand. Who is sinking? The description begins in the third person, "les jambes, le sexe, la poitrine," shifts to draw the reader in, "ces bouches tordues, nos yeux blancs," and the novel ends hanging on that phrase like a loss of consciousness, without even a concluding period. Narrative and language are the most pervasive image of this end of the Middle Ages.

EDWARD A. HEINEMANN



## BECOMING WOMAN

M. T. DOHANEY, *The Corrigan Women*. Ragweed Press, \$12.95.

*The Corrigan Women* is a serial novel composed of three long short stories which primarily present, in chronological order, parts of the lives of three generations of women from a Newfoundland family. The structure naïvely ties the three parts into a larger form by introducing the conclusion at the start. The sections themselves have awkwardly telescoped endings and one senses a strong editorial hand at this level of narration; but at the same time the endings indicate an honest rejection of easy solutions to the problems in the lives of these women.

The movement of the structure documents the changing responses of these women to the needs of their immediate society, and is particularly helpful for its insistence on the way that people are constructed by their inter-relationships with others. Not for this writer the easy essential stubbornness of identity. Indeed one of the inner-tales of the narrative is that once people can distance themselves from the crushing economic necessities of poverty, they begin to assume the illusions of individual self-definition only to be perplexed when necessity once more impinges, as it does so frequently with death.

There is subtle gratification when the reader finds that Mrs. Selena, the first Corrigan woman, is not inevitably a haridan but is returned by a stroke to an earlier, gentler time of her life (this, by the way, being an unusual narrative device handled with considerable sophistication). And there is enormous relief that the potential for crude domestic tragedy in Bertha's 'story,' which is the first, does not take over. The novel's strength is the continual subversion of tragic expectation, but in that first story there is a distinct borderline with melodrama, which is only

just kept under control. This is partly a function of the kind of realism that emerges in the first story, which assumes the conventions for portraying a traditional past and telescopes many social facts into a small number of individual characters, who then almost become stereotypes. Yet it is Bertha's ability to change not only from an embarrassed girl to a capable woman, but also from a woman who copes into one who continues to learn, that saves the narrative. It is too often assumed that becoming a woman is a single event, like some kind of adolescent initiation rite, whereas it is a continual process that Dohaney here goes some way toward describing.

The presentation of the second and third stories shifts the techniques of realism progressively into the detail of contemporary memory. These younger generations of women are no longer faced with rape and overt servitude, but with manipulation by men, the seductions of a nunnery or the exploitation of the commercial world. Curiously, although the book superficially documents the women gradually loosening the ties that hold them to men as fathers, lovers, husbands, sons and others, it is through just those relationships that the writer chooses to present the stories. Despite the practical support the women give to each other there is a huge gap in the narrative about how they communicate with each other. There are a few conversations between women as friends, a few indirectly reported discussions particularly between Bertha and granddaughter Tessie, but the emphasis seems to be on what they do not understand about each other and more specifically, what they do not know about the men in the other women's lives. The sense of almost unnecessary loss that results is arrestingly caught in the cover, "Waiting for Danny" by Janice Udell, which presents two women, one carrying

a child, isolated from each other by boat, sea and absent man.

While valuable as a general narrative of changing social relationships, the work is particularly helpful in documenting a small part of that lost group of women who are neither the grand matriarchs/comforting grandmothers of nostalgia, nor the ambitious, energetic go-getters of contemporary utopian aspiration. The "lost" group appear to struggle furiously and often futilely in an ideological strait-jacket, trying to locate a direction to take. Although radically uncritical, the bleak documentation here through Carmel, of their specific history in the years of W.W.II and the 1950's, and the frequent separation from their immediate families, is a needed reminder of their attempts which made possible a later 'liberation' which many of us take for granted.

LYNETTE HUNTER

## HYSTORY

DAPHNE MARLATT, *A.N.A. Historic*. Coach House, \$9.95.

THIS STORY IS real cute: "Canadians don't know how to speak proper English." Both themes — the question of the story (the title, *A.N.A. Historic*, questions the subtitle: "a novel") and the question of power and exploitation — are built into language and into society. Society was, in 1873, very much dependent on the colonizing power. This leads us to the main problematic: the status of women and their dispossession through men's values, men's language.

"True or cute, but not both, too true." We could say that part of the story lies in this structure of declining to put two adjectives together. The narrative rests on a constant counterpoint between the unwritten story of a "cute" woman, Ana Richards, who (we sometimes would almost be led to write *which*, because she

appears in archives as a mere commodity) was mentioned in the archives of the city of Vancouver. But like most women, she has no real identity of her own except as an appendix of a living or, in this case, of a dead man. Simultaneously, we read the story of a contemporary woman, Annie, who, as Lacan explains through his metaphor of the mirror stage, tries to re-member, to put the pieces of her identity together through the inscription of herself, of her body, of her being, in a language which (maybe *who* if the language and her self are one), more and more, changes and is inhabited by new paradigms.

What would it be possible to write about *hystory*? As the orthography suggests here, it is the connection between hysteria and a male-directed perspective towards the past and the present so that heroes, important people (that is, men only), are mentioned at length in books and archives. History is the effacement of women, up to the point of receiving electric shock treatment in case they are not "cute" but true. Here we see a denunciation which has already been made by A. Esterton or by R. D. Laing in *The Politics of the Family*. Both psychiatrists show that schizophrenia usually comes from a pathological environment and is a defence mechanism coming usually from adolescent girls or from women. The whole family has to be treated, says Laing. Esterton or Germaine Greer would say that the whole society would need to be treated; that is, revolutionized.

Thus, we read the story of those who have no history because they are dispossessed from scratch. "What is a world event?" "What is fact?" This was also put into question by Postmann and Weingartner in *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* following the General Semanticism (in the framework of a non-Aristotelian philosophy) by Alfred Korzybsky. Semantics is astonishing and we discover it through the poetic and rhythmic prose, uninter-



rupted, in its gentle and powerful flow (non-antithetical adjectives, as the *Tao* would emphasize) by capital letters: Vagina in French is masculine! "The worst is we had no say in how it was made." All this leads to an absence linked to many knots, knots like the ones that were poetized by R. D. Laing in his book entitled *Knots*. Here, however, *knots* leads to *not*, to the suppression of women, in Canada, in Europe, in the whole world, as has been forcefully demonstrated by Marie Cardinal in *Les mots pour le dire* or by M. Régnier in *L'Humanité seconde*. M. Régnier despises many intellectuals accepting clitoridectomy as another legitimate non-western custom, as if women were not human beings who suffer like us (who is us?). Genyside. Beside us. Now. Through language, through discrimination, through inequal treatment, defective but too well-accepted laws, economic restrictions and inequality.

Daphne Marlatt, like Nicole Brossard whom she translates and with whom she enters into a reciprocal intertextual creative process of writing/translating/rewriting (which emphasizes creation rather than a fundamentalist meaning to be canonized and then conveyed at any price), shows the way, serenely, so that women are not alienated from their own body, their own sex. So that their difference leads to equality.

This has no end. "The story is 'only a story' insofar as it ends." But *A.N.A. Historic* has no end because desire, difference and imagination have taken over.

PATRICK IMBERT

## JANE'S RULES

JANE RULE, *Memory Board*. Macmillan, \$19.95.

*Memory Board* conveys the joys and pains of old age by telling the story of David Crown, a retired CBC radio newsreader;

his twin, Dr. Diana Crown, a retired and arthritic gynecologist-obstetrician; and her lover, Constance Crowley. This poor and lovely Englishwoman had, after World War II, left the trauma of bombed London to become a gardener in Vancouver. The twins have only met furtively, on their birthdays, since the end of the war when David married the upright and uptight Patricia. The time present, 1985-1986, records the reconciliation of the twins after Patricia's death, and their care of Constance whose loss of memory requires not only inventive tools such as a memory board, a slate listing her day's activities, but also patience, and love; their reward is Constance's charm, and love.

David resembles George Stewart, another CBC newscaster who witnesses the passion of his more vibrant self (the doctor Jerome Martell) for the ill but beautiful and strong Catherine. While the parallels are far from complete — George and Catherine marry, for one difference — both authors do show a self-effacing, passive man enjoying walks through his city and his activities as kind-hearted guide to his young. Like *A Watch That Ends the Night*, *Memory Board* explores an unusual situation: the love triangle affected by memory loss, which attracts readers' curiosity (how, one wonders, can Constance still have her human identity without a memory?), and then turns into commentary on our more ordinary lives. Rule has as much to say about the problems of David's daughters and their families as they respond to their newly discovered aunt, on their angry grief for Patricia, and on their financial worries in the West Coast recession, as MacLennan does about his contemporaries' behaviour during the Depression and World War II. Many other Canadian novelists also start with a fascinating and decidedly odd premise — think of Marian Engel's *The Bear*, Van Herk's *Judith*, Brian Moore's

*Cold Heaven*, Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* — to enliven sermons on contemporary life. Unlike authors such as Margaret Laurence, who gives voice to ordinary people, or Robert Kroetsch, who starts and ends in entertaining but rarely instructional worlds of the bizarrely fantastic, Rule has taken up the CanLit tradition of moral exploration while struggling to overcome its reputation of *dullness*.

In this novel, Rule's presence is felt as a worldly and wise sociologist, delightfully clever in perception and expression. She skilfully satirizes the aspirations of Canada's middle class: *Chatelaine's* simplistic articles on "how to control your temper better"; hairdressing salons where Patricia "weekly reconfirmed the moral structure of her universe in which the basic requirement of a good wife and a good mother was to be right"; and psychiatrists because the patients who "made a habit of them were more self-absorbed than ever." She condemns the social pressures the twins felt as children: Diana's refusal to use her right hand or to read most stories because they "reflected David's view of the world rather than her own"; David's terror that he might not be superior to girls, as he was expected to be. In other passages, Rule assumes the voice of an enthusiastic guide to modern culture. When David undertakes his Christmas shopping, a clerk asks him to listen to a compact disc recording: "His hearing aid did protest once, but that didn't interfere with his amazed pleasure at how much more he could hear than he ever had before, even in the presence of an orchestra, the voices of each instrument floating out on a base of true silence." We watch the difficulties and delights of the three old people as they undertake a winter vacation in the Southern Californian desert, "a comic little paradise which overnight had transformed [Diana] from a near cripple into

an athlete." Diana, with her defensive dislike of the gay rights movement, responds with exemplary compassion to the need of Richard, one of her grandson's friends, for advice and companionship when he is dying of AIDS. As she learns to respect the responsible support system developed by the gay community for AIDS victims, we hear her opinions on sex education and the hazards of being a woman. This book is certainly didactic, but never dull.

Rule's two central concerns, old age and homosexuality, are described with a precision and respect which compel the reader's involvement with three people who, from the perspective of modern culture, are grotesque old fogeys. David uses humour to take revenge against the small print in the phone book listings, "as safe from old eyes as if they were in code. He ought to join the Grey Panthers or whatever the organization was here in Canada, probably less aggressively named." But brother and sister discover joy despite the pains, bereavements and restrictions of old age; Diana, whose arthritic feet are often "sirens of pain," concludes, "To be cared for and cherished in this kind of domestic harmony was something that perhaps couldn't be learned except in old age where the needs of the flesh, though humiliating, were rarely competitive. It was an accomplishment that came out of failure." We learn the poignant difficulties of life without a fully functioning memory. Constance asks, "Do I cook?" "You're a wonderful cook," Diana said, "except for timing." Humour and love shine through these characterizations.

When Rule moves past social and psychological commentary to dialogue and action, she gives her characters brilliant one-liners. Mary, David's hot-tempered daughter who has inherited all of Patricia's imperious and narrow values, is described by her brother-in-law, "I call her Mount St. Mary. When she's not erupting, she greatly improves the view."

Constance often intrudes into discussions with surprisingly accurate understanding; on modern art she asserts, "In western Canada the human form is yet to be sighted." On architecture, "Canada is a country of hollow doors." Readers, along with the characters, come to value these difficult fellow humans, and to learn from their sufferings.

ELEANOR JOHNSTON

## NAVEL & WOMB

ANDRÉ VANASSE, *La Vie à rebours*. Québec/Amérique, \$15.95.

NORMAND REID, *T'es fou l'artiste*. Editions de Montagne, \$12.95.

AS THE QUÉBÉCOIS, once inspired by the famous *revanche des berceaux*, now anxiously contemplate their decreasing birth-rate, it seems fitting that André Vanasse should now publish this fantasy about a bizarre pregnancy, *Le Vie à rebours*. When the heroine, Vénoussa, invited her neighbour Serge over for dinner, she could not have anticipated that, after sharing his marijuana and peyotl, this disciple of Carlos Castaneda would not only make love to her but also, "metonymized" into a spermatozoa, find refuge in her womb. One of the most felicitous passages in this novel is Serge's erudite account of his voyage to the womb; he compares himself successively to Lancelot in search of the Holy Grail, to the runner at Marathon, to Sisyphus, and to Poseidon. With an epigraph at the beginning of the novel, Vanasse also links his hero to the biblical Jonah, trapped in the belly of a whale.

This fantasy of intrauterine security reminds us of Vanasse's interest in psychoanalytical criticism but the novel also criticizes society's ability to accept Vénoussa more readily as an expectant mother than as an obese woman. For she is not, as she herself admits, "la fille maigre" of Anne

Hébert's poem of the same name. Previously lonely, Vénoussa now feels an intense possessiveness towards her body's inhabitant, catering to his desire to hear fairy tales over and over again. Serge, once a lecturer at the Université du Québec à Montréal who fired his students with an enthusiasm for *Letters from Prison* by the Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci, now wants to hear stories of magical imprisonment such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Pinocchio*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. Serge is more than content to stay in the security of the womb. But, of course, pregnancies do not last forever. Vénoussa is devastated by the loss of Serge and her life ends tragically. Serge, unable to remember the time he spent in her womb or his emergence from it, torments himself with the problem of his origins and, eventually, in a symbolic sense, finds his way back to the womb.

By giving his heroine the name "Vénoussa," Vanasse not only signals his affinity with this character but also evokes the goddess Venus. After Vénoussa's death, the press reveal her true name as "Marie-Eve"; she thus represents not only fertility but also maternity and seduction. In many ways Vénoussa recalls Cybèle, a character from Vanasse's first novel, *La Saga des Lagacé* (1980), who embodies the erotic. In fact, *La Vie à rebours* shares the fantasy and humour of the earlier novel, but by giving Vénoussa the dominant narrative point of view, Vanasse arouses more sympathy for this character than for any of those in *La Saga des Lagacé*, who seem more caricatural.

With Normand Reid's novel, *T'es fou l'artiste*, we leave the realm of fantasy for the more traditional world of realism. Beginning with "Jour 7" of his new life, the narrator recounts his attempt to leave his wife and his secure government job to devote himself to painting, driven at the approach of his fortieth year to fulfil the artistic ambitions of his younger self,

whom he rather coyly names "cher Petit-Alex." Unfortunately, it is difficult to sympathize with his attempt to defy society, given his reluctance to sever his ties with his wife and his secure suburban home. Eventually, Alex learns that his art demands a wholehearted commitment.

The narrator's personal problems are more pressing than his artistic ones, entangled as he is with three different women. His wife Caroline is convinced that his desire to paint is a mere caprice and, though once independent, she now appears to be unable to live without him. His sister-in-law, Ginette, encourages his fight for artistic freedom but, soon involved in an affair with him, she begins to press him to live with her. He meets Marielle, a mercurial painter supported by her husband, who invites him to share her studio but, out of artistic ambition, eventually betrays him. In the battle of the sexes, the narrator has difficulty holding his own.

Despite the narrator's attempts to promote his own paintings, the galleries are not generally receptive to his work. Tending toward social realism, he attempts to criticize society in paintings such as "Samaritains d'état," depicting a man writhing in pain on Sainte Catherine Street while people pass by uncaringly and an ambulance makes its way through the traffic. One cannot help but feel, however, that social problems preoccupy the painter far less than his own personal difficulties.

Reid's narrative style is characterized by an abundance of metaphors and similes. This image, for example, represents the urban landscape favoured by Alex in his paintings, "Tintamarre des klaxons, air irrespirable, odeurs d'essence et d'huile chauffée, partout des reflets de soleil en kaléidoscope. La rue Saint-Denis comme un gros dragon bigarré et nauséabond." Unfortunately, Reid's literary images are very uneven in quality, too often lacking

concreteness and originality. Moreover, the timid eroticism in this novel lacks the captivating playfulness of the eroticism in Vanasse's *La Vie à rebours*, perhaps because Reid's narrator finds that sexual intimacy generally complicates his already difficult relationships with women.

*La Vie à rebours* and *T'es fou l'artiste* represent two poles of writing in Quebec: the fantasmatic and the realistic. Both novels, however, portray the quest for self-fulfilment: for Alex, through artistic freedom; for Vénoussa, through maternity; and for Serge, through a return to his origins.

KATHLEEN L. KELLETT

## HOME IN EXILE

LOUISE FRÉCHETTE, *L'Ecran Brisé*. Pleine Lune Edns, \$12.95.

MARCEL DURIEUX, *Un Héros malgré lui*. du Noroit Edns, \$8.95.

LOUISE FRÉCHETTE'S novel echoes Marguerite Duras's recent feminist explorations of love in a Third World post-colonial setting. Extremely self-conscious from a linguistic and psychoanalytic vantage-point, influenced in all likelihood by the political analysis of France Fanon, Fréchette narrates the eventual suicide of a young poet-journalist who has survived polio, political violence in Beyrouth, and the loss of her lesbian lover. Marcel Durieux's memoirs about homesteading in Alberta transport the reader back to turn-of-the-century hardships, recited in a polished but traditional prose style and linear structure. Intensely romantic despite her sense of irony and occasional lapses into self-deprecating humour, Fréchette gives us a Quebec feminist's perspective on the post-Lacanian *nouveau roman* and on Middle Eastern politics; quietly stoic, Durieux offers the very concrete historical and emotional experiences of various prairie immigrants from France, focusing

on his fairly cosmopolitan family. I fully expected to admire the former and make an effort with the latter; in fact, the reverse occurred, and with good reason: if the postmodern novel is more deliciously self-reflexive, in this case, at least, the traditional narrative is more critically and less obtrusively self-conscious.

Fréchette opens with an explicit point-by-point parallel between the quotidian experiences of Raphaëla and Alexandre in their respective rooms. Her window on the world is that of an aging woman and member of the intelligentsia condemned to crawl, minus crutch, on straw mats; his, that of a young marathon runner using professional athletics to escape his past and private pain. Emblems of masculine and feminine oppression, each character is variously trapped in the prison-houses of mind and body. Both have lost their homosexual lover only to find each other in an unspecified fleeting encounter born of "the gaze"; Alexandre loses this second, more substantial mother-love, discovering her "true" identity only after her death, which leaves him with a burden of guilt and regret but also with a renewed sense of meaning. The dialectic of pain and desire is somewhat broken by the presence in the novel of a third "upbeat" presence who may replace Raphaëla in Alexandre's life, and who as a writer seems to mediate between a narrator and a reader faced with the complex, only partly accessible external histories and interior worlds of the two main characters. However, even the delightfully caustic, Reubenesque figure of Florence Dolle, who harmlessly gobbles up men and Blazing Burgers at the local café, is unfortunately subject to pontificating after a few too many beer:

Oh! quand tout cesse de révolutionner et que la machine d'os, de nerfs et de chair se coagule, vitrifiée, et entreprend sa lente glaciation, commence alors le décompte à rebours d'une bombe dont l'éclatement est imprévisible. Le terrorisme de l'esprit prend nais-

sance dans l'inertie, l'absence de jeu, de mouvement, de tremblement. Oh! Les scènes désolées qu'il m'a été donné de voir dans les yeux pétrifiés des hommes de pouvoir, imbus de leur narcissisme détestable sous le couvert d'une mission de paix sociale et politique!

The above passage exemplifies one of the book's main weaknesses, in my opinion: quite capable of poetic virtuosity, Fréchette's style all too often verges on self-indulgent excess and obviousness if not outright authorial intrusion. Perhaps the old adage "show, don't tell" takes on new meaning in a postmodern context; making the speaker into a writer does not excuse Fréchette from using her characters as mere spokesmen for her own pain, or so it seems. Certainly this novel has structural vision and even something new to say; for this reason, it is even more distressing to see genuine feminist politics descend into unintentional self-parody.

*Un Héros malgré lui* was first published in English translation as *Ordinary Heroes* to coincide with the 75th anniversary of Alberta, and to recognize the contribution of French emigrants to its rural economy and culture. Given recent governmental blindness to the French fact in Alberta, the book's publication and dissemination in both languages continues to be timely. Unfortunately, it is more likely to be touted unread as a token contribution and then shelved. This would be unfortunate, because Marcel Durieux was a better writer than farmer, and his farming skills were considerable for a student of architecture and a novice. Narrating the experience of his family in the Red Deer district from 1906-1910, as well as the voyage over, his book seems to be based on the revision with hindsight (editorial asides indicate the passage of decades and the coming of "progress") of the diaries he kept as a young man, diaries through which he coped with loneliness, boredom and submerged rebellion. Marcel's per-

sonality intrigues me — it is difficult to tell if his inventiveness and resilient sense of the absurd, producing thumb-nail sketches that recognize eccentricity without demeaning or denying individuality, are a constant or the product of either youth or old age. His writing plays down the self, and personal tragedy is glossed over, not forgotten so much as transmuted by a sincere religious faith. Clearly, Marcel is writing for a European audience and with hopes of publication, identifying “Bas Canada” as “Québec-Montréal-Ottawa,” for instance, and translating the occasional line of dialect into standard French; yet he has produced a key document in the annals of prairie history and literature.

Middle-class merchants in reduced circumstances, the Durieux emigrated despite the advice and prejudice of friends in both France and Montreal, people of “arrested ideas” in Marcel’s opinion. According to the historian L. G. Thomas, who introduces the book, they approached farming scientifically and with more capital than most Eastern European emigrants, and fell victim to ill health and the war more than to ignorance and poor climatic conditions. Descriptions of their “second class” passage by cattle freighter and train give way to an extended narrative of the lonely winter of 1906-07, spent in isolation in a small, rudimentary cabin. Skis as used to convey coal, which had to be dug out of a vein at a distance of a two days’ journey from the house. Food is scant and Marcel must learn how to use a rifle. The rhythms of summer make it more difficult for our narrator to lose track of the calendar, and his world is peopled with the coming of spring. Narrations of summer activities and events — haying, stooking, barn-raising, prairie fires, and branding cattle — gradually merge into an appreciation of the building and growth of Stettler as a typical prairie town. Marcel learned much from

the Métis and rough English settlers who were his closest neighbours, apparently treating them no differently than he did the numerous more educated Belgian and Flemish emigrants who adapted well to the new life. With the coming of their second spring on the prairie, the Catholic cemetery emerges as testimony not only to the importance of the church in the community but also to the death of Marcel’s mother from a combination of cancer and repressed homesickness, and of his father shortly after from old war wounds and a broken heart. The building of the new parliament buildings are associated with Marcel’s coming of age and with his strong allegiance to the new land, born of suffering but also of success and of youthful French camaraderie. Gassed in the Great War, Marcel remained in France (ostensibly for health reasons), but his hardier brother Henri, awarded the Croix de Guerre among other honours, returned to make Canada his permanent home.

The very personal preface by Roger Motut and Maurice Legris, who visited the abandoned homestead and only located it with great difficulty in the vicinity of Ewing, is moving, and the introduction by Thomas is knowledgeable in its social science. One wishes that some postmodern literary scholar would tackle the construction of self, the occasional deployment of nationalist rhetoric, and the representation of the prairie in this text — all are modern, sophisticated, self-conscious and (Georges Bugnet notwithstanding) unmatched by any other similar perspective in prairie writing.

MICHELE LACOMBE



## DOCUMENTARY

ALAN FILEWOD, *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$30.00/\$14.95.

ALAN FILEWOD'S *Collective Encounters* is a long-awaited book, and it does not disappoint. Apart from seminal articles by Diane Bessai, Robert Nunn, and Filewod himself, this is the first serious analytical study of collectively created documentary theatre in English Canada. As such it establishes for the first time a theoretical context and practical methodology for the analysis and assessment of what is arguably the most significant body of work to come out of the alternative theatre movement in Canada in the 1970's.

Filewod focuses on six productions of different types of documentary theatre, and frames these central discussions between a valuable introductory chapter on "The Evolution of Documentary Theatre in Canada" and a Conclusion that places "Canadian Documentary Theatre in Context," primarily the context of subsequent Canadian drama and theatre. The first chapter accomplishes more than its title claims, establishing with remarkable brevity and clarity the contexts, historical and critical, national and international, within which the explosion of collective documentaries in Canada in the 1970's took place.

Filewod sees the major and distinct influences on Canadian documentary — all themselves inspired, of course, by Piscator's "epic theatre" — as the workers' theatre movement and other polemical theatre in the 1930's; the Theatre Workshop of Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl in post-war England; and the community documentary as developed by English director Peter Cheeseman at Stoke-on-Trent in the 1960's. In addition to these, Filewod establishes in the penultimate chapter of the book the relation-

ship between recent Canadian experiments with participational "interventionist" theatre and the theory and practice of Brazilian educator Paulo Friere and director Augusto Boal in the 1960's and 1970's. The relationship of these international developments to the development of historical and documentary theatre within Canada is established in an admirably clear, artfully integrated, argument.

The great strength of the book, however, is Filewod's detailed analysis of the process, politics, and poetics of the individual productions that he chooses as representative of distinct types of documentary plays. These central chapters — on *The Farm Show*, by Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille; *Ten Lost Years*, by Toronto Workshop Productions; *No. 1 Hard*, by the Globe Theatre, Regina; *Paper Wheat*, by 25th Street Theatre, Saskatoon; *Buchans: A Mining Town*, by the Mummers Troupe of Newfoundland; and *It's About Time*, by Edmonton's Catalyst Theatre — consider as their texts the plays in performance, rather than their scripts, as works of dramatic literature. Filewod's research is fresh, thorough, and impeccable, but applied with sufficient discretion never to overwhelm the argument; his approach is rigorously analytical, but flexible enough to meet each production on its own terms. While refuting the too common practice of judging these plays from an external, conservative aesthetic, Filewod is nevertheless evaluative, assessing each work according to its own explicit and implicit artistic and political purpose. If his own bias for process- over product-centred texts, interventionist activism over what he calls "community sentiment," leads him to judge such popular shows as *Paper Wheat* and *Ten Lost Years* more harshly than he does the lesser-known productions of the Mummers and Catalyst, his appreciation of the primacy of process, of "localist" focus, and of interventionist poetics refreshingly

redresses the balance of prevailing critical misunderstanding.

In many ways Filewod is at his best when discussing the productions with which he has the least sympathy. His analyses of *Ten Lost Years* and *Paper Wheat* — the first serious studies of these shows — are brilliant, and they go a long way toward explaining what has made many scholars, critics and theatre professionals uncomfortable with these widely popular productions. Filewod is surely right, for example, that both are ultimately subjective and sentimental in their willingness to sacrifice serious analysis for connection with community, and he convincingly links this to the fact that, unlike *The Farm Show* and *Buchans*, these shows involve “no direct relation between the matter of the play and particular actors in a given performance.” The weakness of these plays points, of course, to a central problem with documentary theatre: as a form that claims to be populist, it most often achieves popular success by sacrificing its objectivity and partially misrepresenting its process because of the need, as Filewod says of *The Farm Show*, to “document the community from within.” An unstated irony that runs through the book is that, in the terms of Filewod’s assessment, the best of these “populist” shows are rarely the most popular. Needless to say, the paradox will lead many, rightly or wrongly, to question the bases for Filewod’s judgements.

As a book that initiates the debate, *Collective Encounters* of course contains many questionable judgements. I am not convinced, for example, that *The Farm Show* is as clearly superior to other Passe Muraille productions as Filewod claims (1837 immediately springs to mind), though he is clearly correct in seeing it as seminal. I also question the assumption that actors are generally “more comfortable with emotions than analysis,” which Filewod uses in his discussions of Passe

Muraille, 25th Street Theatre, and the Mummers to explain what he sees as a problematic lapsing into “community sentiment.” In my experience most actors are “more comfortable” with the safety of detached analysis than with the personal risk-taking of emotional commitment to a role. I wonder, too, about Filewod’s assumption that what he is examining is “the *development* of documentary theatre” (my emphasis), with the most recent stage in that development represented by the interactive performances of Catalyst Theatre, “a more analytical approach which emphasizes problem solving rather than community sentiment.”

But these, like other reservations, are quibbles, or the kind of active questioning elicited by any good book of criticism. *Collective Encounters* is clearly such a book: it breaks new ground, contains a great deal of new information, provokes thought, and will be required reading for anyone interested in its subject. It is quite possibly the best book yet published on Canadian theatre.

RICHARD PAUL KNOWLES

## SITCOMS

*Four New Comedies*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

PLAYWRIGHTS CANADA has long been the Fiddlehead of Canadian drama. As Fiddlehead has for poetry, Playwrights Canada, since its inception in 1972, has done signal service in the promotion, publication, and distribution of Canadian playscripts, and like Fiddlehead it has been criticized for publishing indiscriminately. In December 1984, its parent organization, Playwrights Union of Canada (PUC) began taking steps to change this image, establishing a committee to review its publishing policy. The following year PUC adopted that committee’s report, including recommendations that scripts selected



by an editorial board be published in a new and more marketable format, that certain groups of plays be published in special anthologies of playwright's collections, and that other professionally produced scripts be promoted to potential producers and made available by request in a standard computer format. It was hoped that in this way PUC could fulfil its mandate to promote the production of as broad a range of Canadian scripts as possible while improving the visibility and reputation of plays selected for publication in order to gain access to the retail and educational markets.

The first fruits of the new policy include, in the "special anthologies" category, the present collection of *Four New Comedies*, but it is difficult to see how this collection will help to change Playwrights Canada's reputation for indiscriminate publishing or gain them access to either broader readership or school curricula. The book is well made — no mimeographed, staple-bound 8½" by 11" gathering, nor even the glossy-covered, reduced typescript of the new "trade paperback" format used for individual plays: this one has a full-colour cover and slick typesetting. Most of the plays in the collection, too, have production potential at summer and community theatres everywhere. But none will challenge or even entertain a reading audience of any discrimination, much less reward the scrutiny of the classroom or the study in the way that many of PlayCan's recently published individual scripts can.

The first item in the collection is a one-act play by Warren Graves entitled "Would You Like a Cup of Tea?", a dated bit of sit-com British "wit," the humour of which is forced and the characters stereotyped. It is hard to tell what audience Graves is addressing in this mannered exercise about an unemployed upper-class English veteran, his "batman," and the women they meet in the new

world, but I suspect that any audience would sense Graves' condescension both to his characters and to them.

The second script in the volume is the most genial but perhaps the least competent. In "Monkeyshines" Suzanne Finlay sets out to celebrate senescent sex in a distinctly "Golden Girls" idiom, in spite of Richard Ouzounian's disclaimer in his introductory apologia to the collection. The sentimental and predictable plot about late bloomers is awkwardly constructed and unnecessarily underscored by the constant flowering and deflowering of an onstage cactus that "has to be very old before it flowers," as we are told early on, in case we miss the point.

The third play is called "The Late Blumer," and in spite of the cutesy title and tired, Rip-van-Winkle premise — it deals with the return seventeen years later from apparent death in 1967 of a hippie-guru, the titular Blumer, who finds himself in what seems to him an Orwellian 1984 — the play contains some of the insight and flare of which playwright John Lazarus has proven himself capable. But Lazarus has an eye (and ear) for the ephemera of culture that can sometimes undo any more serious purpose: at his best he is witty and insightful; at his worst he can write like a theatrical "lifestyles" columnist.

Colleen Curran's "Cake-Walk," which closes out the book, is less ambitious than Lazarus's play, but it accomplishes what it sets out to do, and is probably the best of a bad lot. It tells the story of four women and a man in a cake-baking competition on Canada Day, and Curran handles the essentially naturalistic depiction of character and of small-town life, together with the complications of the plot, with assurance. If the play plumbs no unsounded comic depths, it is nevertheless as genial and inoffensive as the best television sit-coms.

This, of course, is the problem with the

whole collection. Each of these plays is ultimately derivative, sometimes rising to a level of competence almost as high as the essentially mimetic scripts on which they are based, but nevertheless imitative not of life, but of other plays — or worse, of TV shows. If the theatre is to survive, grow, and find the popular audience at which these plays are aimed, it must face the fact that television makes better television than the theatre can. It has to break new ground and break with the traditional wisdom that equates “popular” with television-style “heightened naturalism.” And if Playwrights Canada is going to change its image, it is going to have to lead the way.

RICHARD PAUL KNOWLES

## ROADS & ARTERIES

ROCH CARRIER, *Heartbreaks Along the Road*.  
trans. Sheila Fischman, Anansi, \$19.95.

“HONORABLE MINISTERS, he who would harvest first must sow; to harvest votes, you must sow roads. . . . Every rural part of this Province has to have its strip of road, because roads are the arteries of a country — and politics are its life.” So begins the election campaign which provides the narrative thread of Roch Carrier’s latest novel whose 500-plus pages are alive with farce and tragedy. Structurally *Heartbreaks Along the Road* is Carrier’s most ambitious piece of fiction so far and many of the characteristics we have come to associate with his work are present: satire, burlesque, abundant and ribald sensuality, episodic structure, and a pervasive darkness that seems to lie at the heart of all Carrier’s fiction. They reiterate what is a fundamental tension in his work, a love of the living balanced by a despair at life. In the cultural and religious context about which he writes, he is confronting two sins: those of the flesh

and the sin against the Holy Ghost. Against such a background, nobody wins.

In its pace and detail, this is what might be called a “sprawling” novel full of incident, digression, and often hilarious incongruity. The Province of Quebec is governed by the “Right Party” whose “Chef” decides to call an election; the novel traces the course of the campaign primarily in terms of its effect on a rural Appalachian village, Saint-Toussaint-des-Saints, where the road-building, traditionally associated with provincial elections, promises employment to the inhabitants of the hamlet. In the course of the campaign the young recipient of a miracle is immolated in french-fry oil and becomes a candidate for sainthood, a student expelled from college obliterates himself with dynamite, two editors of the Quebec City newspaper in the pay of the Right Party commit suicide, and the inauguration of the new highway at Saint-Toussaint-des-Saints spawns a wreckum race that ends in bloody carnage reminiscent of the conclusion to *Le jardin des délices*. The interdependence of the governing party and the church, the domination of “Le Chef,” and the widespread corruption described in the novel have unmistakable affinities with the Duplessis era in Quebec. The village priest, Curé Fourré, preaches the goodness of God and the Right Party, the Chef dispenses power and largesse as he wishes, and the province remains enslaved by the Right Party’s ability to slake appetites and blackmail critics. Such a monolith is ripe for satire and Carrier makes the most of it. In so doing, he enlarges the imaginative picture of the two decades between 1940 and 1960 which he has treated in his earlier novels. Carrier also makes us aware of the extent to which he is indebted to Roger Lemelin whose *Au pied de la pente douce* (1944), published in the Duplessis era, used many of the same satiric and comic techniques.

While *Heartbreaks* makes occasional

reference to literary figures like Rimbaud and Melville, Carrier's religious parody and his emphasis on the body link him to the anti-clerical satire and scatological humour of Rabelais. Innocent Loiseau, the expelled student, is given "enough to feed Gargantua" while an angry newspaper editor, in imitation of Émile Zola's "J'accuse," addresses the Chef whom the editor wishes to provoke to the point where "your fundament, to use Rabelais' fine word, bursts." The appetites — physical and political — are central to *Heartbreaks* and essential to its vitality. The world to which Carrier returns in this novel borders on the Famine River, a hungry country, where self-interest and greed operate at a primitive, instinctive level and are as enduring as the country itself. Technological innovation — electrification and highway building — are offered as sops to temporarily satisfy the appetites which re-emerge as rampant and heedless as ever.

As dominant image and metaphor of the novel, the road provides most of the drama of *Heartbreaks*. Its associations with life and pilgrimages reach a Rabelaisian apogee in the epic village procession in honour of the miracle at Saint-Tous-saint-des-Saints. Feudal in its occasion and order, the procession's components are described in high-spirited detail with numerous digressions about the foibles of various members of the procession. The event terminates with carnivalesque laughter and a storm of rotten eggs from the opponents of the Right Party: "All that was still alive in the night, in the very great procession, the greatest ever organized in the Appalachians, was Ligouri Lafleur's joke, which was repeated, heard, laughed at, repeated and laughed at again and again, because it was so inexhaustibly comical." The comic sensuality is also reflected in the magnificent cavalcade of names that seems to be Carrier's forte and a particular source of pleasure: Opportun Lachance, Curé Fou-

ré, Mozusse Chabotte, Uguzon Dubois, Poutine Lachance, Charlemagne Saint-Ours, Cytriste Tanguay, Montcalm O. Labranche, Azellus Loiseau, Téton Lachapelle. The action of each is appropriate to his or her name and among the most absurdly appropriate is "shiggy," a unique variation of Sigmund, which the villagers use as a term for the phallus.

For all its satire and burlesque, however, this is a disturbing novel. The recurrence of gratuitous death and suicide, the graphic reference to child abuse, and the inevitable corruption of the young are symptomatic of the underside of Carrier's recurrent, dark vision. The Rabelaisian part of him lampoons and celebrates, while the twentieth century in which he lives imposes despair. Unlike the route followed by the returning Acadians in Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie-la-charrette*, another fiction of the road which celebrates in Rabelaisian style the restoration and rebirth of a culture, the completed road in *Heartbreaks* leads nowhere and will be "deconstructed" in order to be rerouted toward the cottage of the friend of an influential American governor — "Something about free trade with the United States" as one character remarks.

From *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* to the present, Carrier's satiric impulse has been consistently directed at repressive dogma and excessive power. As he has persisted in doing so, however, Carrier's novels have grown in size largely, I think, because of his interest in the human comedy. He is a student not so much of individuals as of human behaviour and the big, representative canvas reminiscent of Brueghel and Bosch that we glimpse in his earlier work emerges full-blown in this latest novel. As his books have become longer, they have lost the tension created by the brevity of *La Guerre* and *Floralie, où es-tu?* or the seasonal structure of *Le jardin des délices*. In *Heartbreaks* the road is the event, the setting, and the symbol linking different

stories together not as a unified whole, but as parts of a heterogeneity to which unity is incidental. Some readers may regret the lack of unity and find the episodic structure spun out to stunning excess. Others will be content to follow the curves and digressions in Carrier's road. In either case, the tension between comedy and despair is unmistakable and always troubling. As much as we might want to emphasize the vitality of Carrier's people, we also have to recognize the abyss that swallows them whole.

This very fine translation is once again evidence of the fruitful collaboration between Carrier and Sheila Fischman who have worked together for almost twenty years. She knows his art and his language intimately. With this novel we have reason once again to be grateful for their creative partnership.

JOHN LENNOX

## PACIFIC BRIM

LINDA SPALDING, *Daughters of Captain Cook*.  
Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$13.95.

FOR CENTURIES WESTERN man has attempted in various ways to come to terms with the Pacific Ocean. The first mountain men to cross the Rockies and ride down the Pacific Slope, into the sweet sunlight and even sweeter winds of California, did not even know (so the story goes) where to start having a good time. And after decades at the Pacific's brim many of John Steinbeck's characters were, in the 1930's, still attempting to come to terms with California.

Linda Spalding's Jessie Quill is the modern and feminine counterpart of every man who has stood on the beach and looked west scratching his head. As a character, about the only real difference between the Kansas-born Quill and those men who hung around Salinas is that her questing starts on the Hawaiian Islands.

The reason for drawing this parallel between Spalding and Steinbeck is the writing. At her best Spalding writes with beautiful control:

The house was all shade and high ceilings — the center of my Kansas childhood. A deep porch wrapped two sides. Once it had seemed enormous to me, when I was very young, then it had been merely sufficient, growing smaller, cramped and stifling, as I grew out of it. As we drove up the little street where I had lived for eighteen years, the house changed again in perspective. It grew on us as we approached and then seemed to shrink again, to slump into its surroundings like an already tired host, and by the time we pulled into the driveway it was a small box, a thing of the past, with my relatives pressed against the glass of the windows and squeezed against the door.

Writing of this calibre keeps one reading on long after the plot's heartbeat has disappeared. Since four of every five marriages end in separation or divorce today, it is extremely difficult to use a marriage breakdown as a foundation for a plot. Most people have already been there. Even a marriage breaking up because of "a hidden Hawaiian past, a history of unexpected darkness and outrage" in mythological context is not particularly innovative — just watch a few hours of mid-afternoon television.

Still, one doesn't stop reading; the quality of the writing is a continual promise:

I was a daughter once, brown-haired, blue-eyed, and thin. When was I found unfit? I live in a country of comfortless women — children, mothers, spinsters, and wives. I live a dress in which I place my hands. Scissors, paper, stone. Everyone knows the injury can be cut out. Father. Husband. You teach me a taste for you, then you leave. You find other women who call you divine. But they are like me. We are ahead of you waiting in the place you journey to and we are the ones you left behind. I am Julie, my mother, and Mihana. Kit. I am Maya. I too looked for a god. I looked for a platter and a house. I looked for the resurrection of the body in a child.

What this promises and never serves up is a synthesis of the inlander, Jesse Quill, her husband, the outlander Paul, and the mythologies whirling around them like a whirlpool. The differences between Kansas and the Hawaiian Islands are as great as the miles separating them. Steinbeck's characters were confused by their western landscape, so promising yet so sterile, and he was content for the most part to echo their confusion. Spalding, a working member of the generation who is trying to move into this western world of ours, attempts to take Jesse Quill into the landscape, exotic and mythological.

It does not work. Like Gary Snyder's leap to the Far East, and Sean Virgo's leaps first into Haida and then Polynesian mythology, Spalding's surrounds works only if the reader (remembering his or her Kierkegaard) has the will to believe in a leap of faith. This is to be regretted. Had Spalding, a better stylist than Snyder and Virgo but not yet their equal as a technician, chosen a plot where tension might be developed, where each character might become unique, the reader might then lose control and descend with Jesse and Paul into what Spalding obviously considers the maelstrom of Hawaiian mythology.

There is a possibility that much of this will not matter to a certain number of readers. These people, among them admirers of Virgo's *Selakhi*, George Peyerle's *Unknown Soldier*, and P. K. Page's *Brazilian Journal* (and all the people who got to the movies to watch the special effects), are those who fall in love with the writer's language. This creates its own orientation, its own tension, and becomes the only important structure for the reader. Whether or not this is a structuralist field may be an important consideration, yet the final result — the reader's distance from the author's infrastructure — must be strikingly similar to reading Dante without notes.

Ending a review on the this-is-a-first-novel-and-the-next-should-be-worth-waiting-for note is too frequently used to mean much today. Yet the writing in *Daughters of Captain Cook* is so full of life one cannot help but believe that on this occasion the cliché is accurate. Given time Spalding will produce something truly important. Her imagination will catch up with her style and sensitivity.

CHARLES LILLARD

## CLOSE-UPS

KAY SMITH, *The Bright Particulars: Poems Selected and New*. Ragweed Press, \$10.95.

BRONWEN WALLACE, *The Stubborn Particulars of Grace*. McClelland & Stewart, \$9.95.

LYN KING, *The Pre-Geography of Snow*. Brick, \$9.50.

WHILE THE MALE tradition in Canadian poetry has often emphasized the panoramic perspective, wide-angle shot and remote vantage point — Roberts's "Tantram" speaker's insistence upon distance and "the darling illusion" typifies this choice — Canadian women poets have tended to explore the consequences of looking at things *close-up*. What this examination of the particular or, as Bronwen Wallace calls it, the ECU (extreme close-up), adopting the term from cinematography, actually *reveals*, however, differs considerably.

Kay Smith, whose first book of poems was published in 1951 by John Sutherland's First Statement Press, is a modernist writer; Yeats, Eliot and P. K. Page are among her influences. Although Wallace acknowledges Flannery O'Connor as her primary muse, her work in fact draws on and evokes an extensive collage of popular culture from the 1950's to the present, including Hollywood movies, Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and *People* magazine. In contrast to both Smith and Wallace, Lyn King writes from a darker,

more introspective tradition of poets such as Sylvia Plath and Margaret Atwood.

If Smith's particulars are "bright," and Wallace's are "stubborn," King's are horrific. All three poets write about the fall from innocence into experience, but in Smith's book, which spans four decades of her writing, it is still possible for the poet with a sensitized eye and ear to regain a kind of innocence and achieve a transcendent clarity of perception in which images and experiences are distilled to their essences. "I am filled to wordless overflowing / purged to the clarity of a single tear," she writes in "Morning, Grand Manan." These moments of vision are clearly related to a communion with the rhythms of nature, which is frequently personified. In Smith, one "bright particular" can redeem a bleak landscape.

As P. K. Page notes in her introduction to *The Bright Particulars* (Smith's title taken, as Page points out, from Helena's words in *All's Well that Ends Well*), Smith's primary strength is her imagery and patterns of sound. Unfortunately, not all of the poems in Smith's "Selected and New" exhibit this dual strength. Approximately two-thirds of the book contains work from previous volumes, including several of her weakest "European poems" that tend to substitute rather maudlin sentiment for linguistic rigour. However, the "Selected" section of the book does include a number of Smith's strong earlier poems such as "The Clown," which conveys a stock modernist theme of the deluded small man in an indifferent universe but which also displays her fine ear and close attention to syntax and sound in such lines as "Sun-slide, wind-ride / On roller-coaster waves, / Sky drops cones of cream / On the shot silk of the stream, / Crickets click their castanets, / 'And all for me,' sings that poor clown."

Still, one cannot help but wish that Smith's book contained more "new" and less "selected." Her new poems reveal a

more original application of Yeatsian themes and symbols, as in "Old Woman and Love" and "Dream Back the Child." The influence of P. K. Page is also advantageously present in the birds, flowers and dreams prevalent in Smith's new work. Smith has assumed a more straightforward voice, and a more humorous and gently ironic tone. Her vision has distilled into a strong statement of faith and acceptance, as her recent poem "Shells" suggests. Even the broken shells bring revelation, "taking you into their innermost porcelain skin / to drown you in colours / far too elusive and subtle / for naming." Art arises out of imperfection, and Kay Smith's close-ups or particulars are arranged skilfully, for the most part, in the container of the poem.

For Bronwen Wallace, the poem is also a container (her Grecian Urn poem in this volume is "Things"), but its contents are inclusive and varied, incorporating both extreme pain and joy. Wallace's details are drawn from the objects and experiences of everyday life: junk piled in a garage, photographs, the difficulty and sometimes the boredom of working at a shelter for battered women, traumatic beginnings and endings, Sunday dinners, birthdays, anniversaries, and most significantly, perhaps, *stories*.

Some of Wallace's poems seem like short stories in disguise, not so much because their organizing principle is narrative (although this is sometimes the case), but because of their preoccupation with storytelling. Fiction and memory are interdependent in Wallace's vision, and embedded in her poems are numerous stories of war, namings, magic, accidents and coincidences. These stories, Wallace suggests, are not controlled *by us*; in fact, *they* control *us*, re-surfacing in our experience in unexpected ways.

The individual life, Wallace shows, carries with it a rich legacy of fiction. Her work reflects a belief in the collective un-

conscious; nothing is lost in Wallace's poetic vision. Everything simply reappears in a different form, such as the metal pin from her mother's hip that the female cab driver in "Bones" now uses as a weapon of self-defence. For Wallace, memory is decidedly non-nostalgic, and her extreme close-ups include graphic descriptions of injuries suffered by women who arrive at the shelter, wounds that disappear on the surface but are permanently inscribed in memory.

Wallace's poetry, like the stories of Flannery O'Connor and the photography of Diane Arbus (both of whom Wallace refers to), exposes the thin veneer of the normal and the violent intrusions that disturb the surface of everyday life. Keenly aware of the protective coatings or comforting details we embrace to keep the "other" at bay, Wallace is equally aware of the tendency of these "corny truths" and "homely metaphors" to infiltrate her writing; thus, her own language is constantly placed under scrutiny.

*Stubborn Particulars* has few weak poems, although the writing sometimes suffers from an attempt to be too global, generalizing on such matters as "our future" and "our century." Wallace works best when she bases her writing in the particular: the specific story, life, event, beginning, ending. Ultimately Wallace affirms language, and its ability to bestow meaning and to interconnect lives, and her close-ups reveal pain as well as blessing. Wallace's final poem "Particulars" foregrounds a single signifier — "bless" — that marks the end or closure of the text but also a return to the communal Sunday dinner scene of the book's first poem.

Lyn King is a poet of "undiscovery," who refers to creative expression — her own included — as a "static dance of undiscovery." Like Wallace, King believes in a kind of collective unconscious but not as a rich, mysterious source of imaginative power; it is, as King reveals, a dark, inde-

cipherable sign system and force that carries with it a certain pointlessness and absurdity. King writes of the failure of the intellect (including language, as a tool of the intellect) to impose a meaning on the world. Her individuals are driven by basic physical needs and the desire for power.

King's poems are strongly — sometimes too strongly — reminiscent of Atwood's poetry. She is not, however, a mere Atwood clone because she lacks Atwood's humour. *Pre-Geography* is unmitigatingly dark, dominated by images of entrapment, closure, displacement and fragmentation. She is avowedly anti-romantic. Nature represents a death-trap in which, if one looks up, "the sky / is a messy closet / of stars," and, if one looks down, the earth is "a minefield / exploding." There are no places of refuge secure from chaos, it seems, and this sense of claustrophobia is marked by the heavy use of full stops, both internal and at the ends of lines. King's is a discourse of choking and suffocation.

Like the broken people who inhabit her poems, King's signifiers are also fractured. Words like "love" and "home," she writes, "shatter like crystal." Words provide only surface adornment for King. The deception of beauty — including the beauty of language — is a trap, as King writes in "Sensing the Hook," which forms her 'statement' about art. The poet's craft is made "beautiful, to deceive." It is a box with intricate "scroll-workings" and "miniature / inlays," but "Otherwise / empty."

Indeed, in such a world of "undiscovery," a winter landscape of "pre-geography" where everything is already pre-inscribed with winter/death, the definitive descent into darkness and silence is sometimes presented as the most attractive option: "No telling. And no pull / like an undertow."

In Lyn King's poetics, the extreme close-up and its consequences take us full

circle from Kay Smith's "bright particulars." For King, looking closely only confirms on a microcosmic level the dynamics of competition, death and struggle for dominance; in short, the brutal, primitive energies that comprise existence: "Once, I saw / a leaf curl at right- / angles to the sky and three winged beetles / fought to death for the space." There are no "darling illusions" here. In King's poetics, expression is reduced to "a lone note," a primitive howl of desire which stands as "the history / of singing."

Although the speaker's disillusionment in King's poems sometimes becomes annoyingly self-indulgent ("I used to believe in light"), and although one sometimes feels that one is reading just another black romantic, her linguistic rigour exceeds both Smith and Wallace. Read as a unit of three, Smith's *Bright Particulars*, Wallace's *Stubborn Particulars* and King's *Pre-Geography of Snow* map out singular areas of voice and silence, communion and separation, all with the close-up eye and ear of the poet.

JEANETTE LYNES

## "DCB" VI

*Dictionary of Canadian Biography* VI. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$65.00.

SINCE NONE OF the major "stars" in our literary firmament died between 1821 and 1835 those whose interests are narrowly confined to "pure" literature need not feel compelled to add *DCB* VI to their personal libraries. As with the nine previously published volumes, the interest for readers comes from the broad panorama the *Dictionary* gives of past Canadian society — although the reader must always bear in mind that the panorama is seen from the viewpoint of Canadian scholarship and interests circa 1960.

1821-1835 was not one of the memorable periods in our history, encompass-

ing as it does the lull between the political, economic, and social stresses surrounding such textbook staples as the War of 1812 and the agitation for responsible government. None of the individuals studied died in war, as they did in previous volumes, but a large percentage died in the cholera epidemics of 1832 and 1834. The dead also included almost the last of the prominent Loyalists and the fur-trading giants. By far the longest biography in Volume VI is, rightly, devoted to the Roman Catholic Bishop J.-O. Plessis. Other extensive biographies are of William Black, the Methodist missionary, and Church of England Bishop Jacob Mountain; their importance in this volume demonstrates the great influence of denominational religion on early Canadian society. The remaining unusually long entries are devoted to businessmen Robert Nichol and John Richardson, and to the peculiar Canadian mixture of politician/judge/administrator and general "notable" represented by Pierre Bedard, Sir William Campbell, Ward Chipman and William Dummer Powell.

The "Index of Identifications" gives a further clue to the nature of the society a reader will discover. Long lists of names appear under "armed forces," "politicians," "office holders," "business" and "legal"; very short lists under "architects," "arts," "engineers," "scientists" and "women." There are forty-seven different names (ten appear more than once) listed under "authors." These are subdivided into five categories: diaries, memoirs and biographies; educational and scientific works; pamphlets, essays, polemics and sermons; poetry, prose and drama; and travel accounts, journals and narratives. Eight names comprise the "poetry, prose and drama" section. Of these, only three published a book of their works — and one of the three books was in Gaelic; the remainder are known for



one long, or a handful of short, poems. Only one of the eight is female.

Many of the same names also appear under the heading "journalists" and it is in this category, however many poems and pamphlets they may have written on the side, that men like Thomas Cary, Richard Cockrell, and Samuel Hull Wilcocke made their principal contribution to the quality of Canadian society. The index is not infallible. S. H. Wilcocke, who published many poems and several serial novels of his own in *The Scribbler*, is listed only as a pamphleteer and a journalist.

As with all the *DCB* volumes it is easy for a specialist to find small errors, to complain about the selection process (the choice between individuals included and those excluded does not always seem to have been governed by logic), and to lament that the "official biography" format tends to smooth out, if not obliterate, some of the quirks that make our early notables interesting as people.

Nonetheless, one must applaud the achievement. While most contributors have stuck with the tried-and-true, a number have triumphed over the medium and have made significant revisionary assessments of their subjects, wiping out with devastating fact over a century of secondary source-based historical assumptions. The *DCB* has become the reference work of record and no scholar can ignore it. As a dedicated student of the series, I recommend it to all as perfect bedtime reading: short entries, a variety of subjects, and, simultaneously, a fascinating overview of both early Canada and mid-twentieth-century perceptions of our past.

MARY LU MACDONALD



## PRE-REFLECTIVE

BEVERLEY DAURIO, *If Summer Had a Knife*. Wolsak & Wynn, \$8.00.

GEORGE MILLER, *Sancho*. Wolsak & Wynn, \$8.00.

ST. JOHN SIMMONS, *Driving the Angels Out*. Pulp Press, \$6.95.

SINCE ABOUT 1960, English-Canadian poetry has been veering away from its historical connections with the British tradition of "reflective" poetry and leaning towards the "pre-reflective" mode of mid-century American poetry. In fact, the majority of prominent poets of the 1960's can be said to have based their entire *oeuvre* on primal or pre-reflective contrivances: frivolity (Rosenblatt), nihilism (Newlove), paranoia (Atwood), and personal alphabets (bissett and Nichol). While for some these contrivances seem more sham than sincere, many younger poets continue to work the ground so dramatically changed by this shift from sense to sensibility; their inclusion in the canon, it would seem, is dependent on their ability to outdo the 1960's poets, to adopt a more particularized or outrageous voice. The prominence in contemporary Canadian poetry of Dewdney (geological and scientific language), di Cicco (metaphysical verbosity), Mouré (feminist/liberal diatribes) and Musgrave (violence and witchery), among others, attests to this progression. Two of the poets here under review fall within this paradigm of hyperbole, though with little success, and one has mated the open forms of pre-reflective poetry with the virtues of reflective poetry.

Beverley Daurio writes within a small compass. Her poems are often addressed to friends, family members (alive and dead) and lovers, and she frequently alternates between the reflexive "i" [*sic*] and the projective "you." The second section of this her first book is a colloquial

meditation on the separated "other," who is sometimes reclaimed:

two days later  
you, the child, and i  
are looking out  
the same window,  
eating omelettes

While windows provide the most apparent motif — of perspective — they are also, like so many other of Daurio's symbols, capable of perilous illusion:

a clarity  
into which bright things flew  
and died.

When she requires a conventional metaphor or simile, Daurio usually goes to the countryside or to a forest ("sensible as a tree watching a fire / i could stand near you forever") and to water when she wants to write like Margaret Atwood: "again and again the lake panics: / the waves lose their hold on the sand."

Following physical or metaphysical separation from those she is emotionally attached to, the poet adopts a phenomenological pointilism to avoid directly confronting the changes that occur on the large scale. Thus "my child bites an apple" and "laura fusses with the tea" camouflage the magnitude of her melancholy. Less private poems tend to verge on artistic emulation or amazement at life's peculiarities and are less claustrophobic. Daurio's "public" poetry, incidentally, often fluctuates between the voices of the socially inarticulate —

this godtalk this yearning form-  
less as a building  
when you are inside and we are inside the  
god speaking  
through the mask of it speaking children  
through vaginas  
in it not empty but a great roar rising

— and ruminations about the baffling conduct of other people, notably the Beat Poets and their idolaters in "Lost in the Boarding House":

and a nodding  
ovation from a crowd of hungry cameras  
saying die now jack die with me here;  
passive gun of alcohol turned on himself . . .

Her most successful lines and poems are those which find her images controlled by ideas and not the illiterate pessimism called up in the first poem: "and no broom or dustpan / big enough."

If Beverley Daurio's poetry tries the patience for its minuteness of scope and inflexibility, St. John Simmons's poetry is weak for completely different reasons. It is bombastic and affectedly surreal, and the heterogeneity of images confuses rather than enlightens. This means that Simmons is no master of tone, though several poems — "My Father Carved Me," "Exile," and "The Cassin's Finch, Loose in a Woman's Bedroom" — do show him successfully limiting his conceits to a single image or idea.

Unfortunately, however, Simmons too often employs an absurdist *discordia concors*. A 100-line verse biography of Socrates (Socrates' name is mentioned at least forty times) seems a haphazard collage of irrelevance: "Socrates hurdy-gurdy monkey sky blue blood red" and "It was winter in Socrates' stomach the orchard and ground bare his / nerves green wizened seedless bags." Elsewhere words are divorced from their meanings, syntax is ignored, and sentences fall apart as Simmons lets his sensibility go unbridled:

My son I want you to be the gates are closed  
and the  
loneliness overwhelming the sound of feet  
dancing  
on my brain my mother ruined my father left  
the  
fireplace is blackened in the mirror my face  
wavers . . .

Several allusions to Eliot's *Waste Land* and numerous birds and animals appear as "real" or at least recognizable signposts ("Penguins on the edge of your eye") on the journey through this book of unsubtle verbal pastiches. For those who make it to

the end, there is the dubious reward of the last poem, a catalogue of violence that begins as if spoken by a demoniacal Polonius:

Make no prayers to a god;  
use incantation  
to threaten the populace;  
love women fiercely,  
take children in your arms  
and run, pursued by dogs;  
weep, kiss ass, cut throats.

Between such extremes of sensibility, George Miller's *Sancho* seems rather ordinary. His poetry is less heterogeneous than that of Simmons, but more imaginative; and he works the common ground familiar to Daurio with much more exactness and far less banality. He has more sense than sensibility which makes his observations more acute and his language less sloppy than that of the other two poets:

Lacy  
    winged flies  
cluster in the corner of the window  
pacing around and over each other  
in self-important loops  
like a mob of buzzy politicians  
nervously awaiting the results  
of a referendum to repeal  
the autumn

Indeed, the title of the book, *Sancho*, as well as a nod in the direction of Wordsworth ("... the emotion recollected / in tranquillity"), tell us much about Miller's standoffishness. Frequently it is ironic, as in "Sancho Sings":

Careering  
suddenly 'round our ass-end  
with consummate drunken artistry  
he reins his dream horse to a halt  
beside us  
Through 3 feet of Friday night  
I see him study the map  
of that next country  
his face a parody of concentration  
head nodding with distilled veritas

After the relatively unreflected jottings of Daurio and Simmons, it is with approval

that I read Miller's metaphor for reflective poetry:

Staying awake longer than I should  
so that I can feel lonely  
feel privileged  
at having to calculate this darkness  
like a secret drinker  
with a beloved vintage

One appreciates the order that frequently results when a poet's intellect keeps pace with his impressions. When his intellect does get ahead of his poetry, the result is perhaps less distracting than that of a sensibility turned loose on an already confused world. In an understated and modest way Miller makes sense.

FRANK MANLEY

## SHELL HOLES

GAIL BOWEN & RON MARKEN, 1919: *The Love Letters of George & Adelaide*. Western Producer Prairie Books, \$9.95.

MARILYN BOWERING, *Grandfather was a Soldier*. Porcépic, \$7.95.

TRENCH CONDITIONS contributed most of the *Angst* to the First World War, by which time warfare's twentieth-century technology had outgrown the eighteenth-century tactics still in use by military commanders. So armies went underground; and their rat-like warfare to kill and survive has been the subject for a host of authors, some of whom were themselves survivors.

Written about much less than the war itself is its immediate aftermath of disillusionment, the struggle to find a job, and the devastation of the world influenza epidemic. Returning servicemen, especially the badly wounded, often found themselves an unwelcome embarrassment in a world anxious only to restore the pre-war past. Perhaps it seemed untidy that the nearly dead should come back in order to hang around like reproachful creditors

who could never be paid what was owed them.

These two contrasting books about that aftermath are by people looking at the experiences of their grandparents' generation. Bowen and Marken's *1919* is the immediate aftermath, led into by the last few weeks of war but set in Canada, with glimpses of the Western Front; whereas Bowering's poetic elegy, completed with endnotes from military historians, recalls the old experiences through the memorials and the relics and the modern landscape that now refashion the world of battles seventy years ago. In her portrayal — broadcast as a drama on BBC Radio Scotland — are blended the living and the dead in a world steeped in the supernatural, so that whoever exists there in bodily form and whoever is already changed utterly are scarcely distinguishable.

The three writers take certain facts, and breathe life into the dead bones. For Marilyn Bowering they are her grandfather's service records. Edward Grist volunteered for overseas service in 1915. His grandson tours the Flanders battlefields his forebear knew. With him travels the older man's ghost, recalled perhaps by his grandson's interest to walk for itself through the remembered trenches of the Somme, the tunnels of Vimy, and the sloughs of Passchendaele, to live again the old wounds, and the war he survived in spite of them:

Where a red brick house stands, horses  
nibbling at hay  
by the fence, was Vine Cottage.  
He had returned from convalescence to fight  
there.  
It was nothing he would speak of, even if he  
could,  
although the name has been passed down  
through generations  
like a code.  
Passchendaele.

To bring together these generations an

elderly Belgian couple bought part of Sanctuary Wood and set up there a museum of relics, with war photographs in stereo, an inheritance for their own grandchildren. Thus the museum fulfils a need, for visitors and residents alike. After all, if one's home has been for four years a battlefield, some recompense is in order. Besides, it may soon be happening again: "Two training jets make a low pass over the graveyards." Meanwhile, the Second World War having apparently passed through here without leaving an echo,

the land has since turned to Eden.  
. . . Cattle drink from the shell holes.

The land is rich and fertile with a few  
irregular hills.

The novella *1919* has a different kind of coming together, though it also has a ghost. The women at home nurse the returning wounded, sometimes marrying those that survive into the immediate aftermath of the war — if they survive for long enough, for the aftermath can be psychologically worse. The novel in letters — or at least the novella — still has its uses. Immediate impressions of the public events of the time, from Armistice Day onward, mingle with hospital gossip and the relationship growing between George and Adelaide, between the Saskatchewan farmer of Scottish descent and the tall brunette daughter of a stuffy Toronto businessman and a lively South Carolinian. Each public event — as diverse as the Prince of Wales's tour of Canada and the Winnipeg General Strike — receives its personal analysis for its vital importance in their own lives. It can be seen as a signal of what is to come in their lifetimes, just as clearly as a heavy artillery barrage announced an imminent offensive in the years just gone. George and Adelaide are highly articulate people, of course, and seek a better world than the postwar politicians are giving them. The

old generation, with its limited imagination and confirmed prejudices, ought to be punched out — as in the person of one of its specimens it literally is, by Adelaide. Her elders discover women are finding independent careers for themselves.

George and Adelaide's own generation and their own preferences speak out in the writers they quote: above all, Sassoon. Sassoon's "Survivors" is an obsession with George's friend Roger, the blinded veteran; while "Base Details," "Fight to a Finish," "They," and "Suicide in the Trenches" are others expressing the same anger George and his friends feel for self-satisfied arrogant leaders who had mismanaged the war and were now ensuring the eventual outbreak of another. Among the authors they quote to each other appears Lord Northcliffe as a sort of genius in fatuity for his assurance to the British public that in the trenches "The open-air life, the regular and plenteous feeding, the exercise, and the freedom from care and responsibility, keep the soldiers extraordinarily fit and contented." Part of George's comment on this passage is that his own wound at Ypres came from accidentally stabbing himself with the bayonet on a corpse's rifle when he slipped down the side of a trench.

If, then, the Bowering meditation on a war cemetery is asking us what humanity's destiny is and what we are fit for — perhaps with the partial answer that Nature can forgive us (up to a point) though we have punished ourselves savagely for the ever-recurring mistakes of our leaders — then the fuller reply from *1919* may be that we should begin by amending our personal lives and still engage in the world with all our wartime energy. Even if the old devils are still there, the old hope for a better life is there too — but war as an answer creates more problems than it solves.

MICHAEL MASON

## FLOW & EBB

RAYMOND SOUSTER, *Eyes of Love*. Oberon, \$25.95.

PATRICK LANE, *Selected Poems*. Oxford, \$14.95.

DOUGLIS LE PAN, *Weathering It: Complete Poems 1948-1987*. McClelland & Stewart, \$12.95.

PATRICK LANE's *Selected Poems* divides into four major groupings: the Sixties, Seventies, Eighties, and New Poems. The Sixties group reveals Lane to have mastered the clear rendering of personal memories — of his grandfather, of his children and their mother:

For years I tried to leave them,  
leave them all.  
Now they've left me.  
Three childish smiles are scars  
inside my mind.

She took all three.

Nothing phony; nothing cute. One reads Lane's early poems confident that they will repay the effort, consistently.

In the Seventies section, poems like "Macchu Picchu" reveal the inspiration of the geography of South America on Lane. The poverty, degradation and unearthly dignity of the common people call forth new accents in his poetry, as in his description of a cock-fight:

Survival lies in the death you make  
believe. As it is with birds and bulls  
so with men. They do not hate what they are  
they hate what they cannot be.

These insights into the well-springs of hate and fear deepen the coloration of the volume.

Growing mysteriously, but quickly, under the provocation of such reflections, Lane's poetry undergoes a change in the early 1980's. His line expands; his themes expand:

1877 plus  
three years to kill and gone  
rode down on horses in high summer so  
the hides  
useless (it was not commerce)

drove them  
   but that space was  
    better made empty  
 (the lodgepole pine  
 will not open unless to fire  
 unwilling to release  
 the seed unless born to flame  
   the fires of 79/80  
 opened them

Pound's techniques for the long poem — the use of history, anecdote and verbal echoes — inform, but do not choke, Lane's impressive debut in multitextured poetry. In the New Poems section, "Harvest," "Brothers," and "The Happy Little Towns" demonstrate a new emotional resonance, while "Dominion Day Dance" captures the essence of longing. This volume demonstrates Lane's improvement in craftsmanship over three decades. This pattern of growth does not often appear in the purely lyric poet, and indicates that Lane's best work may still be to come — in the form of a long poem?

Born in 1914, Douglas LePan has recently completed his latest volume of poetry, in which are presented selections from four previous volumes: *Weathering It* (1987), *The Wounded Prince* (1948), *The Net and the Sword* (1953), and *Something Still to Find* (1982).

Undoubtedly the best work of this volume occurs in the latest sequence, "Weathering It." Here LePan manages to speak honestly and directly at times — an old man trapped in the past:

"Relief," that's the first word to sound in the marriage exequy.  
 Then after that put "resentment,"  
   resentment at being left  
 and extruded. And after that "failure." A  
   tangle of bitterness  
 almost completely concealing how happy he  
   could be at first —  
 thick underbrush covering where wildflowers  
   grew in the spring.

The lapses in this poem appear almost admirable when measured against the excesses of "Song" (1982), where the six-

line stanzas get stuck in unfruitful, unfruitful repetition:

I was whipped, I was whipped,  
        my brains were flayed  
 I was running like mad  
        as the searchlights played

This is not poetry; the editor should have done the whipping — tough love needed here.

However, in his last collection of poems, LePan often manages to express in his own small, quiet, honestly self-obsessed voice the universal fear:

He wakens to a tightness in his chest —  
 bronchitis? emphysema? lung-cancer? —  
 he doesn't know, but as he pads about  
 the flat . . .

Still, the tones of Ford's *The Good Soldier* enter one's mind in far too many of these poems as the nearest equivalent to the persona's sensibility.

What was he like, then, as a boy growing up?  
 A prig?  
 I'm afraid so, although never a milksop. A  
   shy, bright butterfingers  
 who could always be trusted to drop any ball  
   that came  
 his way, but who always stood head of the  
   class. . . .

A few poems arise from the thickets of prose, like welcome pheasants out of the bushes: the early "October," the later "A Radiance" (a genuinely touching tribute to his sister), "Below Monte Casino," and "Pink Oleanders."

Lack of passion does not threaten the reader in Raymond Souster's *The Eyes of Love*. The book consists of two sections: poems he gave his wife in 1946-47 and those he gave her forty years later. The volume is as delightful as it is rare. Can you think of any other poet who has celebrated forty years of *licit* love?

My body is a harp and you are playing  
 Melodies over it night and day, which rise at  
   times  
 To the great crescendo of blaring trumpets,  
 And at times is the single melancholy of a  
   lute

Piped so purely and thinly. But always there  
 is music  
 Flowing and ebbing through my echoing  
 frame  
 Always there is the touch of your hands  
 To keep me warm and vibrant in all my  
 strings.

No word out of place, and the whole volume makes pure melodies out of the present moment — unabashedly lustful, in the Roman manner: Propertius, say, or Catullus. The poems are consistently lyrical, and consistently good.

Ending the volume is the seventeen-section poem titled "Sequence for Susie." The eleventh section provides a fitting epitaph for "The Eyes of Love":

People who live forty years together  
 are either total-crazy in love,  
 or are bored to tears,  
 or do so out of convenience,  
 or are lonely as death,  
 or haven't got the guts to make a change.  
 We've tasted every one of these,  
 have now gone back  
 to sip at simple love  
 with all our fingers crossed.

This book will sing you through the night.

TOM MCKEOWN

## SURREAL SENSES

GAIL SCOTT, *Heroine*. Coach House, \$9.95.

EVEN AS A CHILD, Gail Scott was able to think of herself weeping over the fate of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, and to see her own selves "s'ouvrant à l'infini comme une poupée russe" (cf. "Une féministe au carnaval," one of six essays by Quebec feminists in *La Théorie, un dimanche*, 1988; this essay is essential reading for a deeper understanding of *Heroine*). In *Heroine* she plays with the subjective-objective enigma of herself as though she were juggling particles of light. If at times she seems to look at herself through a camera lens, or to describe her

mirror image, this, too, is illusion and sleight of hand which the heroine performs with a mocking smile on her face. For it may be the image of herself she thinks others see or a flashing glimpse of how she would like to be seen: "a totally avant-garde woman." The multiple images contract into the immediate warm reality of her sexual body, quivering as she lies in the bathtub, and in the pain-shot landscape of her mind. The book is the simultaneous translation of the heroine's centred energy into the medium of her becoming.

*Heroine*, which is revelation through light and darkness, reminds me of Brigit Brophy's painting in which black and white change places, flash and recede only to come forward again. Like Brophy and other 'op' painters, Scott has the ability to keep all her images vibrating on the picture plane. A study could be made of Scott as a painter, how she makes colour work to enlarge her meanings: "There was a thunderstorm . . . lighting the black prairie . . . Heather hues of purple, white, mustard." These colours have a fuller echo (to me, at least) because they are like those in Braque's last work and already bear a weight of pain. Now they absorb the heroine's pain, and lightning on the prairie illumines the colours of her own humiliation by love. All her images, like her dreams, are pieces of the puzzle that she is putting together in the search for herself as heroine. Already she has an artist's words for seeing and feeling but needs to arrange the pieces that will show her tender, violent and contradictory vision of life. For although time, too, is held on the picture plane in *Heroine*, there is movement in it, as sure as that of a dragonfly that breaks out of its chrysalis, dangles helplessly in the sunshine and slowly spreads its wings.

In the course of the book, the heroine learns to see through patriarchal language to its self-serving bones; she learns how to

take a worn vocabulary and infuse it with her energy. This is the key to her awakening; *her* word appears almost as an angel to guide her through the ordeal of the flesh. In the heady air of the 1970's she had drifted (purposefully) into radical politics and, inevitably, into love. Revolutionary heroes have always been skilled at making love part of their political agenda; they play on the strings of conscience and are aided by the willingness of the heroines to comply. The beauty of the heroine's life with Jon and the smooth, almost female beauty of his body, make it harder for her to give him up. The turning-point is the failure of his attention to *her* words. In the scene on the train with him, after watching the thunderstorm she imagines herself saying, "We have to talk." "This made you sleep even harder." I laughed at this leap from intention to something that has happened, at the lightning flash of irony through which Jon's harder sleep becomes a sign of the heroine's awakening.

The heroine is lucky to live a simultaneous life among beautiful women who have freed themselves; lucky, too, always to doubt, to distrust utopias and false hopes, to sense the trap in every idea of "correctness." In her own space, she will find room for light and order and for the darkness and incoherence that are part of her vision. The heroine finds her space through the ordeals that teach her the underside of euphoria and the dependence and possessiveness of love. For awhile she has to close her mind to the sage words of Marie and the "shrink from McGill," who are able to see her as she will be but understand that she must live her evolution. The heroine reaches out: "As an artist I need to be my own woman. Not handing out pamphlets, but writing, writing." And pulls back: "I have to be careful about thoughts like that." Art versus revolution, hard choices complicated by an unforeseen development, expressed in mock despair: "To complicate matters, *even men*

are suffering now." This is echoed by Anne near the end of the book: "Problem is, we're stuck with new men. The rare ones who make love right and help around the house so that every woman wants them." "Not lesbians," answers the heroine, and adds, uneasily, "But the black spot rises." Another glimmering on the picture plane. "Not that I'm a dyke," the heroine reassures herself, in the middle of a lesbian fantasy.

In *Heroine* Scott has created a vessel which holds the messages registered by her surreal senses, permeated by sexual energy. It is emitted by things, by colours, by radiant little cityscapes, and above all by the bodies of women, men, children, even pigeons. Her messages have multiple or ambivalent meanings; they can convey beauty or the threat of sexual violence, which flickers, half-seen, or comes brutally into the foreground in the story of Polly, the battered wife of a Mafia man. I cannot do justice in a few pages to the complexity of *Heroine*; it goes on echoing in me, just as the final word "she—" echoes with the strange resonance of time-to-come, hovering without resolution like the final note in some of Mozart's piano sonatas, not an ending but a pause before a continuation, or another kind of beginning.

MARY MEIGS

## LIGHT AND DARK

GLEN DOWNIE, *An X-Ray of Longing*. Polestar Press, \$9.95.

ROBYN SARAH, *Becoming Light*. Cormorant Books, n.p.

JANET SIMPSON-COOKE, *Future Rivers*. Ragweed Press, \$9.95.

DOUBTLESS, MACHINES beneficially extend our perception, but, because they create dependencies too, they dull the way individuals and institutions look at the world. Glen Downie's poems examine the



cultural harm machines can do. That we rely on mechanical mediation has, for Downie, vast repercussions: he insists that machines and mechanical processes recoil uncomfortably upon uncritical users. A projector run at high speed may make the idea of death ludicrous but, should the film jam, the blinding white light passing through the blackened film is a lesson in metaphysical as well as physical reversal: the accidental image of oblivion is unbearable. Office copying machines and mechanical reproduction of imagery also have cultural implications: xeroxing renders the duplicate more substantial than the real world, eliminating the dynamic conflict between flawed original and perfect copies. Videos of political horrors, such as the assassination of President Kennedy, reduce history to a consumable icon. Technology makes it increasingly difficult to take in reality. In poems about darkroom production of photographs and a tape-recorder used by lovers, Downie concentrates on the displacement of reality: to the photographer, development is a journey from light into the underworld from which he needs help to escape and the lovers realize the machine that helps them speak to one another erases their voices.

For Downie, television and advertising images attract and repel people in ways they do not comprehend: the images blur fantasy and reality while leading consumers to believe they are controlling what they look at. His most serious charge against consumer imagery is that it denies cultural otherness and the plenitude of the world. In a group of travel poems, he seeks to depict the value of being discomfited by foreign countries. In Mexico, Korea and Japan, he encounters strange customs and a ritual acceptance of death and violence which are, in their frequent repulsiveness, lessons in openness to being. In these lands, he finds a healthy double attitude to technology: resistance as well

as acceptance. Seeing how the urban poor exploit technology and how clever, if unhygienic, market folk feel superior to foreigners opens the poet up to cultural difference, just as observing ancestor worship in Japan impresses on him that there are many organic social models in the world. Related to his sense of the North American rejection of cultural difference is his view that consumer images of animals, as embodied in Disneyland, manifest fear and contempt for the other. Thus, the poet enjoys impersonating the salamander and imagining the pleasure it gets from repelling humans. Thus, to heighten appreciation of the structure of spiders' webs, he mischievously compares the brief lives of flies to babyhood, thereby obliquely undermining the way such nursery rhymes as *Little Miss Muffet* domesticate fear of insects. For Downie, nature seems holy in the sense that it needs no redemption according to the typology of the peaceable kingdom.

The last section of Downie's book emphasizes cultural difference by describing hospital life. In this institution, with its advanced technology for diagnosing and dissecting the human body, patients are dehumanized in many ways, but holy if minimal gestures are performed by those close to death: a stroke victim clumsily and even grossly offers the poet bread, unwittingly upholding sacramental truth. When the prosthetics specialist gives the poet his hand, the gesture is amusingly grim, but the humour is subordinated to the wish to define value in the tension between divine and human concepts. Emotionally powerful and socially relevant, Downie's volume has a distinct expository shape and real persuasive force.

If not preoccupied with cultural criticism, Robyn Sarah's poems do suggest that technology devalues life. Her first poem, "Convection," wryly celebrates openable windows and physics: the dance of warm and cold air at an open window

varies the image of the outside, whereas sealed units make the outdoors seem fixed and static. But her constant motif of windows framing views conveys a greater concern with perception than social commentary. Her interest in the way windows do and do not mediate light is allegorical: keeping windows open and building new ones are emblems of openness to being. Exploring the impulse to shut nature out of consciousness, Sarah's poems recoil upon this impulse. In one poem, a worker inconvenienced by a bus detour and waiting in a strange location for a connection dismisses the images new windows present. Filled with her sense of destination, she does not glimpse, as the reader does, that her standing and waiting remotely upholds a Miltonic sense of religion.

In the subtle impressionism of Sarah's poems there is a restrained, even ascetic selflessness. Not only do her poems quietly but firmly express a dislike for the modern urban environment but her contrast of plain interiors with the rich sensuousness of outdoor imagery has spiritual import. The poet tries to win a perspective that will make the colour and richness of things seem immediate and redolent with the transcendent. Yet, her efforts lead to dissatisfaction, to a disengaged, even disembodied, stance toward nature: the perspective that is instrumental to colourful vision causes a loss of immediacy. To an extent, light overcomes the disorienting remoteness of perspective by revealing the beauty of perceptual media, as when a window frame directs sunbeams fleetingly onto a delicate spider's web. In turn, windows show up how much light itself is an essential, if minimal, organizing principle in life. Looking at light in media prevents Sarah from being deceived by perspective. Since a keyhole can frame a fat lady, a camel might be made to pass through a needle's eye. But, if perspective can displace biblical analogy, it does not affect Christ's view that the poor are always with

us. Sarah's wish to defend metaphysical truths leads her to criticize perspective and attitudes that support it: her alternative is to focus on detail. Whereas Downie scorns miniaturization, Sarah celebrates the liveliness of small things. This makes her imagery vivid and disjunctive. Relatively unconcerned with social and personal reference, she gets close to things because she wishes to discover in the physical elements and dimensions that mediate experience a way to renew metaphysics.

Janet Simpson-Cooke's poems have neither the social impact of Downie's nor the metaphysical curiosity of Sarah's. Simpson-Cooke is primarily interested in personal relations. Yet her poetic stance is not exactly personal: her personas seem discontinuous. Writing within family and domestic perspectives, she de-emphasizes autobiographical reference: her poems are like exercises in dispassion. Certainly, she avoids giving her poems the sorts of continuity that the extended form of the volume may provide. This is, however, less true of the group of feminist poems that close the volume. Here, perhaps to our relief, anger breaks through mannered aloofness. In the early poems, when she explores a daughter's identification with her father and distance from her mother, Simpson-Cooke's style is straightforwardly declarative. The emotions she presents are not keenly apprehended nor does she expose them to compelling ironies. Clichés are common; imagery unsustainable. Too often, the poems are nostalgic testimonies, the nostalgia limited only by discontinuous viewpoints. The poems are undisciplined statements rather than mediative structures; their composition is not offered as a process of discovery. There is a fundamental reserve in the poetic strategies: private statements, the poems suppress personality. Rhythmic, grammatical and expressive vagueness governs them. Frank sexual expression tends to be schematic

rather than personal. The reversal of sexual roles which involves female objectification of male beauty is interesting, but the interest is weakened by platitudes. The suppression of personality does not automatically bring about convincing generalizations. When pregnant women are presented as discovering the same surprise before the processes of gestation as experienced by the "ancients," the idea is not dramatized vividly or powerfully. The interesting theme of genetic continuity in the pioneering community receives a treatment no less free of slogans. Real poetic force is not evident until the hard-hitting feminist poems at the end of Simpson-Cooke's volume. Sharp feelings about the conservatism of women she conveys particularly well. She poignantly exposes the harm done to women by male sexual fantasy and she is compellingly urgent about the harm women do to themselves by making men the centre of their imaginative existence. Still, her expression could be more striking and her techniques more imaginative. She provides so little social and political context while so much avoiding metaphysical issues that she cannot possibly achieve the integration of personal and general ideas that is so evident and so variously compelling in Downie's and Sarah's volumes.

ROBERT JAMES MERRETT

## BLUELINE MYSTIQUE

DOUG BEARDSLEY, *Country on Ice*. Polestar Press, \$19.95.

SERIOUS IN ITS intent and entertaining in its presentation, this is not a "sports" book, but Beardsley's attempt to define the role of hockey in the Canadian psyche. Although a good deal of the game's external history is presented in passing, the personal experiences of the author and other Canadians are given as much develop-

ment as anecdotes about the great players past and present. Beardsley views hockey as central to Canadian culture and something, therefore, to be treated seriously. While I agree with the importance of the game, its treatment here is finally not satisfactory.

Any hockey fan of long standing will quickly recognize Beardsley's authority as a writer on the sport. His grasp of hockey idiom is firm; the language of the book itself will cause many smiles of recognition for Canadian readers. He handles the more public aspects of the game's language with sureness. The overwrought diction of Gallivan is precisely presented. The often grisly vignettes of hockey folklore are given with detail but detachment. And while the private reminiscences of boyhood hockey may not correspond exactly with the memories of the reader, they are close enough to command assent.

Some readers will complain, in fact, that Beardsley has relied too heavily on his personal experience. His defence undoubtedly would be that he is not according his experience special status but rather asserting its typicality. For central to Beardsley's understanding of Canadians' love of hockey is the shared intense involvement with the game from a young age, the common bond that makes hockey not simply a sport for Canadians but an integral part of their cultural identity. Therefore the presentation of the hockey experiences of ordinary Canadians who never achieved stardom is an essential part of Beardsley's book.

To some extent I think this strategy succeeds. Beardsley sees the NHL's attempts since the late 1960's to sell hockey to the Americans as a misguided diminution of the sport. This is hardly an original insight, but Beardsley's demonstration of the Canadian intimacy with hockey makes it clear why these financially motivated plans are so unlikely to succeed. The author's understanding of the game's dy-

namics, an understanding he generously ascribes to all Canadians, provides remarkable insights into hockey's incompatibility with television and its excitement when experienced live. Moreover, his comparison of his own assessment of an ordinary NHL contest between the Bruins and the Canucks with newspaper accounts of the same match underlines the pathetic shallowness of almost all sports reporting in this country.

Beardsley also makes a number of interesting statements about the Canadian love of struggle but ambivalence toward victory and greatness. On the basis of his insights one can see that the current Canada Cup format is ideal for Canadian hockey fans, because the disbanding of the team after the tournament allows us to turn its achievement immediately into memory and relieves us from the burden of dealing with ongoing greatness.

However, Beardsley's view of hockey as a crucial, defining experience in the lives of Canadians is more limited than the author will allow, and this limitation is the primary weakness of the book. Many Canadian men, for one reason or another, did not participate fully in the game while growing up. And, although some girls and women do play hockey today, it is simply a fact that a huge majority do not. How can it be, one wonders, that so many of these non-participants are still fiercely devoted hockey fans? Is the Canadian passion for hockey based exclusively, or even primarily, on boyhood experience? Perhaps an alternative explanation of our attachment to the game can be found in the long quotation from one of Beardsley's correspondents, a Spanish-Canadian woman who attended one Oiler game and described this single hockey experience she witnessed as a "ritual of violence" played out by both players and spectators.

Beardsley faithfully reports this impression of hockey and many others as well. The book is full of insights that might be

developed. Unfortunately, however, the development is largely absent and the insights themselves are inevitably overwhelmed by the author's romantic remembrance of games past. Instead of an organized investigation of the Canadian game, incorporating the private with the public, Beardsley continually returns to rhapsodic nostalgia about the good old days at the neighbourhood rink. This romanticizing effectively blocks reasoned penetration into the proclaimed subject, just as it disqualifies the non-player from participation in this essential Canadian experience. Beardsley's view of hockey is ultimately exclusionary.

*Country on Ice* is a pleasant, easy-to-read book that poses a number of important questions, but a more hard-headed, analytical approach to these questions — and perhaps an accompanying *bildungsroman* about a young man coming of age on the ice — would have been more satisfying.

DOUGLAS MOFFAT

## CATCHING LIFE

W. P. KINSELLA, *The Further Adventures of Slugger McBatt*. Collins, n.p.

W. P. KINSELLA'S latest collection of baseball stories takes its title from a character created by a young writer who finds "refuge" from harsh reality in his "cartoon art." But the stories in *Further Adventures* are all realistic in detail, even in those cases (two fantasies) where the basic premise is improbable. All of the stories except one are firmly grounded in U.S. soil, not Canadian, as are most of Kinsella's writings since he took leave of the Ermineskin Indians. Baseball is endlessly fascinating and increasingly lucrative for Kinsella, who is not just a fan but an inventive chronicler of the game.

His recent efforts at Vancouver's New Play Centre show that he can turn base-

ball stories into successful one-act plays. His work in baseball fiction (two novels, ten books of stories) falls into three main types, each represented in *Further Adventures*. The first is the realistic story about unexceptional people who find ways to cope with problems that arise despite the banality of their lives. In "K Mart," a trio of baseball buddies come together under the roof of a superstore to play a last "healing" game in the sports department. Their small world is for a moment transformed:

I [the narrator] wiggled the end of the bat and waited. As I did, the white light of K Mart became summer sunshine. The store lifted away from us like a bell jar. . . . The ball was one long laser of white connecting Kaz's hand with my bat. In the hairsbreadth of a second between the crack of the bat and the ball exploding into the sun above the outfield, I relished the terrible joy of hitting it square on.

Stories such as "K Mart" are closest to Kinsella's heart, and in the telling he can invest life with sweet wonder.

A second kind of story is derived from the tall tale of North American humour, especially the tale of the Trickster variety (Sam Slick, the shrewd con man; the playful joker; the Yankee Pied Piper, such as the Music Man who figures in *Shoeless Joe*). The instance in *Further Adventures* is "Distances," the opening story in the book, which brings a mysterious stranger to a quiet town where he leads the kids to victory over adult rivals by stealth and the use of garden tools.

A third kind is the fantasy in which unknown forces, outside human control, play magical games with material substance and the dimension of time. The book contains a story about a feathered alien from a distant planet who becomes the mascot for the Seattle Mariners and then falls tragically in love with a fan. "Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated" shows

how Kinsella can make the absurd seem completely plausible.

Although Kinsella has little patience with conventional pieties, he continues to amuse us with stories that exemplify simple goodness. As he does so, he emphasizes the quality of such goodness (his figurative language, in fact, suggests a state of grace) by reference to a world of the spirit that is not transcendent but immanent, or at least adjacent to the small circles where we conduct our daily business. Such goodness is most memorably glimpsed in "Searching for Freddy," which concerns a ghostly base-stealer who succumbed to a hereditary degenerative disease that is like mortality itself. Although Freddy was elusive, the narrator discovers a "pattern" to his moves: Freddy was a Johnny Appleseed among baseball scouts, preparing for seasons to come. "I have a nose for fast-running ballplayers," he was heard to say, "I smell them out, the way a bear finds honey." Since the good player is capable of a sacrifice, Sweet Freddy literally (and with black-humour) diminishes himself for the sake of others. "Somewhere in his travels he lost or dispensed with his last name and one of his legs." Finally there is nothing but an empty wheelchair and a pile of clothes. Or perhaps, the narrator concludes, he is just the nervous tic in the eye of a boy who is about to steal second base. He is W. P. Kinsella's vanishing hero, and his story is a worthy conclusion to a deft storyteller's latest book. Somehow, he keeps coming up with new angles on his favourite game.

DON MURRAY

## NO-HED-AGEN

DENNIS LEE, *The Difficulty of Living on Other Planets*. Macmillan, n.p.

THE POETICALLY PIXILATED chef who made Alligator Pie a recipe of delight for

thousands of children, and earned the gratitude of countless parents whose bedtime lullabies were giving their kids bad dreams, has produced a daffy dish for older readers. And the difficulty with *The Difficulty of Living on Other Planets* is just that: once a person has successfully written for children, he may have a problem in writing down to adults. With this collection of verse Lee seems to be trying to be all things to all men, women and children. Despite the interpolation of attractive sketches by artist Alan Daniel, one senses the blank space of the generation gap.

Some of the poems will be fun for both tots and teenagers, and possibly for seniors who are not too severely impaired by contact with reality. But other poems — and particularly those that are spun out beyond the tensile strength of gossamer — may leave the reader with an expectant smile on his or her face, as if Laughter were holding only one of his sides. The glory of the nonsense lyrics created by Carroll and Lear and Nash is that we are never in any doubt about where we are, viz., at sea with the Owl and the Pussy Cat. When Lee introduces an element of *meaningfulness*, he stops singing to a small guitar and confuses us with bursts of synthesizer that rather rock the boat.

"Twas brillig, and the slithy toves . . ." Some academics have gravely pondered the words, seeking the hidden message, but for everyone else the message is clear: it's gorgeous gibberish. Searching for the symbolism of serious poetry can be soul-destroying enough, without our having to worry that we have "missed something" in "The Doughnut Hole," Lee's threnody to the vacant.

Every writer is expected to grow, and Lee has perhaps succumbed to a fear of remaining a literary Peter Pan. One hopes that he will have the courage of his whimsy. In a mad world that speaks as

though it has never been certified, we need the romp with his shaggy doggerel.

ERIC NICOL

## AQUINIANA II

FRANÇOISE MACCABÉE-IQBAL, *Desafinado: Otobiographie de Hubert Aquin*. VLB Editeur, \$24.95.

PIERRE-YVES MOCQUAIS, *Hubert Aquin, ou la quête interrompue*. Pierre Tisseyre, n.p.

*Hubert Aquin dix ans après*, ed. Robert Richard. *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa Quarterly* 57:2 (April-June 1987).

*Bulletin de l'EDAQ* 6 (February 1987).

*Bulletin de l'EDAQ* 7 (May 1988).

TO READ THESE FIVE collections or studies, the highlights of Aquin criticism over the last four years, is to sense that most critics are, for the moment, inevitably spinning their wheels, in one of two different directions. Applying the various grids of critical theory to Aquin's four published novels, as in the six essays of *Hubert Aquin dix ans après*, has perhaps already reached the point of diminishing returns; the further accumulation of biographical data *via* eyewitness accounts, as in *Desafinado*, is, likewise, "lur[ing] us into a lifetime of excavation, an infinite regress of reading" (*TLS* June 10-16, 1988) in order to relate the life to the art to the life. But the way out of these 'huis clos' is proffered tantalizingly in the twenty-one volumes of EDAQ (*Edition critique de l'oeuvre d'Hubert Aquin*) appearing (see *Bulletin de l'EDAQ* 6) from 1988 through 1992. Until, for example, Aquin's most important 'inédit,' "L'Invention de la mort," appears, the argument of Mocquais's book will remain radically incomplete and many of Iqbal's epigraphs will remain teasingly out of context.

Sherry Simon, reviewing Françoise Maccabée-Iqbal's *Desafinado: otobiographie de Hubert Aquin* in *Spirale* (March

1988) put most trenchantly what might be called the EDAQ case: "C'est une histoire intellectuelle d'Aquin qu'il nous faut. De grâce assez d'anecdotes!" Conversely, reading the six essays collected in *Hubert Aquin dix ans après*, I feel like exclaiming, "enough Moebius strips of self-criticism," enclosing the texts which enclose the comments which . . . at least until further *information* in the form of a systematic bio-chronology, lists of the books Aquin read, texts of his notes and journals, and above all texts of the unpublished nouvelles, can be inserted into the almost self-contained critical system which keeps on re-working the same books in the same ways. In the meantime, essays like the thirteen progress reports of various kinds given in *Bulletin de l'EDAQ 7* provide valuable clues to new readings and new methods of reading Aquin's works.

*Desafinado*, as Simon points out, continues, while of course considerably enlarging, the corpus of first-person comments on Aquin (i.e., Jacques Godbout's documentary film *Deux épisodes . . .* and Sheppard and Yanacopoulo's *Signé Hubert Aquin*) by the people who knew him, were related to him, or worked with him, comments based almost entirely on impressions and recollections. This is the raw material of biography, rather than biography itself. Indeed EDAQ collaborators, researching the biographical material for a much more systematic account of the relationship between 'life' and 'art' in Aquin's works, find that Iqbal's interviews with witnesses provide much useful material for them, while Iqbal, in turn, makes considerable use of *Signé Hubert Aquin*. Yet her title itself suggests a severe limitation in her approach: it contains two quite unfamiliar words, one of which, "Desafinado," she explicates in considerable detail, emphasizing thereby its non-self-explanatory nature (it is, perhaps, a *less* useful term than she seems to

think), while the other, "otobiographie," potentially much more useful, she simply defines as "biography through the ear," i.e., via interviews, missing its "implicit slippage" into "autobiography," for a start, as well as other possibly useful resonances of this Derridean term (*The Far and the Other: Otobiographie, Transference, Translation*). The word suggests, for instance, a (male) speaker, with a (female) hearer "who signs the text by receiving it"; indeed it raises, rather more complexly than would suit Iqbal's purpose, some of the theoretical issues affecting biographical method: "biography . . . is not to be in any way confused with the so-called life of the author, with the corpus of empirical accidents making up the life of an empirically real person. . . . The biographical is thus that internal border of work and life, a border on which texts are engendered." Yet, while I would not ask for a Derridean approach to Aquin's biography, this book is gravely in need of *some* sense of method, some inquiry into the apparent presupposition that what these people wish to say, can remember, feel persuaded to say, has a useful bearing on the understanding of the relationship between Aquin's life and his work, or even just on the understanding of Aquin's life, if she aims no further than that. Her many speakers are not readily distinguishable one from another and, with little editorial delineation of them, or of their relationships to Aquin, all these multiple voices seem equally objective, reliable, and disinterested. What total view are we meant to be left with, when all these separate views seem to be equally validated? The shaping of the material into five roughly chronological, yet ultimately thematic, 'acts,' corresponding to the supposedly self-imposed tragic drama of Aquin's life, and the increasing proportion of authorial commentary towards the end of the book, interpreting Aquin's life according to the tenets of psychobiogra-

phy, again suggest some unexplored and far from self-evident criteria.

*Hubert Aquin dix ans après* adds one essay on each novel, an introductory overview, and an essay on *Point de fuite*, to the eleven hundred pieces on Aquin already in existence when the book was published. (See the second update, in *Bulletin de l'EDAQ* 6, of Jacinthe Martel's magnificent Aquin bibliography). While its outlook is very 'postmodern,' as I've already suggested, many points of interest do emerge from these on the whole rather involuted close readings. Robert Richard points out that the *théâtre illuminé* of *Neige noire* is, among other things, the screen of the *téléviseur*, on which, of course, *Hamlet* is being performed, and suggests that, if for Robbe-Grillet "le roman . . . [est] ce miroir que l'on promène le long du roman," for Aquin, more obscurely, "le roman est la vérité du roman." Rosmarin Heidenreich locates references to Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* and to *Dantons Tod* in *Prochain épisode*, while Amaryll Chanady, the most single-mindedly postmodernist of the six, although over-reading the 'trou de mémoire' of *Trou de mémoire* in political terms, still manages to suggest some useful parallels with Nabokov. Marie-Odile Liu, on the 'vertige en trompe-l'oeil' of *l'Antiphonaire*, refers usefully (and very unusually) to recent books (by Rivard and Villemaire) clearly influenced by Aquin. Seemingly his influence on Quebec literature has been slight; perhaps it is time for a further inquiry into what there is and why there is so little. Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier's essay on *Neige noire* as "simulacre filmique," is I think the most satisfying in the book, partly, perhaps, because of its higher proportion of outward-looking references, even of sheer information, on, say, the collaborative nature of Aquin's work on films (see also Marty Laforest in *Bulletin de l'EDAQ* 7), but also because of some very shrewd close read-

ings: we do not always remember, for instance, that the 'true' account of Sylvie's murder is "deux fois une photocopie," or that most of the place names in *Neige noire* punningly "porter dans leur nom les signes d'une autre territoire." But, most tellingly (and many other Aquin critics, especially those dealing, like Chanady or Allard [*Bulletin de l'EDAQ* 7], with *Trou de mémoire*, would have benefited from this counsel) she recommends "méfiance à l'égard des désanamorphoses," for the baroque device indicates not a particular veiled meaning, but undecidability among many meanings, and that "chez Aquin, comme chez Lacan, un trompe-l'oeil désigné peut en voiler un autre perpétué." Or it may be that, as it has for Mocquais among others, *Neige noire*, despite its disagreeable magnificence, brings out the best in Aquin's critics.

Pierre-Yves Mocquais's *La Quête interrompue* goes well beyond the grimly applied postmodernist tenets of the essays in *Hubert Aquin dix ans après*, to stake out the territory of Aquin's moral and metaphysical concerns, which — as in much criticism of Aquin's admired Nabokov — have been consistently slighted in favour of his flauntings of artifice. He places Aquin's four published novels on a spectrum shaped by the dialectic, not of "art" and "life" suggested by *Desafinado* and by much of the work in the *Bulletin de l'EDAQ*, nor of "l'art" and "le pays," so crucial in earlier criticism, but of art and faith/religion/mystic exploration. It is here that our lack of familiarity with "L'Invention de la mort" and Mocquais's consequent unwillingness to discuss it, amputates our sense of a development apparently heavily dependent upon that originating text, as upon the culminating text, the fragmentary *Obombre*, which Mocquais likewise leaves out of consideration. As *Prochain épisode*, more political than mystic, and *Neige noire*, explicitly mystic, at least in its conclusion, are relatively eas-



ily accounted for, the problem of demonstrating the relevance of the two middle books to the mystic elements of the concluding volume becomes crucial. Here he frequently loses sight of his own argument, as he details Aquin's "échec de l'écriture," re-works such familiar Aquinian topoi as structural doubling, making brilliantly suggestive, though not always explicitly relevant, suggestions throughout, such as outlining Aquin's 'intertextual' connections with the Dionysian Theatre of Cruelty (Artaud's *Cenci* in particular), with Julien Gracq, and others. The case for *Trou de mémoire* and *l'Antiphonaire*, though elaborate, is a little thin. Mocquais never makes it quite clear whether he thinks Aquin *intended* a dialectical argument between religious faith and the substitute faith of writing, with its hubristic, Promethean overtones (as Mocquais interprets them), or whether he is following out and displaying the *progression* of Aquin's thinking and feeling, perhaps (as the EDAQ collaborators may eventually show), in its response to biographical events.

Mocquais's over-literal reading of Christine, in *L'Antiphonaire*, as every bit as wicked and lustful as she asserts herself to be, and thus wholly responsible for her own endless humiliations and for the piling up of corpses by the end of the book, takes this "woman of the book" (in several senses) at her own valuation, a literalism hardly characteristic of Aquin's ironic angles on his narrators and on the circumstances and events that determine their universally morbid destinies. This book in particular cries out for a feminist reading (to be supplied, one may hope, as Patricia Smart fills out her account of 'the corpse in the basement' of Quebec literature), one which will place the sexuality of Christine in a more complex relationship to her textuality. The same issue is raised by the immolation of Sylvie in *Neige noire*. For a critic explicitly con-

cerned with morals and metaphysics, it seems too 'easy' a solution to explain, albeit usefully, and with great clarity, the Dionysian, ritualistic, restoration of order in Nicolas's sacrifice of Sylvie, along with his symmetrical revenge in claiming her (sexual) blood for his, without alluding to the utter horror, and seeming moral asymmetry, of the discrepancy between the revenge and the provocation. Likewise, in Mocquais's account of *Trou de mémoire*, he joins all other critics of this book so far in dealing very quickly with the "dialectique Afrique-Canada," and with Olympe Ghezzo-Quénum, the 'dark double' of the supposedly principal narrator, in skipping over the 'hole' in the title (*whose* 'blackout' is it? Allard, among others, rashly suggests that 'anamorphoses' would be a better title), and in not quite showing *how* the Holbein painting serves as a *mise en abyme* of the story. He also takes Aquin's alchemy and numerology with rather a straight face, although he is much more moderate in his claims for them as interpretive keys than Iqbal is, and he perhaps underrates another generally underrated Aquinian quality, his rather dark sense of humour, combined with a teasing playfulness. He mentions several times the highly emblematic *mise en abyme* of the cover of the original edition of *Neige noire*, now, alas, virtually unobtainable, being replaced by an emblematically meaningless cover in the current (second) edition. Perhaps Mocquais himself, editor of the two-volume EDAQ *Neige noire* (projected for 1990-91), could see to restoring the original cover for the third edition.

There is much more I would like to say about Mocquais's thoughtful and enlightening book, but, as he has the last, and most eloquent, word in the EDAQ Colloquium, where he shows how a validly 'global' interpretation may be drawn from the most tangibly explicit data of

textual and editorial inquiry, perhaps he should have it here, too, as well:

Chacun des quatre romans correspondrait à une problématique, à une vision du monde et à une forme d'écriture... l'oeuvre va soudain être perçue et comprise... la globalité de l'oeuvre apparaîtra, révélant que... l'univers est une bibliothèque.

PATRICIA MERIVALE

## BITS OF STEEL

DENNIS DUFFY, *Sounding the Iceberg: An Essay on Canadian Historical Novels*. ECW, \$24.00/\$14.00.

*Stephen Leacock: A Reappraisal*. ed. David Staines, Univ. of Ottawa Press, \$29.95/\$14.95.

THESE TWO VOLUMES about past eras of nationalist romance and humour illustrate how the judgment of history creates a new vision of our writers and of ourselves. The proceedings of the Leacock symposium of April 1985 at the University of Ottawa, though they include new emphasis on political, historical and economical aspects, are (given the Moritz biography of the same year) less of a fresh appraisal than Dennis Duffy's look backward to the nineteenth-century historical novel — and his look also at what he finds among the current outcroppings.

Duffy charts the process by which usable material from this country's past has become recycled through the genres of romance and realism into satire and post-modern fiction. He suggests that the main impetus in the resifting of history through fiction has been nationalism, which adopted different guises and purposes, for English and French, in three broad periods.

Historical romance — *The Golden Dog*, *The Seats of the Mighty* — in the nineteenth century was essentially triumphalist fiction that warned how corruption could destroy an imperialist

union. The threat for the English Canadian stemmed from the lawless wilderness, and was suaged by optimistic hopes for progress and social order, leading to assimilation. For the French-Canadian *nation*, the threat to survival was from history, and was met by "fear and exclusion," leading to confinement.

Duffy's second main period dawns in 1900 and waxes and wanes all the way through to 1970. From the start of the century, he says, historical novels begin to express a new desire for allegiance to the environment, a near-mystical union with the New World land — and in both English and French Canada there were images of national reconciliation.

Duffy's third, contemporary, period begins with Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, appearing "like a wax banana in a still life of real oranges." It accentuated "the shift in the cultural climate; historical material became a popular and accessible fuel for the writer's inspiration." In its wake comes such metafictional examination of interiorized history as Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, and the history-based considerations of such works as Graeme Gibson's *Perpetual Motion* and Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*. From French Canada, Duffy cites Jacques Ferron's reforming of both tradition and fiction in his satiric confrontation of Quebec reality.

Roch Carrier, who is not mentioned, was victimized perhaps by this study's essential compression (eighty-four pages, including notes, bibliography, and index); the historical sweep that Duffy essays is considerable and keeping it in view, and coherent, necessarily restricts references to both authors and works. As a consequence, this essay may prove a useful stimulant to further study of the historic in fiction, but be an irritant to the specialist, exasperated by the quick trip through the decades.

Duffy's avowed intention from the out-

set is to instigate not dictate, to instigate supplementary or contradictory cases, either of which in the process will refurbish concepts of the "historical novel." Roch Carrier might be a supplementary or contradictory case, if placed alongside the "historical romps" of Donald Jack's Bandy series, Richard B. Wright's *Farthing Fortunes*, and Heather Robertson's *Willie: A Romance* — a mode presenting more innovation than elucidation.

As Duffy notes, the general spread of history into fiction raises the quality of Canadian historical novels because "they are written by superior novelists who adopt the historical genre as they might any other in the course of their artistic development." He cites Hugh MacLennan's *Voices in Time* and Hugh Hood's *New Age* series only for their evidence that serious novelists are "playing with past and future time"; neither author is examined as a historical novelist.

Rudy Wiebe is Duffy's choice as the culmination of the process whereby "historical fiction and history provide for the yearnings of secular man," a parallel to "what the Bible does for the Judeo-Christian" religious man. In his use of history and modern innovations of fiction, Wiebe returns to "the chronicle of magnificence," as in the nineteenth century, except that now "such grandeur [does] not fall on the winning side."

An important attraction in Duffy's treatise is a readability infused by confident candour. Duffy vows in the Introduction to eschew the structuralist promise of intellect-thickening jargon. For the most part he also avoids such metaphorical shorthand, as in this exception: "Hindsight asserts the beginnings of a new spirit, but some caution is required." Another sentence, where Duffy like Homer nods, suffers from a surfeit of clarity: "Any reader who puts Ferron's novel down and misses the message has not understood the book."

At its best, Duffy's style makes a potential welter of material manageable. He makes his point, encapsulates, and, having written, moves on. Where works do not warrant a thematic full-stop, none is imposed. Brian Moore gets a paragraph or two. Of David Devan's *Racing Tides* (1982): "the novel concludes with a cipher. Let that puzzle be an emblem for the entire tale. . . ." Of Launcelot Cressy Servos's *Frontenac and The Maid of the Mist* (1927) (admittedly in a footnote): "To observe that the dialogue . . . is set in doggerel rhyme is to have said it all."

In *Leacock: A Reappraisal*, the sharpest reappraising comes in historian Ian Ross Robertson's examination of Leacock's position in the intellectual history of Canada. Proponent of conservatism, and the imperialistic oversoul, though he was, Leacock saw the social value of government regulation during World War I. Eventually, Robertson argues, he bridges the gap "between conservatism and socialism," and as "red tory" anticipates in *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (1920) "the development of the social service state which emerged almost a generation later."

His thesis is largely supported by economist Myron J. Frankman who suggests that Leacock's social philosophy stems from John Stuart Mill (whose *Principles of Political Economy* was used as a text by Leacock at McGill). Mill had (in Leacock's words) enlarged Adam Smith's "industrial liberty by building onto it the framework of individual freedom." With Robertson, Frankman suggests that Leacock adds a framework of specific rights — the right of a worker to have a job, the right of children to care and education — to Mill and to his University of Chicago mentor, Thorstein Veblen. Although Leacock's 1920 proposal is "as timely now as when it was written," Frankman concludes that the humourist's strategy of "lighthearted increasingly superficial

treatment of questions of national policy" could not disturb "the public expectation of mere levity from his pen" and "did not stir thought on the great questions of the time."

Not surprisingly, literary critics such as Malcolm Ross (on the "Achievement" panel) had a different view. Despite the mix of national postures and of his political and social convictions, Ross says, Leacock's voice comes "out of the very marrow of the man's inner life and sensibility" and in it is heard "purifying laughter" — therapeutic and life-enhancing. Another panelist, R. L. McDougall, said that the variegated Leacock was nonetheless "very much a whole man" who "knew exactly where he stood on most of the major issues of his day. How else could he have implanted those bits of steel that are the satiric dazzle beneath the surface of his best work?"

Among the major papers, James Steele's assesses Leacock as political theorist and provides a strong case that his shifting persona — from Canadian to British to American — is a consistent outgrowth from his idealistic vision of a world empire incorporating all nations. Beverly Rasporich, with different material, looks at similar territory — "the chameleon-like character of the authorial voice" — and traces evidence in the writing to show the extent to which Leacock, leavened by his Canadian experience, did, and did not, share the broader republican humour of Mark Twain and Artemus Ward.

In Gerald Lynch's gleaning of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, details of plot(s) usually allowed to lie fallow are used to present the work as a conflict of Mariposa's institutionalized religion and the enchanting forces of romantic love. Clara Thomas looks at the same work, and contrasts Leacock "the enchanter," who gives a soft and distant focus to small-town happenings, with George Elliott, who in *The Kissing Man* lures readers

into sharing (not distancing) the ongoing (not nostalgically recalled) reality of small-town life. As panelist Alex Lucas suggests, Elliott, as opposed to Leacock, offers a "psychological analysis of village life." Or, as Glenn Clever phrased it more generally: Leacock's world had "outscapes of people in typical nineteenth-century mode. The dramatization of the inscapes of characters" had still to come.

Ed Jewinski's paper on *Sunshine Sketches* applies Derrida's concept of "deferral" of meaning to indicate that critics (Davies, Watt, Bowker, Dooley, *et al.*) who bemoan Leacock's lack of a consistent moral norm are overlooking — in looking for a structural principle — the author's achievement. Leacock's "text" need not be "determinable," "consistent," nor need it, or can it, be "clear and straight forward." The problem that emerges is that "a reader's desire to find an encompassing framework" is about equally matched with the critic's desire to find Derrida-derived impasses. As the critical path clears, the post-structuralist conclusion that the text remains a "collection of irresolvables" is in fact what the *pre*-post-structuralists (Davies, Watt, Bowker, Dooley) were addressing before everyone rode madly, or otherwise, off in all directions to end breathless at the point where Leacock started.

Ralph Curry, Leacock's first biographer, and the summertime curator at the Memorial Home in Orillia for twenty years, provides a 27-page bibliography of Leacock's writing during his sixty years of publication, 1887-1947. Curry also provides a paper on "Leacock and the Media," detailing Leacock's efforts in writing for radio, television and the cinema. The volume also has, along with a brief introduction by Staines, introductory comments (many of them whimsical) by writers Timothy Findley, Erika Ritter and Guy Vanderhaeghe.

To me, the chance of getting sustained

criticism from creative writers at a literature symposium is about as likely as getting sustained creative writing from academic critics. Nonetheless, the continuing examination of the Leacock canon, as well as Duffy's examination of our historical genre, suggests how the two processes merge — even though the best writers continue to have the last word.

GERALD NOONAN

## TRAILING AMBIGUITIES

GEORGE BOWERING, *Delayed Mercy and Other Poems*. Coach House, \$12.50.

THIS BOOK IS loosely divided into two sections: the first, "Delayed Mercy" (about two-thirds of the total), is composed of poems addressed to a variety of writers — Herman Melville, H. D., and Hubert Aquin among many others. The second section, which comprises "Section Two," "Irritable Reaching," and "The Pope's Pennies," is about family, memory, and writing, and is mostly short rhyming lyrics. Says Bowering of the poems in the book: "I wrote these lines at 3am, when your brain is too tired to keep the unexpected pictures out; when 'Late night poems / and children should be in bed.'" This statement represents both the good and the bad that has resulted. Unfortunately, the bad must get first attention, since there are more unsuccessful poems in this book than there are successful ones.

Almost all the poems in the book seem to be intensely private musings on subjects that are only hinted at or vaguely alluded to. They do not allow the reader within their secrets, within their worlds. Here is a section from "It's Another Miracle (*fr bp Nichol*)":

I wear a second shirt & call it a jacket.  
 People remark on the beautiful birds,  
 they are stitch on the back. Cats cant get  
 them.  
 My own back

has been itchy for a week. I dont say this  
 for the rime (dont say 'rime' in a rime),  
 all right, but it's the immediate fact,  
 my itching back.

And here is a section from "Mirrors Show":

Mirror show up empty, windows turn black,  
 and mannequins stand in couples back to  
 back;  
 ripples rise in ponds unbidden by the wind,  
 giving old misgivings to a maiden who has  
 sinned  
 against a godlike apparition dressed in green  
 and  
 red and acting unimagined where  
 mannequins stand,  
 each meaning something to this watcher but  
 nought  
 to one another, only to their fiction wrought.

As I read and reread poems like this I try to imagine what hides in the shadows that the words create. Perhaps these poems are more concerned with "delay" and "mercy" than I can appreciate. Perhaps these poems are not about shadows at all, but rather the directness of speech, colour, texture. But I don't think it's that easy. If the poems are meant for a wider audience than the person to whom they are addressed, then I can't help feeling cheated by these poems. Perhaps there are too many "unexpected pictures," too many unexpected *in-jokes* to warrant interest from the *outside* reader.

In the collection preceding this one, *Kerrisdale Elegies*, Bowering was always conscious of audience, as well as of his intensely private and autobiographical meditations. In *Delayed Mercy* the general reader seems largely to have been forgotten. Perhaps the reason is that this book is often concerned with the emptiness of language and words. Toward the end of the book this theme is particularly evident: "Sometimes your word organ / is just empty, / you stare at an object, a broken tree, / a grate in the ceiling, / & you cant say, you can only think / you cant say, / the thing in front of you / becomes worthless"; "Do you have to write /

just because there's a pen?"; "Here, do we always have to / talk about poetry / when we mean our lives? / (I didn't want to write a poem, / somehow starting this, I wanted / time to make a thing / longer, a thing lived / in my head too long.)" But again, I think that is too easy an explanation. I like poems that lounge around or bang around in my head for a time — unfortunately, that does not happen with these poems.

Those that I found most satisfying were the ones in which Bowering tells a story, any story, about himself, or a cat:

*The black & white killer cat who used to live  
next door walkt  
my way without seeing or without caring that  
I was there. He  
stept four-foot along the rail of the rotting  
fence, not  
swaying as it swayed, foot step off the moving  
board, intent on  
patrolling my, not his, yard.*

Here, from "Thea in Oliver," is Bowering simultaneously talking to himself, to Thea, and to the reader:

Drawing a few days of your childhood  
upon my boyhood's landscape,  
I make memory not a servant but a poem  
through which you scamper, a brownish  
butterfly in the sun. A daughter,  
a metaphor, a sister to my first years.

In these lines Bowering has an intense loyalty to the subject and object of the poem, but at the same time has not forgotten his responsibility to the audience, the anonymous readers willing to offer their interest. It is disappointing to see so many private poems that do not work, when Bowering obviously can write ones that do.

At its best this book has a late-night sadness and softness. But you have to look hard, perhaps too hard, to see it: there is too much private, ungiving hardness to too many of the poems. What we are left with in this book are "A trail of ambiguities" as Bowering tells us in the last poem. This trail sometimes leads the

reader into a private and reflective world. But more often than not in this book, it does not.

PETER O'BRIEN

## IRWIN'S LIVES

GRACE IRWIN, *Three Lives in Mine*. Irwin Publishing, \$17.95.

GRACE IRWIN WARNS US that "this book was not intended as autobiography," but rather as a tribute to the three men who shaped her religious and moral principles. Nevertheless, this mélange of reminiscences, letters, and character sketches — written in her characteristically convoluted style and filled with humorous digressions — gives us a memoir of a resolute, energetic woman who has been a teacher, amateur actress, fiction writer, and preacher. Of no less interest is the fact that she is the sister of John Irwin and Irene Irwin Clarke, of the Clarke, Irwin publishing firm.

A novelist who has been ignored by the contemporary CanLit critical establishment, Irwin's territory is the religious novel that explores the relations between God and the individual and his society. She analyzes the nature of doubt and conscience in the lives of clergymen; for instance, *Servant of Slaves* (1961), an autobiographical novel about John Newton, the eighteenth-century sea captain turned Methodist preacher, is told through interior monologues, diaries, and letters. Her trilogy, *Least of All Saints* (1952), *Andrew Connington* (1954), and *Contend with Horses* (1969), examines the career of the minister Connington from his days at Victoria College in the 1920's, through his growing alienation from his wife and congregation, to his final tests of faith. Readers of the novels will find some parallels between these fictional protagonists and the "three lives" here, which

demonstrate Irwin's lifelong admiration for older men of intellectual vigour.

The first life is that of Irwin's father John, an Irish emigrant who worked his way up through the Toronto police force to the morality squad, and then lost his job in a confrontation over his own principles and integrity. Although he died when the author was 10, he and his wife Margaret gave their own children a lifelong sense of superiority and excellence; their cultured home was temperance and Methodist, where church attendance three times on Sundays and dissection of the sermons was the norm. This chapter is an affectionate evocation of a WASP childhood in Toronto's High Park in the first twenty years of the century.

The second life centres on her brother John, who became a kind of father figure for Irwin in her teens and college years. In the 1920's John, a serious, practical young man and lover of books, worked as a subscription-book salesman in eastern Ontario and then sold insurance in New York City. This section makes for tedious reading, because of extensive quotations from his letters — their self-consciousness suggests an eye on future publication — as John encourages Grace to examine her religious beliefs. I regret that this record of growing affection between two handsome and ambitious young people did not tell us more about the affairs of Clarke, Irwin, which was founded in 1929 by John and his brother-in-law William Clarke. Yet there is no doubt where the firm's educational and moral bias comes from, which resulted in prohibitions on smoking, and directors' meetings of John's other firm, The Book Society of Canada, which opened with prayers.

Following graduation from Victoria College, Irwin taught Latin at Humber-side Collegiate to many generations of Toronto students, she gravitated to the Oxford Group, and in the late 1930's she joined the little theatre society clustered

around George Wilson Knight while he was at Trinity College. Meanwhile, she began drafts of her first novel, and in 1940 — John was now involved with the firm and his own family — she met the Rev. H. Harold Kent, an architect turned Baptist preacher, although he was neither a Baptist nor a fundamentalist. Not given to histrionics, his fortitude and reason reflected an inner fire, and the way he bore his trials seems to have provided Irwin with a model for her fictional men of God. By 1960, unhappy with the United Church's lack of intellectual and spiritual challenges, she joined the Emmanuel Christian Congregational Church, and became its pastor in 1980.

It may seem ironic that Irwin, who is often infuriatingly opinionated, would focus on men who were her father figures and confidants. She has no use for current fads in feminism, for she never thought of herself, physically or intellectually, as a weaker vessel, and the glimpses we get of her mother Margaret and sister Irene reveal personalities as complex and as dominating as her own. More fundamental for her, however, is the underlying motif of the book: how the twentieth-century Christian struggles to maintain her faith, particularly when she has unfashionable ideas about sex, the family, and society. This woman's *apologia pro vita sua* shows that she had a lot of help from her friends.

GEORGE L. PARKER

## SOVEREIGN LIVES

*Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume VIII: 1851-1860.* ed. Frances G. Halpenny, Univ. of Toronto Press, \$60.00.

IN A COUNTRY that has abandoned the issue of sovereignty-association only to take up the matter of arctic sovereignty, the special status and the submerged manoeuvrings of pre-Confederation history may not seem of immediate interest

and import. Yet the underwhelming question facing Canadians today may well have to do with precisely this kind of pre-history. The Canadian question, of course, is not the "where is here?" of *indépendantistes* and nuclear submarine proponents. Nor is it the "who am I?" of colonials, free-traders, and nationalists. Northrop Frye notwithstanding, the real Canadian questions may be less "where are we?" and "who are we?" than "where have we been?" and "who have we been?" If we were merely to scratch the surface of our common land, we might soon find ourselves digging native marrow from our fingernails. If we were only to sketch in our collective genealogy, we might well begin to sense the blood of heroes coursing through our veins.

Those places which have got us to where we are today and those people who have made us who we are today are not the stuff of straining imaginations and fading memories, the stuff as dreams are made on. They are the stuff of history, and nowhere are they more firmly grounded than in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, that massive undertaking of economic, military, ecclesiastical, artistic, literary, ethnological, political, scientific, cultural, and geographic history, all told through the lives of extraordinary Canadians *du temps perdu*. Of the nine *DCB* volumes published since 1966, the first volume covers the years 1000-1700 and the second the eighteenth century, while the remaining volumes deal piecemeal with the nineteenth century. Each nineteenth-century *DCB* volume concentrates on a period of ten or twenty years. *DCB, Volume VIII (1851-1860)* is the latest pre-Confederation work in the series (the already published Volume IX covering the years 1861-1870).

The fastidious scholarship of general editor Frances G. Halpenny, directeur-général adjoint Jean Hamelin, and some 350 distinguished contributors from

around Canada exposes some of our most revered and least remembered heroes to a brilliant and penetrating biographical light, revealing these figures to be not larger than life, but precisely as large as life — and there is the wonder of collective memory. Open the book at random and we find lives much like our own: more glorious perhaps, more complete perhaps, but defining the human condition all the same. So varied are their personal stories that their only common points seem to be general prominence and the accident of having died in the last full decade before Confederation. These are the people who envisioned the Dominion of Canada; but like Moses they did not live to set foot in the promised new land.

A kind of Mt. Nebo ambivalence is poignantly evident throughout Canadian literature, as again and again, even to the present day, we try to leave Moab for Canaan. The *DCB* biographies of pre-Confederation Canadian writers warn us against both the complacency of those who have arrived and the smugness of *arrivistes*. This volume teaches us how much we still have to learn about Canadian literature, and in particular about the writers and critics who seemed to arrive before us. For example, test yourself on these sovereign lives:

1. Name the Irish-born Catholic priest who, appointed archbishop of Halifax in 1852, became the first archbishop in British North America, excluding Quebec. He was a widely read poet and devotional writer.
2. Name the francophone romantic poet who, sentenced to death as a Patriote, went briefly into exile in France, and who committed suicide fifteen years after suffering a nervous breakdown over his wife's death in childbirth.
3. Name the Quebec author who, arrested during the 1837-1838 rebel-



- lion, was the only Patriote to plead guilty to trying to overthrow the Lower Canada government. His death sentence was commuted and he was pardoned in 1843. He published two stories: "Voeux accomplis" (1846-1847) and "La Croix du Grand Calumet" (1847).
4. Name the author of *Les Révélations du crime ou Combray et ses complices* (1837), often mistaken for the first French-Canadian novel.
  5. Name the king's printer and journalist who gained notoriety over his reporting of the British seizure of the American ship *President* in 1815. After a career in the Maritimes, he died of yellow fever in Bermuda.
  6. Who, in *The Unknown, or Lays of the Forest* (1831), was the earliest practitioner of the Canadian frame story?
  7. Name the Scot who became one of Canada's earliest female poets at the same time that she earned her living as a grammarian. She was the author of *Home* (1815) and *A Year in Canada and Other Poems* (1816).
  8. What New Brunswick playwright was rumoured to be both a deserter from the American army and a bigamist?
  9. Name the mayor of Montreal whose memoirs, "Ma Saberdache rouge," a history of Upper and Lower Canada, and "Ma Saberdache bleu," a collection of letters and notes, numbered forty-three volumes.
  10. Who wrote the novel *The Life and Adventures of Simon Seek* (1858) — and invented a method for processing pulp?
  11. Which Gaelic poet of Scotland and Nova Scotia was so expert a marksman that he was reputed to be able to shoot out a candle flame with one pull of the trigger?
  12. Who wrote *Épîtres, satires, chansons, épigrammes et autres pièces de vers* (1830), considered by some the first poetry collection published in Canada by a French Canadian?
  13. Name the eccentric Toronto poet who began his career crusading for a trans-Canada railway and who ended it propelling himself about in a self-styled wheelchair.
  14. Name the Québécois poet and journalist whose pseudonyms included "X," "Le Frondeur," and "\*\*\*\*."
  15. Name the first French-Canadian playwright: in the 1830's he came under the tutelage of Archibald Campbell, and he went on to write *Griphon ou la vengeance d'un valet* (1837) and *Une Partie de campagne* (1865, post.).
  16. Name the Scots pupil of Thomas McCulloch who went on to a career in Nova Scotia journalism, politics, and law, and who penned a romance titled "The Prince and His Protégé: A Tale of Nova Scotia" (1844).
  17. Name the poet who supported Canadian annexation to the United States, yet whose best-known poem, "Mon pays" (1841), was a precursor of French-Canadian literature.
  18. Name the French-Canadian poet who served briefly as organist at St. Patrick's Church, Montreal, and who, disabled after a childhood operation, died at the age of 28 from complications arising from this surgery.
  19. Name the now famous author of *The Monk Knight of St. John: A Tale of the Crusades* (1850), who once described himself to Queen Victoria as "the only Author this Country has hitherto produced."

20. Name the Newfoundland poet whose *The Last of the Aborigines* (1851) most recently made an appearance in *Canadian Poetry* (Spring-Summer 1978).

*Answers:* 1. William Walsh (1804-1858); 2. Charles-François Lévesque (1817-1859); 3. Guillaume Lévesque (1819-1856), brother of Charles-François Lévesque; 4. François-Réal Angers (1812-1860); 5. Edmund Ward (1787-1853); 6. William Fitz Hawley (1804-1855); 7. Ann Cuthbert Rae (1788-1860); 8. Thomas Hill (1807-1860); 9. Jacques Viger (1787-1858); 10. Ebenezer Clemo (c.1830-c.1860); 11. Iain MacDhonnail 'Ic Iain (1795-1853); 12. Michel Bibaud (1782-1857); 13. John Smyth, a.k.a. "Sir John Smith" (1792-1852); 14. Pierre Laviolette (1794-1854); 15. Pierre Petitclair (1813-1860); 16. George Renny Young (1802-1853); 17. Auguste Soulard (1819-1852); 18. Orphir Peltier (1825-1854); 19. John Richardson (1796-1852); 20. George Webber (fl. 1851-1857).

PAUL MATTHEW ST. PIERRE

## CONVENT & TAVERN

ROBERT PRÉVOST, SUZANNE GAGNÉ, & MICHEL PHANEUF, *L'Histoire de l'alcool au Québec*. Stanké, n.p.

MARTA DANYLEWYCZ, *Taking The Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Québec 1840-1920*. McClelland & Stewart, \$14.95.

THE VISITOR to Quebec from another Canadian province is soon aware that "la différence" is clear in one respect: you can purchase wine at the local corner store and bring it with you to many restaurants. In fact, as revealed in the illustrated *Histoire de l'alcool au Québec*, commissioned by the Société des alcools du Québec in celebration of its 65th anniversary, the consumption of alcohol has performed an

important role in the history of Quebec and attitudes to it have frequently set francophones apart from anglophones.

The first part of the book, by Robert Prévost, traces the early history of various alcoholic beverages, beginning with Jacques Cartier's reference to the Ile d'Orléans as the "isle de Bacchus," in honour of its wild grapes. Champlain's attempts to cultivate vines were unsuccessful, but the Jesuits set up the first brewery at Sillery in 1646, a project imitated elsewhere and expanded by Jean Talon twenty years later. The Sulpiciens brought wine from France and by the early eighteenth century there were already numerous "cabarets," designated by an evergreen branch over the door, some serving white customers only, others "les Sauvages" as well. The conflicts between Church and fur-traders over the sale of liquor to natives are well documented from legislation. This section of the book is rich in anecdotes, such as the story of an English officer who wrote (in French) to a French counterpart in 1759, to arrange an exchange of beer for wine — quoting Voltaire's recent allusion to "quelques arpents de neige."

Ambivalence toward the sale of alcohol persisted, and not only with regard to Indians. The first Molson arrived in Montreal in 1782 and soon started large-scale brewing and distilling. Taxes from the sale of liquor became a lucrative source of revenue, as did those from the offshoots of Molson's success (steamships, public transport, street lights, the first real hotel and theatre). In the nineteenth century government interest in maintaining sales came into conflict with the Temperance movement. The first of a series of Acts culminating in state control of the industry was passed in 1850. In a national referendum on prohibition in 1889, Quebec was the only province to vote overwhelmingly against. Even the clergy feared difficulties in obtaining wine for Mass.

The second and longest part of the book, by Suzanne Gagné, begins by covering the period from 1921, when the "Commission des liqueurs du Québec" was created, to 1961. Bootlegging adventures abound. Once more moral reservations as to the sale of liquor were outweighed by the lure of tax and contraband dollars. Sales of alcohol in Quebec dropped by 75 percent in 1933, when prohibition ceased in the States. Corruption continued to be rife throughout the Duplessis era, permits to sell liquor being issued on a patronage basis or arbitrarily refused, as in the famous Roncarelli case. During World War II, when the distilleries became part of the war effort, the black market flourished. New regulations did not come into effect until 1961, under the Liberals, when the "Régie des alcools du Québec" was created, and sales were separated from the issuing of licences.

The 1960's saw a new force come into play, that of unionized workers (the first in the public sector). Major strikes occurred in 1965 and 1968, when an Inquiry resulted in the separation of sales and quality control. The newly formed "Société des alcools du Québec" (1971) oversaw the spread of self-service stores and the growth of the wine and cider industries in Quebec. The changing tastes of the Québécois are chronicled in a final short section by Michel Phaneuf.

The latter parts of the history tend to become a panegyric to the Société des alcools, reading at times more like advertising copy than an account of the development of what has definitely been — and still is — a major element in Quebec culture. Nonetheless, this overview will be useful to those teaching Quebec civilization courses as a background to literature, or to those wondering why imported wine is sold by the gallon in Quebec.

The history of alcohol in Quebec makes little reference to women, except to note that husbands were held responsible for

their wives' misdemeanors in this domain, as late as 1961. Women in general never drank spirits and rarely beer, limiting their imbibing to a little sherry before dinner or a glass of "bière d'épinette." They never indulged, for instance, in brandy-soaked bread for breakfast, as did the heroes of *Les Anciens Canadiens*. On the other hand, they were the mainstay of the Temperance movement, as illustrated by Laure Conan's short story entitled *L'Obscure Souffrance*, which consists of the fictional journal of a young woman forced to abandon all hope of marriage in order to take care of her alcoholic father. "Taking the veil" might well have appeared an attractive alternative. Marta Danylewycz's study considers the advantages of this choice over both possibilities — marriage/motherhood, or spinsterhood.

In it the author considers primarily two religious orders which played an important role in Quebec in the nineteenth century: the Congregation of Notre-Dame and the Sisters of Miséricorde. Both expanded rapidly around 1840, during a religious revival which drew upon the political conservatism and the perception of Roman Catholicism as a messianic mission related to "la survivance." Urban growth also provided ideal conditions for religious orders to expand in the area of social services. Church support for those in power tended to depend on the exclusion of all competition, particularly in the fields of education and health care. The Congregation of Notre-Dame, the largest and most prestigious teaching order, dating from New France, provided the first teacher training in Quebec. The Sisters of Miséricorde were social workers and early childhood specialists, involved mainly with unwed mothers and illegitimate children (of which there were many — an unplanned contribution to the "revanche des berceaux").

Danylewycz's study places the choice of a religious "vocation" in context, bringing

out both the reasons for religious fervour among young girls and the pragmatic side to their decision. Becoming a sister in one or other of these two orders, for example, was a very different prospect. Whereas the teaching nuns tended to live in bourgeois comfort and well placed families were proud to count a daughter among them, the Sisters of Miséricorde laboured under much more gruelling conditions and not always with the full approval of society. Outside the religious orders, any professional activity was almost impossible for women. Marriage was the only other socially acceptable option, as statistical charts show. Families were large and, particularly in the farming community, suitable (landed) spouses were not always available. Girls who attended convent schools were also constantly exposed to religious rôle models and a certain amount of recruiting propaganda.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the growth of the feminist movement led to greater communication between nuns and educated lay women who performed voluntary work. The women's movement in fact advanced more slowly in Quebec, according to this author, because "religious life offered a practical solution to the problems arising from the lack of educational and economic opportunity for women." The first "École d'enseignement supérieur pour les filles," founded in 1908 and renamed "Collège Marguerite Bourgeois" in 1926, was a joint religious and lay venture. Higher education for women was more readily accepted than their entry into the professions. When one graduate of the college went into medicine, in 1924, the school's administrators deplored her decision. Marie Gérin-Lajoie, a prominent lay leader of the women's movement in Quebec, founded a new religious community, the Institut N.-D. du Bon Conseil, aimed at expanding the sphere of nuns' activities in society. In fact, within their own convents

some were already active as engineers, carpenters, writers, artists, administrators and even dentists. Poor women who joined the Sisters of Miséricorde could hope to be sent to universities in the States for medical training. They certainly had more opportunities to acquire professional experience than most marginal spinsters or mothers dedicated to the survival of the Québécois species.

*Taking The Veil* is a lucidly written, well-documented account of a phenomenon essential to the evolution of Quebec and usually neglected in general histories. As Marta Danylewycz concludes: "In the final analysis, entering a convent could well mean overcoming the disadvantage of being a woman in a man's world." One can only deplore the violent and untimely death of this talented historian, in 1985.

The convent and the tavern: in Quebec, as in Ireland, the two are opposed but inseparable. They mark Quebec's literary output, from the earliest times to *Broue* or Michèle Mailhot's *Le Portique*. Storytelling in Quebec has always been associated with drinking/"le sacre" or religion/"le sacré." Inspired fervour or the "ivresse" of revolt: two types of escapism, or two ways to live more intensely?

VALERIE RAOUL

## INTIMATE VOICES

ALAIN GRANDBOIS, *Lettres à Lucienne*. L'Hexagone, \$14.95.

DENISE BOUCHER, *Lettres d'Italie*. L'Hexagone, \$14.95.

ANNE DANDURAND, *Voilà c'est moi: c'est rien, j'angoisse*. *Journal imaginaire*. Triptyque, n.p.

WHO IS LUCIENNE? The official biography of Alain Grandbois does not mention her. The letters written by him to her before he became a famous Québécois poet are published with "avant-propos, introduction et notes de Lucienne." The publisher

states at the outset that "d'un commun accord avec Lucienne" names are indicated by initials "afin de préserver l'anonymat." The combined effect of exposure/confession with erasure/self-effacement on the part of "Lucienne" is one of reality masquerading as fiction, or the reverse (as in the eighteenth-century novel). One assumes the receiver was really called "Lucienne," since the reproduction of two previously unpublished poems begins with "Lucienne" in Grandbois' handwriting and corresponds to the name as written on the cover of the book. Our perception of the Lucienne of 1932-33 to whom the letters were addressed is further complicated by the constant intervention of retrospective comments by the present-day Lucienne, presumably in her seventies. First she narrates their brief affair in France from her own perspective, then comments throughout the letters in notes justifying, questioning, echoing a dialogue with her long dead and even longer forgetful lover.

We are informed that Lucienne published a volume of poetry herself in 1972, under the pseudonym "Marie Normand." But here she adopts the role of Muse, the woman who inspired certain poems by Grandbois, whose trace is to be sought in his work, although he abandoned her. This abandonment is not accepted as such: Lucienne persists in believing that she was as responsible as Grandbois for their failure to live happily ever after, that she too was an "être d'élite" who deserved a "grande passion" which should have lasted more than a year. The correspondence becomes the cherished relic of a lost dream, a central element in the life-drama of this woman, who appears to have been marginal in Grandbois' own. This collection of love (?) letters is interesting for the portrait it draws, both intentionally and unwittingly, of this woman's expectations, frustrations, nostalgia, resentment and over-riding deter-

mination to find a positive interpretation in spite of all the contrary evidence.

The image of Grandbois conveyed by the letters is enigmatic. He appears clear-sighted but ruthless, impassioned but selfish, unswervable by "love" or sickness from his own project. Advising Lucienne to obtain an abortion from a doctor rather than from "ces femmes," he complains: "Tu me négliges" — and Lucienne interrupts from "now" to protest: "Je lui écrivais tous les jours, rien d'autre ne m'intéressait. . . ." Grandbois' mysogyny is stunning: ". . . il n'est pas besoin de connaître beaucoup les femmes pour savoir à quoi s'en tenir sur leurs capacités de jeux et d'intrigues. . . tu t'y montres intelligente. . . c'est une qualité que les femmes vraiment 'femme' — les seules qui comptent — ne possèdent guère." Lucienne does not comment on her reaction to this ambivalent judgement of her. Dazzled by his charm, his style? One would like to think that this kind of blind devotion could no longer be considered admirable, that this type of reflected glory might no longer seem better than none. This correspondence raises the old question of whether we should/can prevent our impression of the artist as man from affecting our judgement of his work (cf. Sartre on Céline).

Sidelights on the life of Canadians in exile in Paris in the 1930's are incidental in this account of the failure of life to reach the heights of art. Denise Boucher's *Lettres d'Italie*, on the contrary, provide a witty account of her travels during February and March 1987 with "André" (?), who remains in the background. The letters are addressed to several narratees, including such well-known names as Pauline Julien, Gaston Miron, Gilles Carle and Monique Mercure, as well as the writer's mother (the only one called "vous"). A composite portrait of the author is built up from glimpses into her relationship

with all these people, as well as with the places she discovers.

The author of *Les Fées ont soif* demonstrates the same propensity for striking images as in that controversial text. The first letter begins, "Si la lune est verte et bleue comme une orange, Alitalia nous y a déposés. Les pissenlits sont allumées. . . ." Delighted, Boucher recognizes the figures of classical mythology (Athena, Demeter) echoing her own representation of the Sainte Vierge. She incorporates information from her prolific reading, her own personal literary and personal intertextuality ("Me voilà donc en Sicile: Avec Pirandello"), her insight and humour. From "Monreale" she writes to Gaston Miron that "au Québec nous n'avons qu'une chose, c'est la littérature. Pour le moment, c'est notre seule identité." When a thief snatches her purse, she yells at him, "I'll kill you!" and comments, "Je ne sais pas encore hurler la rage en italien mais pourquoi en anglais?" Remembering the time when she left home to become a teacher, Boucher notes "Peut-on écrire dans la maison de ses parents?" Leaving Quebec is a second exodus, but she proclaims to Gilles Carle: "Sache que je ne fais pas du tourisme culturel. Je suis une routarde qui cherche à comprendre son héritage."

This traveller is less impressed by monuments than by "bouffe et mode et art dans tous les superlatifs," by the fact that five hundred poetry magazines are published in Italy each year. Throughout, the bombardment of the senses with concrete details is interspersed with wry comments and aphorisms linking the past and the present, Quebec and Italy. The letters also vary according to the addressee. Denise Boucher writes at the frontier of poetry and the prosaic, shifting constantly from one to the other. The effect is the opposite of that left by the *Lettres à Lucienne*. This Italy, this writer, are more real than reality. Her correspondents must

have looked forward to receiving their mail. Although the letters were read on Radio Canada before being published, they retain (most of the time) the warmth and spontaneity of private communication. The reader is invited to enjoy voyeuristic glimpses into the contemporary Québécois cultural network in the wings, as she/he admires the scenes of Italy depicted on stage.

These two examples of the epistolary genre conform to the conditions associated with non-fictional correspondence. Anne Dandurand's *Voilà c'est moi: c'est rien j'angoisse* bears the subtitle *Journal intime* in brackets, but the term must be stretched beyond its limits to include this collection of nineteen texts of varying length, eleven of which had previously been published or performed. While they all belong to a certain period of writing for the author, no chronological or thematic links are established between those which might seem to be part of a diary and those which definitely do not. As in much modern women's writing, the distinctions between fiction and autobiography, narration and commentary, creation and criticism, poetry and prose, are blurred. The author's connections with *Herizons* and the now defunct Québécois feminist journal *La Vie en rose* indicate the perspective which prevails: the revision of "woman" as represented in the dominant discourse, the attempt to produce and adopt an Other subject position.

In the writing of Anne Dandurand this is particularly bound up with the expression of female sexuality. The "Histoire de Q," one of the longer texts, first appeared in a special issue of *La Vie en rose* dealing with eroticism. It inverts the elements of "Histoire d'O" rather than parodying them, forcing the female reader to adopt a position analogous to that of the male in the original story, to face up to the (im)-possibility of that position, to question the foundations of sado-masochistic eroticism

while being seduced by it. Women become sexual predators in a fantastic universe which disturbs because the quandary is implicit: is this the only alternative to patriarchy? The effect is comparable in some respects to Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères*. Like Marguerite Duras, Dandurand runs the risk of being accused of producing pornography, albeit of a feminist variety. As for Duras, sexuality is associated with danger and death as well as with freedom and life, and a sense of social "engagement" is eclipsed by an intensity of style which is almost hypnotic. Cancer, fear of nuclear threat, drugs and suicide are all evoked. Whether these are autobiographical elements becomes irrelevant: they are elements of the dilemma we all face. Poised between fascination and repulsion, the reader is charmed by a mixture of the "real" and the fantastic into abandoning this distinction also.

"Intimate" has many connotations, several of which are illustrated in these three books. The *Lettres à Lucienne* expose a "secret" love affair in the life of a famous man, but are of interest for the more intimate suffering of the woman concerned. In *Lettres d'Italie* it is the texture of the interwoven elements of an individual life and personality which fascinates. In *Voilà c'est moi* the individual is merged with "woman," the most intimate sexual details becoming signifiers of Otherness.

VALERIE RAOUL

## BOILED BATS & BEANS

SUE ANN ALDERSON, *Ida and the Wool Smugglers*. illus. Ann Blades, Douglas & McIntyre, \$11.95.

ROBERT MUNSCH & MICHAEL MARTICHENKO, *Moirà's Birthday*. Annick Press, \$12.95/\$4.95.

JUDITH SALTMAN, *Goldie and the Sea*. illus. Kim La Fave, Douglas & McIntyre/Groundwood, \$11.95.

IAN WALLACE, *Morgan the Magnificent*. Douglas & McIntyre/Groundwood, \$11.95.

JUDITH SALTMAN'S recent book *Modern Canadian Children's Books* (Oxford, 1987) celebrates the past fifteen years as a period of dramatic growth for the children's picture-book industry in Canada. For all the familiar reasons (the high costs of printing colour separations, the lack of children's editors, and the reluctance of librarians and parents to buy the few good picture-books that were published), we used to be able to count on the fingers of one hand the distinguished picture-books published annually in Canada. However, a small core of publishers has changed all that: Annick, Douglas & McIntyre, Kids Can, James Lorimer, Oxford University Press, Tundra, and a few others. The four books reviewed here add to the accumulating evidence of a coming of age for children's picture-books in Canada. One is the first effort in this genre by critic Judith Saltman, teamed up with Kim La Fave (*The Mare's Egg*). The other three are worthy productions by old hands: Ian Wallace (*Chin Chiang and the Dragon's Dance*); Sue Ann Alderson (*Bonnie Mc-Smithers*) collaborating for the first time with illustrator Ann Blades (*Mary of Mile 18*); and storyteller Robert Munsch joined with long-time collaborator Michael Martchenko (*The Paper Bag Princess*, and at least ten others).

All four books feature plucky girls as central characters. *Goldie and the Sea* begins, "Goldie was nine and always looking." Unhappy with the way her sea-pictures keep turning out, she sets off to observe for herself a real ocean. Her travelling companions are her cat Foss (named after Edward Lear's cat perhaps?) and her parrot Jake, the ex-pirate. The sketch-like, slightly unfinished, illustrations are just right for the story.

*Ida and the Wool Smugglers* and *Morgan the Magnificent* each, in their different ways, look like prize-winners. Both books develop the theme of growing up. *Ida* and *Morgan* take on dangerous chal-

lenges and succeed, Ida through obedience and calm responsibility, Morgan through defiance and a crazy hubris. Too small to help her father with the sheep run, Ida is sent across the meadow to take bread to neighbours who have had a new baby. She gets involved in an encounter with wool smugglers and a rescue. But despite this, the dominant images of the book are calm, domestic, and comforting: fresh bread cooked in a wood stove, new lambs, a new baby. Ann Blades' gentle, somewhat primitive, watercolours recreate strongly the sense of farm life of an earlier period. *Morgan the Magnificent* also starts out with a farm setting of an earlier time, all realistically depicted in stunning two-page spreads. However, the setting shifts to the world of romance when Morgan finds a poster announcing the coming of Amazing Anastasia and the Condos Brothers' Circus. The text is spare and dramatic; the pictures do not so much illustrate the text as extend and enrich it.

Whereas both *Ida* and *Morgan* seem to require some quiet, concentrated time to pore over the illustrations, *Moira's Birthday* is a more rambunctious kind of book — the one that I would choose to read to a whole roomful of children. Originating as a story told for a particular child, its delight still comes from its oral bias: the presence of the storyteller's voice, incremental repetition, and the lists and roll-calls. Moira wants to invite to her birthday party "grade 1, grade 2, grade 3, grade 4, grade 5, grade 6, aaaaand kindergarten," but her parents say, "Are you crazy? That's too many kids!" She invites them anyway, and then copes in inventive ways with resulting complications. The kids eat: "fried goat, rolled oats, burnt toast and artichokes: old cheese, baked fleas, boiled bats and beans." Marchenko's cartoon-like illustrations capture the story's energy and plenitude.

CATHERINE SHELDRIK ROSS

## LES JEUX

GERMAINE BEAULIEU, *Sortie d'elle(s) mutante*. Les Herbes rouges, \$12.95.

FRANÇOIS TÉTREAU, *Le Lit de Procruste*. L'Hexagone/Le Castor Astral, \$15.95.

AGNÈS WHITFIELD, *Le Je(u) illocutoire: forme et contestation dans le nouveau roman québécois*. Les Presses de l'Univ. Laval, \$26.00.

*Le Je(u) illocutoire* analyzes five Quebec novels published in the period 1965-1976: Réjean Ducharme, *L'Avalée des avalés*; Anne Hébert, *Kamouraska*; Gérard Bessette, *L'Incubation*; Gilbert La Rocque, *Serge d'entre les morts*; and Hubert Aquin, *Prochain épisode*. Whitfield examines the formal innovations found in these first-person novels, concentrating on the "jeu illocutoire" generated by the narrator, the "je locuteur." The theoretical model for her analysis is set out carefully in the first chapter. Critics such as Percy Lubbock, Bertil Romberg, and Wayne Booth are cited to establish (a little too perfunctorily) what is to be considered traditional criticism of, and traditional form for, the first-person novel. Barthes, Genette, Bremond, Greimas and Todorov, among others, are used for creating the theoretical model of the first-person narrative, using a variety of critical approaches to discourse analysis. Whitfield proposes a model which analyzes both the story ("le déroulement événementiel" as well as the "progression thématique") and the discourse (the temporal and spatial situation of the narrator, the choice of audience or "allocutaire," the discursive intention of the narrator, or "force allocutoire"). While the discourse hierarchically subsumes the story, the sense of the novel is created by the paradigmatic integration of these two levels. Whitfield's pragmatic aim is to create a workable theoretical model; as applied to the novels discussed, her model works best to chart the dynamics of the discourse of each work, and to show its relationship to the



"logique événementielle" of the story. When the model is used to explore the innovative formal structure of the novels, however, the exposition is less convincing. Similarly, the model seems to work better for Ducharme, Bessette, and La Rocque, than it does for Hébert and Aquin, whose novels of great narrative complexity are less amenable to the constraints imposed by the theoretical model.

Originally written as a doctoral thesis in the late 1970's, Whitfield's study retains many of the characterizations of this particular genre: it is thorough and carefully documented, sometimes to excess in its dutiful display of erudition. While it is a conscientious study of its chosen subject, based on wide critical reading, it can at times bury the reader in a welter of analytical assertions. A sparer, more elegant analysis would have been more compelling.

*Sortie d'elle(s) mutante* is a re-edition (with a preface by Nicole Brossard) of the novel by Germaine Beaulieu, first published in 1980. Although labelled a novel, *Sortie d'elle(s) mutante* is really what more conventional minds would call poetry, since the text is for the most part written in free verse, printed, without exception, on only the top half of each page. The work is divided into seven sections, "L'asile," "Délire," "Asile-exit," "La serre," "Déchaînement," "Cette chose," and "La mutation." These sections mark a progression in the consciousness of the central character, who moves from a catatonic state in a psychiatric ward, to a sense of rebirth through fantasies involving her mother, her own physical rebirth as a stillborn, and an ultimate, willed rebirth of herself and all women: "Je renais. Nous renaissans. / Elles renaissent toutes: / les incarcérées, les folles, / les ménagères, nos mères, / nos soeurs, nos filles, / les mortes." Nicole Brossard, in her preface, characterizes Beaulieu's writing as "textes de la colère et de l'éclatement,"

and comments on the use of insanity both as a weapon for rejecting male domination and as a tool for self-exploration. This sense of female solidarity and revolt against male domination is neatly summed up in the first lines of the last section: "Où sont les autres? / Je refuse d'être une apostrophe historique qui se confond dans un discours mâle."

While Beaulieu's novel is a re-edition of work from an earlier poetic feminist tradition, whose roots go back at least thirty years to the work of Anne Hébert, *Le Lit de Procruste*, by François Tétreau, is a very impressive first novel which breaks new ground in several areas. The author, who is also an art critic, translator, and poet, has incorporated several important narrative innovations into his work, as well as drawing on his own extensive knowledge of fine art. Included in the text are analytical sketches and reproductions of paintings which are discussed in the body of the novel. There are marginal glosses and notes drawn from the written work of painters, or from writings on art by well-known authors such as Diderot or Malraux, which are relevant to the fictional text. The novel itself begins, and ingeniously ends, with Van Gogh and Gauguin. The first part of the novel is a series of journal entries by Gauguin and Van Gogh which debate the merits of Van Gogh's self-portrait (a colour reproduction of which is used on the cover of the novel), effectively contrasting the differing points of view of the two painters. The fictional texts also include journal entries from models who posed for famous paintings. The narrative flow is punctuated with anonymous passages of poetry and prose, written from a contemporary point of view, which comment on the relationship between the work of art and the person perceiving the work of art, and on the nature of imagination and reality. The theme of the interpenetration of the real and the imagined world is continuously

developed throughout the novel, through a series of characters, including, among others, Cézanne, Braque, Matisse, Picasso, and their respective models. The structure of the novel is masterful, providing the reader with surprise after surprise, without abandoning its own inner logic and its concentration on the mystery of the dynamic relationship between the work of art and the person who responds to it, ranging from the adoring student of art to the obsessed vandal who physically attempts to destroy a museum masterpiece. *Le Lit de Procruste* is one of those rare works which will inspire the reader not only to re-read the novel, but to re-examine the works of a number of painters as well. No mean achievement.

D. W. RUSSELL

## TERRA INCOGNITA

DON BAILEY, *Bring Me Your Passion*. Oberon, n.p.

LESLEY BATTLER, *The Polar Bear Express*. Nu-Age, \$8.95.

THE READER OF DON Bailey's *Bring Me Your Passion* may well reflect after reading a few of the stories that a more appropriate title for the collection would have been *Bring Me My Father*: for all but two of the stories involve the obsessive motif of the missing father. In several stories the perspective is that of the inadequate fathers themselves, and this allows the author to explore rationalizations — of varying plausibility — for their delinquency. Predictably enough, however, the stories written from the perspective of the abandoned children are far more highly charged. In "River Crests" the 15-year-old protagonist ruminates on what appears to be the ultimate father-son bonding experience for Bailey — fishing — and remembers yearningly his father's gift to him on his twelfth birthday: miniature

boats which, set afloat, never return. In the present the boy apparently finds partial compensation for the loss of his father (who, like the boats, never returned) in a surrogate: a stoical Indian who sits on the river bank drinking Lysol and viewing the world organically. In "Letter of Intent" the protagonist — a female this time — expresses her deep bitterness towards her father, as well as her continuing love, in the form of a rambling letter. In this case the father returns and is deeply moved by what he reads. He produces alcohol (which is elsewhere in the stories a destructive element) to celebrate their reunion — a new beginning which is too facile to be altogether convincing. "Stopping to Paint the Sailboats" is a much more successful piece, since there is greater complexity both in point of view and in relationships. Although Dave's father was a drunk who abandoned his family after the birth of the narrator's brother, he also introduces Dave to a rich world of imagination (camping trips in the mind) and taught him to dance as an expression of transcendence. Dave, drawing on the best in his father, plays the father role for both his troubled brother and his nephew: he teaches his brother to dance, and he takes his nephew (who is "afraid they'll run out on him") fishing. On occasion, Bailey shows himself capable of writing which is both poignant and lyrical; but he is also frequently guilty of rhetorical overkill, as in the following: "He lights a cigarette, swallowing the smoke and using it like a stone to plug the mouth of the volcano where his anger bubbles in a pool of festering misunderstanding, hurts and defeats."

*The Polar Bear Express* by Lesley Battler is largely free of both the obsessiveness and stylistic unevenness of Bailey's work. Her collection of connected stories, published by Nu-Age Editions (a rather infelicitous punning name for an enterprising company of enthusiasts at Concordia

University) covers the years from nine to nineteen in the experience of Crissy Ryan. *Prima facie* one may well groan at the prospect of reading yet another account of coming of age. But Battler's collection succeeds in avoiding the tendentiousness that frequently plagues this genre: there is no tallying of gains and losses, no central epiphany; rather Battler displays a quite remarkable total recall expressed with a freshness and immediacy that carry the reader ineluctably back to experiences which had seemed buried. Nor is there sentimentality here: in "New Year's Eve," when Crissy and her brothers conspire to stay up until midnight, there is, of course, the thrill of doing something illicit; but there is also unremitting harassment by her brothers and, in the way her mother and a neighbour — both the worse for drink — dance together, a troubling glimpse into something unexpected and alien in the world of familiar adults.

Throughout the collection, the constant which underlies changes in perspective from childhood to young adulthood is an intense curiosity reminiscent of Alice Munro's *Del* (in "Terra Incognita" Crissy observes: "It never ceases to amaze me how unfamiliar other people's lives are, and how much it is like entering a foreign country") and an admirable propensity for being able to face her own failures unflinchingly. Thus, in "Man Teacher" — set in grade eight at the critical intersection of childhood and adolescence — Crissy discovers her capacity for betrayal. Her yearning for the approval of her truculent classmates leads her to drive the last spike in the professional coffin of an ineffectual male teacher who had wistfully seen in her the potential for empathy and alliance. The Polar Bear Express of the title is a midway ride in which Crissy loses all sense of herself and her problems and abandons herself to delight. Something of the same experience awaits readers of this excellent collection. FREDERICK SWEET

## GOOD CARE

JEAN MALLISON, *I Will Bring You Berries*.  
Caitlin Press, \$12.95.

NORA KEELING, *A Fine and Quiet Place*.  
Oberon, \$23.95/\$11.95.

JEAN MALLISON'S stories cover, in sequence, the pains of growing up, being married, experiencing the pangs of divorce and living alone. The first three of these states of being are related in personal narratives whose theme centres on the archetypal relationship of a mother and her daughters. Mother, Anna and Katherine move around one another like planets around the sun, although the daughters are always wishing they could break out of orbit. The storyteller's art resonates with almost mythical associations: "At night, in the darkness of the bedroom she shared with Katherine, it was the sound of Mother's knitting needles that provided reassurance that the world was still there and could be reconstructed again at daybreak."

These "Anna" stories, with their potential as a short story cycle, merit a collection of their own. They are different in both content and form from the more structured and literary stories found at the end of *I Will Bring You Berries*. More sophisticated and controlled, such stories as "Grief," "Green Thumb," and "Things," should be read in a separate collection with additional similar pieces. Indeed, it is the editing that is lacking in this volume. In a book devoted to the emerging selfhood of Canadian women in the 1960's and 1970's, it is unfortunate that we find misspellings of the word woman.

Nora Keeling's *A Fine and Quiet Place* follows *The Driver* (1982) and *Chasing Her Own Tail* (1985) with another thematically linked collection of short stories. This time the female characters are struggling with husbands, fathers, and brothers who treat them like pets or worse. The

violent nature of the male partner in two of the stories, "The Feather Pillow" and "Peter's," is that of the hunter who may shoot his wife just as he may kill a deer, "since guns and hunting were a way of life to him." The general effect of such struggles on the reader is that one shares with the characters an almost hypnotic acceptance of fate.

The author uses three generations of family relationships to reinforce the pattern of the power struggle between the sexes. In "Just Izzy" the female child receives a deserved but harsh reprimand in the form of a beating by her grandfather; later, when he dies (after she has cursed him) she accepts friendship from a possible child-murderer because he looks like her grandfather. She walks off with him hand-in-hand at the end of the story. That same symbolism is found in the first ("My Father's House") and next to last ("Tiny Kathleen, James, all the Emptied Skies Themselves") stories, both of which deal with the same family. In the former James Tobias is Kathleen's father. In the latter James is her son. Her father deserted her and her mother, while James, her son, seems to be shaping up to give her both the joy and pain that her father did. The trusting hand in hers inflicts pain and takes control of her: "the lad had stated, 'I'll take good care. You're my Mom,' growing hand pressing warm into her own skinny one, nails dug into her light flesh, and in his fashion, as fingers do on occasion." One wishes that these two stories were used consciously as a frame for the collection and that their significance were more fully developed.

Both of these collections of short stories focus on women and their struggles to emerge psychologically whole from childhood, as well as to survive the pressures of adult relationships. As such, they offer insights into the condition of women in Canada today, although they rework familiar themes. While individual stories

possess merit, both collections are uneven and the former, particularly, would have been better served by more rigorous editing.

HILARY THOMPSON

## CARWASH & MOONSONG

JAMES REANEY, *Take the Big Picture*. Porcupine's Quill, \$8.95.

JOY KOGAWA, *Naomi's Road*. Oxford, \$7.95.

IT SEEMS ALMOST to have become a convention for well-known Canadian writers to experiment at least once in their careers with the genre of children's literature. For some — Mordecai Richler, for example — the journey into the world of "kiddylit" confirms a writer's brilliance and flexibility; for others, it's a trip that had been better left untaken. There can be little doubt that at least some of the writers who have temporarily stepped into the arena of children's literature in Canada have done so under some duress from publishers who know that a book for children by a Margaret Atwood, a Margaret Laurence, or a Pierre Berton will sell well enough, quite apart from its critical reception. What could be more enticing on a bookshelf than a children's story by Joy Kogawa — in fact, a book "based on her award-winning novel *Obasan*" — and a juvenile novel by James Reaney, whose sensitive evocation of our individual and collective Canadian childhoods in plays like *Colours in the Dark* has rarely — if ever — been surpassed?

Both first novels involve journeys across parts of Canada. Both contain sixteen charming black-and-white drawings that complement very effectively the stories they illustrate. Here the similarities between them end.

Reaney's novel certainly looks promising. The quality of production we have

come to expect from *The Porcupine's Quill* is in evidence in the brightly laminated cover, the sturdy sewn binding, the "Zephyr Antique" laid paper, and in the generosity of design (revealing none of the fear of white space so evident in some of the productions of less aesthetically conscious Canadian book-producers). Reaney's narrator is immediately engaging, introducing himself as a confederate of the children in his neighbourhood: "I tell them that if they buy me a new bottle of ink, I will use it to write them a story. The story will last as long as there is ink in the bottle they buy me." Unfortunately, not far into the book the reader may begin to wish the ink bottle had been smaller and to rue the narrator's having, as he says at the outset, "no idea what my story is to be about."

I find myself hesitant about being critical of a children's book, wondering tentatively whether I lack the child-like disposition that should be eager to embrace any serious creative work aimed at those of us who are, at least, young at heart. I cringe at the prospect of being labelled with the mean-spirited professor who appears at the end of Reaney's novel only long enough to be dismissed by the narrator as "some sort of poisonous creature . . . undercutting the enjoyment." (It appears that Reaney seeks to intimidate his own critics with this remark.) I comfort myself, however, with the thought that if I have found this novel much too long — tedious, in fact — I can appeal to Reaney himself in my defence, for in chapter 11, not one, not two, not three, but four of the author's own narrators of the tale-within-the-tale fail to sustain their own interest in the plot as they fall asleep attempting (in turn) to finish the story about the two rival carwashes that figure as major players in the book.

*Take the Big Picture* is about the Delahay family: father, mother, daughters Sally and Ann, and sons Colin (17) and

5½-year-old Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Ezekial — the terrible triplets. Much of the plot revolves around father and children's stop at an isolated mountain carwash on the way back to their home in Ontario (after a year in British Columbia), and grandmother's refusal to allow the family (particularly the rambunctious "trips") to move back into her spacious home — despite the fact that their own house is on the verge of sliding into Antler River. There is, throughout, much ado about sasquatches (the fear of which happens to be the only thing that keeps the terrible three from creating utter havoc always and everywhere).

Reaney works with some good ideas, but rarely manages to make them work. The novel's intrigues involving a large cast of family, friends and neighbours lack both colour and momentum. As a result, the reader remains as disengaged from the action as the many characters seem to be from each other. The stilted dialogue that Reaney too often uses crudely for exposition accentuates the absence of human warmth in the characters' relationships (and in the narrative generally):

"Mother, that 'perfectly good house' up the river is getting too close to the water for safety. Don't you remember? Because they're erecting that monster apartment building across the river, the current has changed and now bites away into our backyard at the rate of six inches a day. That's why we had to run away and move in with you."

"Six inches a day," murmured Granny Delahay to herself. "If what you say is true, Lucy, I should have seen your house floating by here down the river last spring."

"Perhaps I exaggerate, but — don't you remember the house next door did fall into the river and did float by last April? Surely you remember that."

The novel's awkward expository dialogue is accompanied by bizarre, mannered similes such as this one intended to evoke the quality of Lucy Delahay's storytelling: she went on "like the brown wet ribbon of Antler River flashing by in the

sun.” “Like an angry dentist, the river was almost finished extracting a difficult molar” describes a house on the verge of sliding down a river bank. Particularly unsettling in this long yarn (in which an unexciting main plot is adopted as the plot of a story-within-the-story and a play-within-the-story and so must be endured three times) are persistent suggestions (already alluded to) that the narrators themselves lack confidence in their tale. Near the beginning of his story, for example, Colin announces that “Inspiration [is] shrivelling.” (His sister responds in a whisper: “Oh I see. . . . It’s just a rehash of the place where we got the car washed.”) Precisely.

In sharp contrast to Reaney’s *Take the Big Picture* is Joy Kogawa’s *Naomi’s Road* — an effectively paced, finely crafted story of the Japanese-Canadian child-narrator’s experience of internment during the Second World War. Kogawa’s talents as a poet are evident here, in the narrator’s gentle evocation of warm family relationships:

I jump over a box onto the cot and I am in his arms again — my father’s arms.

His hands touch my face. I wrap my arms around his neck. The button of his pyjama top presses into my cheek. I can feel his heart’s steady thump.

We are quiet as moon song. As quiet and still as resting swans. Into this quiet I fall like a lost feather returning.

Or in the powerful images of fire and darkness that suggest the growth in awareness of the narrator, Naomi (who in chapter 1 declared that she wished to remain a child forever):

I remember Mama used to say that a match was safe if you could blow it out. But what if the whole world was on fire? How could you blow that out?

Naomi understands towards the end of the story that “There are ways to walk safely when the world is in flame. There are ways to blow the fire out.”

Whereas Reaney supplies a host of players none of whom invite a reader’s emotional involvement, Kogawa reveals to her reader the *yasashi* (“soft and tender”) sensibilities of her living, human characters. Kogawa’s treatment of Naomi’s near-drowning in chapter 7 is, moreover — despite its brevity — more richly suspenseful than any of the passages that vainly promise adventure in Reaney’s book. One could argue that the spirit of patriotism in Kogawa’s story is gratuitously overplayed, that the narrative tone is overly romantic, or that the ending is too subtle for a young child to appreciate. Nevertheless (except perhaps for the question of what exactly compels Naomi’s father to return to the hospital again and again), Kogawa’s story is both thought-provoking and satisfying. And it is crafted delicately enough to be read with pleasure over and over again.

HILDI FROESE TIESSEN

## EXILES

PETER THOMAS, *The Welsher*. Pottersfield, \$14.95.

DAVE WILLIAMSON, *Running Out*. Queenston House, \$9.95.

*The Welsher* begins with some interesting ideas: the exile of the protagonist, Anthony Watkins, who lives on the edge of a New Brunswick forest, his presence in the local village mediated by a taciturn Pole; the relationship of truth and fiction, which Anthony explores in correcting the misinformation about his life and character which has driven him from Wales. It is also, apparently, linked to Thomas’s *Strangers from a Secret Land*, an account of early Welsh emigration to Canada. Unfortunately, those elements do not translate into “the sad and frantic comedy” or “the carnival of mortal dreams” that the novel is purported to contain.

The interest of the novel comes from

the juxtaposition of Anthony's narration of his life particularly the events which precipitate his flight from Wales and the narration of his cousin's widow Marjorie; she and her husband's fantasies about Anthony's life, particularly his sex life, have enlivened their own existence to the point that she claims — and believes — that her baby born just after her husband's suicide is Anthony's. Marjorie's alteration of reality makes better reading, as well as better living, than Anthony's version of events. Thomas is skilled at creating both Anthony's and Marjorie's voices and the attractiveness of each character, although the reader's sympathy is firmly with Anthony; the reader becomes implicated in Anthony's eventual loss of control and capitulation to the lies about him. Because the other characters readily believe the lies Marjorie tells about Anthony and Anthony fails to defend himself, we begin to wonder if some of Marjorie's claims are not true at least to his nature, if not to the facts of his life.

But the undercurrent of evil and power in the Welsh village, Anthony's inability or unwillingness to speak to those around him, the willingness of his parents and wife to believe the worst of him, the playing with truth and fiction, make this something more than a comic novel. Anthony *does* speak eventually — the novel is his defence — but decades later and a continent away, and to the reader, not to his family or community. Thomas handles this aspect of the novel intelligently and fairly successfully. What is less successful is his attempt to make the novel comic — Anthony's getting chickenpox at Marjorie's house after the funeral is not funny or witty, but simply points up the ironic and absurd circumstances which eventually overwhelm Anthony and bring him to his New Brunswick exile. One cannot help but wonder if Thomas's critical study of Robert Kroetsch's work has not led him to a particular kind of novel that is not

wholly successful in his hands. The novel is more a version of Kroetsch's tall tale and carnival world than a fully realized work in its own right.

Dave Williamson's *Running Out* is another novel that is supposed to be funny but is not; with it, however, we do not get even a glimmer of the author's critical or theoretical interests or what the novel *could* have been. This novel reads like a sitcom, complete with recurrent crises and pauses for laughs. The chapters which appeared as short stories and a TV play may well have been more successful than the painfully stretched novel version. A middle-aged man, George Beatty, runs away with his Grade Ten son's English teacher. The attraction is sexual; when he isn't in bed with her he's wishing he is, and agonizing about his age and sexual performance with the younger woman. The main action of the novel is their flight, with her three-year-old daughter, from his family in Winnipeg to spend Christmas in California with her parents. They marry, largely because his wife refuses to take him back, and the novel ends with George reliving the early stages of his first marriage with too much domestic responsibility and too little energy and money, an existence complicated by his involvement with two households plus that of his unemployed son and his pregnant girlfriend.

The male characters Williamson creates are irresponsible, and the female characters are stupid. This does not make a comic novel, or even an interesting one. Much of the "development" of George's character is the recounting of his sexual urges, which are tedious to the reader and demeaning to the women — he is aroused by his ex-wife (particularly after her breast enhancement surgery), his wife, and his stepdaughter's teenage gymnastic coach — and no other character is seriously enough developed to attract our attention. Williamson is unsuccessful in

creating sympathy for this aging and silly man caught in circumstances which he thinks are created by women, but are created by himself. His martyr complex — his belief that he is needed to run the lives of these women who “think” they are independent — indicates his own need to be everybody’s hero. Williamson uses language competently enough, but he needs to find something to write about that is not as dated as this protagonist and these attitudes.

MARGARET E. TURNER

## PRIVATE LIVES

CORAL ANN HOWELLS, *Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s*. Methuen, US\$6.95.

AS THE TITLE indicates, this book’s objective is the alignment of a double focus: on Canada and on women’s fiction. In her introduction, Howells suggests that the relatively important presence of women writers on the Canadian literary scene is due to the “ideological coincidence” between Canada’s post-colonial search for a national identity and women’s search for an acceptable gender identity. Both are characterized primarily by a desire to revise traditional views of themselves, in order to make visible what has traditionally been marginalized. Thus, Canada resists marginalization by the United States and, more importantly in this context, by Europe, and women are challenging a male-dominated tradition in which they are excluded from power. Moreover, both tend to circumvent open confrontation, choosing instead a more oblique approach. (Although Howells gives other reasons for the absence of the Québécoise *nouvelle écriture*, a discussion of this type of overtly feminist writing would probably not strengthen Howells’s argument here.) As Howells suggests, both imperialism and male domination

are based on notions of absolute difference and superiority; consequently, both can be undermined by, on the one hand, blurring the boundaries between the different groups, and, on the other, pointing out the internal contradictions within these groups. It seems only logical, then, that both Canadians in search of a national identity and women in search of a gender identity should show a strong awareness of the multiplicity of reality, and of the impossibility of finding final and unequivocal answers to the problems of self-definition. In terms of Canadian politics, it is this awareness which underlies, for instance, the promotion of multi-culturalism. In Canadian literature (and history), it may be responsible for the recent trend toward the integration of unofficial histories of native peoples and immigrant groups, as exemplified by Rudy Wiebe’s prairie novels and Joy Kogawa’s indictment of the treatment of the Japanese-Canadians in *Obasan*.

The major part of Howells’s book, however, consists of the study of women’s texts, from the point of view of their resistance to social and literary traditions defining women’s roles. Thus, although the book sets out to show the connections between women’s fiction and Canadian post-colonialism, in the actual analyses the Canadian aspect often retreats far into the background. In seven chapters, Howells discusses texts by eleven authors: Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, Marian Engel, Joy Kogawa, Janette Turner Hospital, Audrey Thomas, Joan Barfoot, and finally, Marie-Claire Blais and Anne Hébert. None of the texts overtly claims to be feminist documents, yet, as Howells’s discussions show, all either start from, or result in, certain “shifts of emphasis,” which subvert traditional gender roles.

These shifts are evident in both the subjects and themes of the fictions and their narrative methods. Thus, instead of a he-



roic overcoming of concrete physical limits, these narratives tend to focus on the cultural and psychological limits that are challenged, often without visible impact, by women in their "private lives." Here Howells makes an interesting observation about the use of the wilderness — that presumably quintessential element of Canadian Literature — in a "feminized version," as a metaphor for women's unexplored mental territory. Instead of the American frontier myth or the Australian myth of mateship, the Canadian response to the wilderness has consistently focused on domestic and private experiences. For such immigrant women as Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, life in the Canadian wilderness required a revision of stereotyped notions of femininity, thus offering them the possibility to explore other aspects of their identity. This possibility still attracts, for instance, the protagonists of Atwood's *Surfacing* and Engel's *Bear*, both of whom, in a (temporary) stay in the wilderness, experience a change similar to Moodie's development from Victorian lady to independent pioneer.

Equally subversive of tradition are the diverse narrative methods used in these texts. The main challenge is to realism, which, it seems, is simply not seen as an adequate means of expressing women's experiences. The belief that reality is describable is consistently questioned, and if these texts show an awareness of the power of fiction, they also overtly affirm its limitations — as their emphasis on the private nature of the narrative would suggest. Conventional genre codes are consistently mixed, and closure is refused, by for instance what Howells calls the "supplementarity" of Laurence's and Munro's fictions: the addition of an afterthought or other event which throws the whole story into disarray, and prohibits any final interpretation. The narrators

rarely manage to resolve the contradictions of reality, and usually end up celebrating that multiplicity.

Although in the individual analyses, Howells sometimes loses sight of her initial objectives, as a whole they do support the premises laid out in the Introduction. Similarly, while the focus on women's subversions of cultural and literary traditions does not always generate new insights into the specific texts or authors, when taken together these texts certainly do profit from Howells's view of them as women's texts.

Inevitably, some problems remain — but they arise in the speculative and ambitious nature of the project as set out in the Introduction, rather than with Howells's handling of the individual texts. Thus, the delineation between characteristics of women's texts and those of post-modernist fiction is not always made clear, nor is that between Canadian and other post-colonial (or, as Howells puts it, Commonwealth) literature. To be convincing, then, her arguments sometimes must rely on the reader's interest and good will, especially because in arguments like these a considerable number of intangibles come into play. Not surprisingly, the Conclusion cannot quite match the interest provoked by the Introduction; all it can do is reiterate once more that women writers *do* play an extraordinary role in Canadian literature when compared to almost any other national literature, and that the reason for this may very well be sought in the similarities between Canadian nationalism and feminism, and in the typically Canadian wilderness myth. While making these connections, Howells's study also compensates for one of its biggest problems — the exclusion of *nouvelle écriture* — by showing that ostensibly realist writing can be equally subversive of male-engendered traditions.

CARLA VISSER

## MEMORY PLAYS

MICHAEL MERCER, *Goodnight Disgrace*. Talonbooks, \$8.95.

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Albertine, in Five Times*. trans. John Van Burek and Bill Glassco, Talonbooks, \$7.95.

THE MEMORY PLAY IS a theatrical hybrid, borrowing the first-person narrator of prose fiction and placing him alongside or within the retrospective story being dramatized on the stage. In its simplest form — David French's *Of the Fields, Lately*, for example — the narrator merely frames the dramatized memory. In more complex instances like Timothy Findley's *Can You See Me Yet?* or Joanna Glass's *Play Memory*, the present tense narration is woven in among scenes of the past, and more than one character may be given narrative licence. Memory is evoked as a form of confession, a plea for understanding or, often, a justification. The audience is privy to both the dramatic and narrative versions of the story as well as to the interaction between the character(s) in the present and those in the past. Further theatrical interest is generated by the on-stage movement back and forth across time, effected by set, costume or lighting changes, signalled by musical cues, or otherwise visually or aurally rendered, and by the transformations of the actor playing his or her character at different ages. The tone of the memory play is almost invariably bittersweet.

In *Goodnight Disgrace*, Michael Mercer's literate and intelligent first work for the stage, the American writer Conrad Aiken occupies the frame, an aged man in a nursing home raging against the dying of the light. He calls up the memory of his relationship with Malcolm Lowry who forty-four years earlier had come to be his student, acolyte and surrogate son. The elderly Aiken is revitalized by recalling how Lowry challenged him as both writer and man: "Don't be timid. Rush

headlong into the darkness with me." But Aiken never quite took the plunge. Lacking Lowry's radical genius and the courage to make ultimate sacrifices for his art, he survives to live out an obscure, bitter old age. Lowry self-destructs early but leaves a brilliant legacy. "I will be the one they remember," he predicts correctly.

Mercer's treatment is rich and resonant, a tale of male bonding and love, artistic symbiosis and vampirism, paternal care and oedipal destruction. In many respects Aiken and Lowry resemble Salieri and Mozart in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*. In both plays the lesser artist is tormented by the genius of his younger rival whom he manipulates to protect his own position. Aiken is doubly tormented to see the man he loves and nurtures supersede him. But the natural order will out. The young must usurp the old as the son the father and the greater artist the lesser. Aiken's creative impulse will inevitably take root in the more fertile ground of Lowry's genius. Drained by the younger man and absorbed into Lowry's superior art, Aiken will be as much a sacrifice to Lowry's work as Lowry is himself.

Despite its virtues, *Goodnight Disgrace* is curiously undramatic where it counts most. The audience in *Amadeus* shares Salieri's pain, viscerally, whenever Mozart's awesome music fills the theatre. We hear precisely what Salieri can never create. The parallel moment in *Goodnight Disgrace* occurs when Aiken first looks at *Under the Volcano*: "He scans line after line, page after page. He is finally transfixed by it. He is mortified, confused, elated. Aiken is in awe. He shakes his head, and moves his lips as he reads over a passage." This is about as unengaging and untheatrical an emotional climax as can be imagined — a man reading a manuscript — and it proves nearly fatal to the play. More successful is Mercer's dramatic imaging of the relation between memory and frame in the final scene

where, in 1973, a wheelchair-bound, half pathetic, old Aiken shares the stage with Lowry in 1937 who is passed out drunk under a table. "I loved him. I really did," Aiken murmurs, and this time we believe it.

Michel Tremblay's *Albertine, in Five Times* presents the memory play as a psychodrama. Like *Goodnight Disgrace*, it has a nursing home as its frame. Albertine at 70 has just been moved in after a close call with death, probably a drug overdose. Stirred by this second chance at life but depressed by her straitened circumstances, the smell of "death in driblets," she conjures up her memories. They appear as four younger versions of herself (at 30, 40, 50 and 60, all played by different actresses) plus her sister, Madeleine. The biography they patch together is full of familiar complaints of frustration and disappointment, the long wail of the *québécoise* that Tremblay has been sounding since *Les Belles Soeurs*. The play's musical structure and static, formalized staging hark back to the most successful works of his earlier days in the theatre. But *Albertine, in Five Times* is not vintage Tremblay.

The five Albertines exist in a relationship to one another that perhaps means to be dialectical but rather appears formulaic. Albertine at 30 has been sent to her sister's country home for a week after uncontrollably beating her daughter Thérèse. (The country appears throughout the play as an ambiguously pastoral counterpart to the dreary norm of city life, while Madeleine represents the bourgeois pseudo-ideal.) At 40 Albertine spends her time in a bitter "rage," conscious of a futility she has both inherited and passed along:

Thérèse is down at the French Casino on la rue Saint-Laurent surrounded by drunks, whores and drug addicts. . . . I've raised two kids for nothing and I feel guilty because I know I did it badly. . . . Mother had to leave

her house at Duhamel to come and live in the city, and she's never got over it. . . . Three brilliant generations!

At 50 she decides to "disobey" for the first time in her life, casting off her daughter and son (who has gone mad), and feels temporarily free. But she pays for this freedom at 60 with guilt over Thérèse's sordid death, which drives her to a dependency on tranquillizers which, in turn, leads to the present-tense situation of the reformed and chastened 70-year-old.

Because the problems of the Tremblay world no longer hold much novelty for us after twenty years, the effectiveness of his plays rests on the concreteness of their social and psychological perceptions and their technical skill. But the life evoked by the Albertines seems abstract and unparticularized, as in this exchange:

ALBERTINE AT 40: Talk about your rage!

ALBERTINE AT 50: It never does any good to rebel . . .

ALBERTINE AT 60: No, I mustn't give in to despair . . .

These characters are more like humours than real people (one out-character is named Dr. Sanregret). Even the writing sounds stilted and uncharacteristically uncolloquial: "You won't get me with sentiment! My rage is too great." The poetic ending, with all five Albertines reaching out to the blood-red totem moon, is at least aesthetically pleasing if not especially well motivated. But taken as a whole, *Albertine, in Five Times* is one memory play you'd just as soon forget.

JERRY WASSERMAN



## REAL & SURREAL

*Short Stories of Thomas Murtha*, ed. William Murtha, Univ. of Ottawa Press, \$6.95.

J. MICHAEL YATES, *Torque: Collected Fiction, 1960-1987: Volume I*, Pulp Press, \$9.95.

DAVID CARPENTER, *God's Bedfellows*, McClelland & Stewart, \$22.95.

THOMAS MURTHA (1902-1973) wrote for a brief period from the late 1920's to the mid-1930's, and all of his short stories, both published and unpublished, are collected in this volume. He was a friend of Morley Callaghan and Raymond Knister, and like them was interested in the literary experiments of Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway. Murtha emulated their attempts to introduce a more naturalistic idiom to fiction, seeking to portray the everyday lives of unremarkable characters in appropriate language. In a sense he was cultivating a deliberate banality. His prose is reminiscent of Callaghan's in that monosyllables and simple and compound sentences predominate. His narratives are often sketches rather than fully developed stories, and the writing is at times unbearably awkward:

Perce said nothing. Her face sunk in the soft pillow. She thought what a time they would have when he got a good job. They would have a flat. Or no. An apartment. With an electric stove where she could really make things. Make many things. She began to imagine the many things. Then she was asleep.

The passage exhibits the repetition and staccato rhythm we associate with Hemingway and his disciples, but goes beyond simplicity to simple-mindedness.

As bad as some of the writing is, the editing is worse, and permits an appalling number of typographical errors. The editor's introduction is informative but largely uncritical; William Murtha attributes too much importance to his father's work.

Thomas Murtha sought to achieve a

new degree of realism in his fiction; at the opposite end of the literary spectrum is J. Michael Yates, a surrealist whose stories began appearing in the early 1960's. *Torque* is the first volume of his collected fiction, and contains thirteen stories ranging from the Borgesian "Realia," which depicts a museum that houses *everything*, to the poetic "Man in the Glass Octopus." The surrealist movement began in the visual arts, and surrealist works are semi-representational in that they contain identifiable objects or figures which are manipulated or juxtaposed in fantastic ways. Yates's stories are sensually vivid, but normal principles of cause and effect do not apply. As in a dream, the protagonists react without surprise or even substantial concern when their initially conventional or at least comprehensible worlds undergo bizarre metamorphoses. The narrator of "The Broadcaster," for example, is a "popular" deejay who comes to realize that he is entirely lacking an audience, and sees nothing especially odd about the fact that he is shrinking. The characters, and the reader, are drawn further and further into a world where the laws of physical science and normal human motivations do not exist.

Originally, surrealism was an effort to tap the Id through experiments in automatic writing, under the Freud-inspired belief that what lay in this "deeper" region of the mind was more true to our experience than our boringly rational outer world. But surrealist writing evolved into a kind of modern fabulation: stories are no longer exercises in free association, but works that use fantasy to explore distinct themes through symbols. Many of Yates's stories concern the relationship between the artist and the outside world, illustrating how the making of art requires a paradoxical involvement in and distance from life. Thus, the museum in "Realia" has made the world accessible to its patrons, but at the cost of spontaneity and

of life itself. Perhaps, then, these seemingly fanciful works actually touch on some of the most concrete questions facing the artist.

David Carpenter's stories are solidly based in contemporary reality, but in many lies a hint of a world beyond our own. Christian and other mythologies carry the stories to a magical plane. The spiritual ties between Delphine Muskwa and the bears in "Crossing the Line," for example, lead to an enigmatic climax that may or may not involve the intervention of Native gods. In any case, the ending is designed to suggest, rather than explain, her fate and by extension that of her people.

Carpenter's works are often narrated by unsophisticated characters who, like those in his earlier *Jewels* and *Jokes for the Apocalypse*, both yearn for and fear adventure. The adventure they do find is either frightening or disillusioning (see, for instance, "This World"). Although the real world presents itself in quite unpleasant ways to Carpenter's dreamers, its harshness is tempered by love, which seems to possess a remarkable power. In its many guises — from the romantic devotion to childhood friendship — love is a redeeming force that contributes to the transcendent quality of Carpenter's fiction.

ALLAN WEISS

## FEMININE ETHOS

MARILYN BOWERING, *Anyone Can See I Love You*. Porcupine's Quill, \$7.95.

LORNA IRVINE, *Sub/version*. ECW Press, \$24.00/\$14.00.

THERE IS A PHOTOGRAPH of the author on the cover of *Anyone Can See I Love You* which, together with its title and layout, signals a great deal about this book. It is a cycle of poems written in the voice of Marilyn Monroe — the missing narrative

— and the cover shows Bowering, glamorously dressed in a yellow dress with high-heeled red boots sitting on a white cube of the kind that feature objects for sale or display in galleries; the backdrop is the famous blown-up black and white photograph of Monroe, in off-the-shoulder swansdown, her lips parted and glossy. Resemblances between the two figures and their presentation are strong. Both project women as a self-conscious, self-promoting commodity: identification between the poet and her subject is announced, and at the same time Bowering's metasubject, the body of the female, is specifically located in Monroe, the body that is both her text and her occupation, her image and her living.

But as an image that expresses the text, a text that inscribes the body, some difficulties present themselves. Bowering's position in the cover photograph aligns her head with Monroe's, while her colourfully clad body dominates the foreground. It is a relaxed, almost slumped posture, at odds with the composition of her clothing, sharp red boots, jewellery, and matching belt. A body that takes itself seriously but only on the outside. Where the viewer's eye is drawn, and where real comparison is invited (Monroe's body, after all, is significant in its truncation; only the suggestively angled shoulders are seen) is in the two faces, arranged side by side. Monroe's expression of knowing seduction, the gift of herself as both challenge and demand, is countered by Bowering's, her face equally made up and composed, but self possessed, quizzical, an invitation to think first. The juxtaposition of the two Marylins and their deliberate difference, argues a difference in knowledge; while Monroe's head inevitably suggests and emphasizes the absent body, Bowering's insists on the head as focus both of the body and of attention. All of which is a clear enough guide to the inscribed body in the text that follows, a body detailed in its powerless-

ness by failed husbands and failed pregnancies, a body imaged in its clothing, its relationships, its stories, and finally in the house of its death. But it is also a body of work in which Bowering is inscribed; in a sense the body of Marilyn Monroe becomes a metaphorical vehicle for the mediation of Marilyn Bowering, interpreted, and authoritatively understood. At the end of this collection, Monroe seems to have become yet another property; the childish voice asking its rhetorical questions of non-understanding indicates the structures which answer her: the head, for whom this is another body on display, is a sequence of constructions. You might ask whose voice it is, speaking from Monroe's parted lips:

Joe was one story,  
I was another.

He was the Yankee Clipper,  
the Power Hitter,  
my Slugger with the ideal  
batting average.

And I was Cinderella,  
out of tinsel,  
in a high-necked brown suit  
with ermine collar.

The storyteller speaks her body; the poems are a sequence of bodily events and by foregrounding the body Bowering contributes to the power of Monroe as an image, but also to her powerlessness; her body and what has been done to it replayed in language. There is occasional interpolation by another voice, confident and authoritative, which exists in disturbing relation to the fictionalized Monroe and her tenuous hold on identity, and language. *Anyone Can See I Love You* has to do with the forms of power and powerlessness the image of Marilyn Monroe reveals, and with Bowering's power to display that image and enact another possession of it.

"Three husbands, not too many, just enough.  
One to spin the thread of life,

one to measure it,  
one to cut.

Jim, Joe, Arthur . . ."

If, as Lorna Irvine claims in *Sub/version*, "The reader is taught to take women's texts seriously, to recognise not just the surface of the female body but its hidden meanings," the hidden text of Monroe as Bowering speaks it is that of the dispossessed, the body which has become a name, fragments, clothes, an image. The poems conclude with an identification of body/house/crypt "my last brass-doored house." The safe place of death is where Monroe is going; the final stage of her displacement into image bodied in Bowering's text.

Irvine's *Sub/version* is a collection of readings of Canadian women writers — Audrey Thomas, Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel, Alice Munro, Jane Rule, Mavis Gallant — employing recent feminist theory. In the textual reading Irvine gives of *Mrs. Blood* and *Bodily Harm* she concentrates on the inscription of the body in the text of female writers: "victimized, fragmented, dismembered, the female body has regrouped and become its own subject." Irvine's are powerful readings demonstrating the metafictional implications in her title. The relation of the woman writer to her material and the political significance of women-oriented texts assume particular significance in post-colonial literatures; Irvine's readings of the cultural ambiguities embodied in texts by Canadian women demonstrate the complex relationships between gender structures and nationalist structures, problematic identities which are rich ground for readers and writers. The "cultural darkness" from which women's stories converge, their private spaces and denied bodies, takes on particular significance in the context of a colonized society, seeking to separate itself from inherited/imposed structures of power and culture.

Women writers in Canada, even heuristically, need to be perceived communally. As they help to forge their country's literary imagination and to determine many of her metaphors, they also carry political weight. Indeed, as their fictional landscapes become mapped and the hidden stories of their texts articulated more clearly, a new North American ethos begins to take shape. That ethos stresses historical continuity, geographical conservation, communal survival and physical as well as creative generation. It is a profoundly feminine ethos.

Irvine's book is a demonstration of the discoveries being enacted in feminist writing, a journey to the hidden text of women writers.

LYDIA WEVERS

## FIONAVAR

GUY GAVRIEL KAY, *The Summer Tree*. Totem Books, \$4.95.

GUY GAVRIEL KAY, *The Wandering Fire*. Totem Books, \$5.95.

GUY GAVRIEL KAY, *The Darkest Hour*. Totem Books, \$5.95.

GUY GAVRIEL KAY, new Canadian writer and already a major artist in his own right, worked on *The Silmarillion* with Christopher Tolkien, helping to edit what has become the greatest best seller in modern times. Consequently, one would expect the Tolkien influence to be heavily present in Kay's first attempt at novel writing: *The Fionavar Tapestry*. It is not, however, and this fact in itself recommends this trilogy. It speaks well of an artist who has worked so closely on the works of one of the greatest writers of high fantasy that he should choose to write in the same genre and yet be able to avoid the trap of retelling Tolkien's story.

Kay has created a vivid world in Fionavar. The splendid cities of the high kingdom; the exquisite, opulent and decadent court and gardens of Cathal; and the austere plains of the Dalrei with their startlingly beautiful inhabitants are clearly

portrayed so that the reader comes to feel at home in the first of all worlds, of which ours is just a shadow. While Kay does not use the extended poetic description of Tolkien's, Kay describes his world succinctly through the eyes of strangers and, most thoroughly, through the people who inhabit those regions. The deep, high-minded and yet joyful people of Brenninn epitomize the culture and splendour of the High Kingdom. The cruel and wayward King and Princess of Cathal express their lofty land and people, while the gentle, austere Dalrei with their mystic contact with the earth and its seasons help portray the plains as much as the plains portray them.

Prince Diarmud; the mage Loren Silvercloak; Dwarf King Matt Soren; the young High King Aileron; Sharra, Princess of Cathal; Ysanne, Seer of Brenninn; and Jaelle, High Priestess of Dana are characters whom the reader can love, hate, scorn, despise, pity, laugh at or weep with readily. Each grows and changes in the course of the trilogy to become something more and, sometimes, something other than before.

But these are not the only characters in the trilogy. For between our world and the original world lies the passage, Fionavar. Through that passage Loren Silvercloak and Matt Soren take five young adults from our world to theirs. And each one is to find his or her deepest reality in Fionavar and his or her true place in the tapestry that is woven of all the lives in all the worlds on the weaver's loom. Jennifer, who is also Guinevere, must seek the long atonement for her own ancient betrayal. Kim, for whom Ysanne makes the ultimate sacrifice, must, as the new Seer of Brenninn, lead the people of her new world to, and if possible through, the greatest war of all time. Kevin, long-lost beloved of the goddess Dana, will make a sacrifice of love which will restore life to the lands lying under the cloak of death. Dave will

find friendship and brotherhood never found in his world and will also become a great warrior. And Paul, Lord of the Summer Tree, will die and be reborn, to bring help and healing to his new-found people. Each of these characters is fully developed and alive, and between them they bring both the world and its troubles alive for the reader.

Kay has chosen a somewhat fragmented plot structure; the wealth of characters and multiplicity of situations become a little confusing. Kay constantly cuts characters off before they explain something important, or simply informs the reader that one character is telling another something important, without divulging what it is. He seems to take for granted that a reader will remember that hint, that partial conversation later when the author fills the gaps. A frequent use of sentence fragments in the first novel adds to the bewilderment. However, these are, perhaps, the weaknesses of a new writer, and while they can be irritating, they decrease in each subsequent novel and they ultimately detract little from the excellence of the whole.

For some of the underpinning ideology of the novels, Kay has drawn from both Celtic and Norse mythology perhaps even more directly than Tolkien did. However, he has woven together with the great story of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere a tale concerned with the greatest struggle ever to take place between good and evil in Fionavar, the struggle between the people of light and the forces of darkness, embodied most fully in the evil god Rakoth Maugrim, the Unraveller, who would rule and enslave not only Fionavar but all the worlds. Drawn into this melee, and eventually central to the battle, are the five strangers from our world, who battle as much for their own world as for Fionavar, and who symbolize the unity and interdependence of all the worlds.

These are powerful books, well written, with an apocalyptic vision and yet a message of great hope. Kay is a bright new star on the horizon; for fantasy lovers and staunch realists alike, these books are a must.

J. R. WYTENBROEK

## IL EST ÉCRIT

JEAN HALLAL, *Les Concevables interdits*.  
L'Hexagone, \$12.95.

PATRICE DESBIENS, *Les Cascadeurs de l'amour*.  
Prise de Parole, \$9.95.

DANS SON RÉCIT *poétique* le poète-bricoleur Jean Hallal prend à tâche de composer une nouvelle histoire polyphonique de la Création et de l'évolution humaines, avec comme matière première des bribes de discours anciens. Les récits de *la Bible*, de *la Torah* et du *Coran* se mêlent aux discours scientifiques, historiques, mythologiques, philosophiques et poétiques pour bâtir une sorte de "Tour de Babel" faite à l'image des gratte-ciel du monde post-industriel.

Hallal emprunte des termes à des domaines apparemment incompatibles, voire contradictoires, et grâce à des techniques littéraires comme la juxtaposition, l'oxymoron et l'association paradigmatique, les discours concurrents s'entrechoquent, s'entrecoupent et parfois s'annulent. Les différentes isotopies s'imbriquent les unes dans les autres, détruisant les frontières sémantiques et ainsi démythifiant le découpage que les catégories linguistiques font du "réel." En fin de compte, le seul signifié susceptible de "représenter" l'essence de ce "réel" est un énorme point d'interrogation pointillé où les gouttes d'encre formant celui-ci "signifient" autant par l'espace qui les sépare que par la trace qu'elles laissent sur la page blanche. Car Hallal nous entraîne dans le royaume de l'indicible, voire l'impensable.



Le lecteur, dans le dé-lire de son imagination, est encouragé à abandonner les (con)textes familiers et à errer dans les "lieux interdits par la raison," espèce de "non-lieu" qui n'est peut-être rien d'autre que la subconscience de l'humanité. Mais cet univers fluide, s'il est "structuré comme un langage" comme le dirait Lacan, déborde de son "lit." Quand les mots se montrent insuffisants pour rendre compte de l'évolution de l'univers, Hallal a recours à un graphique qui trace point par point le trajet de ce qu'il appelle, faute de mieux, "l'appareil-notion," force motrice indéfinissable d'une histoire qui résiste à toute conceptualisation univoque. Suivre le tracé de "l'appareil-notion," c'est lire "l'inter-dit," c'est concevoir l'inconcevable.

Ainsi Jean Hallal, muni d'une technique qui pourrait être qualifiée de "transsubstantiation linguistique," nous offre sa "fable multifiliaire" de l'humanité. Situé à l'extrême limite de l'intertextualité, c'est un conte de fées à l'image d'une époque de "dépouillement," où la certitude scientifique et la foi métaphysique se sont glissées "dans l'interstice du temporel" et où l'histoire du cosmos ne peut plus se raconter qu'au conditionnel du passé: "il y aurait eu une fois. . ."

Si la Création est le thème principal des *Concevables interdits*, une atmosphère de violence et de mort se retrouve dans tout le récit poétique de Patrice Desbiens. Car le texte lui-même commet des violences contre les personnages, les thèmes et les décors, avant de s'autodétruire. Dès les premiers vers du texte, la fragilité de cet univers fictif est constatée par le "je" narrateur qui ne cesse de nous rappeler que son identité et celle des autres personnages (et jusqu'à un certain point celle du poète) ne sont qu'une fonction du texte. La plupart du temps les situations dans lesquelles se trouvent les actants "dérivent" d'une simple association syntagmatique ou paradigmatique. Par exemple, un

leitmotiv du texte — l'amour — est voué à l'échec parce qu'il est le produit d'un accouplement purement linguistique où le glissement d'un signifié dans l'autre aboutit non pas au "plaisir du texte" mais plutôt à une métamorphose "corporelle" durant laquelle l'un des deux termes est englouti par son partenaire, lui-même très instable. La nature précaire de l'existence des éléments textuels provient du fait que cette existence est posée en principe par l'énoncé, interrompue par les silences et les blancs et relancée par la répétition et les reprises avant d'être oblitérée par la clôture du récit.

Cette histoire se déroule devant un arrière du décor toujours changeant, accompagnée d'une musique de fond tout aussi variable. Il se produit une interpénétration des différents domaines et une série de métamorphoses. Par exemple, la polysémie permet que le corps humain se transforme en instrument musical qui fournira le refrain du texte (corpus). Plus loin, ce "no man's land de la musique" fusionne avec "le pays colonisé [du] corps" du narrateur et la boucle est bouclée.

Le flou de ces éléments textuels nous rappelle le caractère illusoire de toute représentation, et la signification des objets aussi symboliques que la fenêtre devient problématique. Dans *Les Cascades de l'amour*, le "je" narrateur est le plus souvent séparé de la scène qu'il décrit ou des gens qu'il observe par une fenêtre. Celle-ci est censée délimiter les rôles aussi bien que les frontières. En fait, elle n'est qu'un élément du décor en trompe-l'oeil, car elle n'arrive pas à garantir l'intégrité des personnages et des espaces, ceux-ci passant au travers la glace pour changer de place et pour se confondre les uns aux autres. En plus, sa propriété principale — celle de la transparence — est contestée. Parfois givrée à tel point qu'elle se transforme en miroir, parfois simple cadre d'une scène qui ressemble à une nature

morte ou à une photo, pour devenir ensuite un instrument de mort à la fin du récit, la fenêtre nous renvoie à l'aspect mensonger de toute écriture qui prétend "ouvrir une fenêtre" sur le monde.

D'autres formes de représentation artistique sont compromises aussi par cette mise en cause de l'illusion référentielle. Dans *Les Cascadeurs de l'amour* les frontières entre la photographie, la télévision, la publicité, le cinéma, le théâtre et le rêve s'effondrent, permettant un "libre échange" de sujets et de thèmes. Les distinctions entre des termes contradictoires sont effacées et les antithèses: "intérieur/extérieur," "passif/actif," "vie/mort," "moi/autrui" et "fiction/réalité" s'écroulent. Le résultat est un univers livré à la contingence et donc menacé par une extrême volatilité. La violence éclate à chaque page. Le monde fictif et la langue qui le constitue se détériorent devant nos yeux. Je dis "nos" yeux parce que le narrateur se complait à impliquer le lecteur dans cette violence. "Je vis parmi, dans, à travers et malgré vous" nous dit-il en ricanant. C'est avec la complicité du lecteur, par exemple, que l'amour entre le narrateur et sa petite amie est consommé, ne serait-ce que par le feu. Les deux "cascadeurs de l'amour" s'enflamment comme le papier sur lequel leur destin est inscrit et en réanimant le mot sur la page nous avons le triste privilège de faire leur "lit" de mort. Il faut avouer que le lecteur participe volontiers à ce complot. Envoûté par les images et enchanté par les sonorités hautement évocatrices, il ne tarde pas à reconnaître que, contrairement à ce que dit le narrateur, le poète n'a rien laissé au hasard. Patrice Desbiens est un véritable "cascadeur de la poésie" — une funambule qui ne perd jamais de vue le fil.

DELORIS WILLIAMS



## TROIS HISTOIRES

ANDRÉE A. MICHAUD, *La Femme de Sath*. Québec/Amérique, \$14.95.

YVON PARÉ, *Les Oiseaux de glace*. Québec/Amérique, \$16.95.

MONIQUE PROULX, *Le Sexe des étoiles*. Québec/Amérique, \$16.95.

ACCEPTONS LE JEU des couvertures de livre et parlons donc de trois histoires d'amour, de passion et de jalousie, de trois histoires de femmes surtout, mais aussi d'hommes, et même d'une transsexuelle. Mais de quel genre d'amour s'agit-il, de la passion déchirante à la Bergman, du sentimentalisme des romans Harlequin, ou simplement, pour parodier le titre des récits/recettes érotiques d'Yves Thériault, des oeuvres de bonne chair? A une époque où Barthes, Derrida et Lacan nous incitent à croire que tout est langage et que la critique féministe remette en question tant le langage que les stéréotypes sexuels, la réponse à cette question ne saurait être simple ni innocente. Méfiants, au fond, devant ces couvertures alléchantes, flairant la supercherie sous des mots choisis justement pour leur pouvoir de séduction, nous préférons inspecter minutieusement les entrailles des textes.

Or, ces entrailles, nous les cherchons longtemps dans le rythme soporifique de *La Femme de Sath*, récit de l'absence, de femmes-ombres disparues dans la nuit et la brume. L'histoire, comme l'écriture, rappellent *Les Fous de Bassan* d'Anne Hébert. Dans un passé flou, trois étrangers, deux femmes et un homme, débarquent à Sath, petit village au bord de la mer, voué à la disparition. Que se passe-t-il au juste entre l'homme à la "silhouette noire" et ces deux femmes, dont l'une a un "corps frêle et peureux et la peau blanche du visage comme une tâche dans la nuit" et l'autre, un "manteau déchiré, là, juste au-dessus de la jambe"? Tout tendu vers la réponse à cette question, vers l'éclaircissement de "cette interminable

nuit," le récit tour à tour accumule les témoignages et brouille les pistes. Y a-t-il eu viol, meurtre, suicide ou amour? Quels liens reliaient ces deux femmes ou n'y en avait-il qu'une seule? Leur histoire jouait-elle un rôle dans la disparition de Sath, les villageois payant ainsi leur complicité dans une affaire louche? On ne saurait guère trancher.

*La Femme de Sath* se construit à partir de documents épars et incomplets et d'indices indécis, tous assumés de façon ambiguë par une narratrice qui ronge sa quête obsessionnelle comme un chien son os. Cette idée fixe suffit-elle pour assurer l'adhésion du lecteur, de la lectrice? C'est dans les passages où la quête de la narratrice s'identifie le plus clairement à une recherche filiale de parents perdus que la prose d'Andrée Michaud parvient le mieux à nous émouvoir, suscitant ainsi des espoirs quant aux efforts subséquents de cette romancière débutante. Sinon, trop de femmes-ombres, de sujets effacés et de femmes-victimes se profilent dans ces pages pour éveiller notre empathie et amadouer notre impatience. Volontairement décentré sur le plan narratif, à la mode du nouveau roman, *La Femme de Sath* arrive difficilement à reconstituer une unité thématique ou affective qui pourrait motiver la structure narrative et soutenir l'attention des lecteurs. Le texte est beau mais on reste sur sa faim.

En comparaison, *Les Oiseaux de glace* se lit comme une bouffée d'air frais, troublant, mais efficace: des personnages avec des noms, une intrigue bien campée, des images à couper le souffle. Ovide et Thérèse se marient dans un pays du Lac-Saint-Jean, à l'époque où on colonisait encore la région. La vie est dure, la nature omnipotente et les rapports interpersonnels précaires. Installés dans le camp d'Ovide à plusieurs milles de la maison la plus proche, les deux jeunes sont livrés à eux-mêmes et à leurs passions. A certains égards, leurs rapports restent fidèles aux

stéréotypes sexuels. Grand gaillard aimant la boisson et les histoires grivoises, ne pensant qu'à assouvir ses convoitises, Ovide considère sa femme tantôt comme un objet sexuel, tantôt comme une bête de somme. Regrettant d'avoir laissé la sécurité de sa vie de jeune fille pour un lit conjugal où le désir sexuel est le monopole du mâle, Thérèse s'emmûre, silencieuse, dans une résistance passive qui exaspère Ovide. La grande solitude qui les entoure exacerbe les passions de l'un comme la colère rentrée de l'autre.

Plus qu'un roman d'amour, *Les Oiseaux de glace* est donc un récit de tensions et de luttes acharnées. A ce niveau des émotions crues le récit s'écarte des stéréotypes. Paré vise surtout à dépeindre les passions de l'une et de l'autre, passions confuses que ces êtres vivant aux confins du monde civilisé ne savent guère exprimer. C'est donc par des images puissantes, tirées surtout de la nature, que Paré évoque les remous affectifs et le besoin d'amour et de camaraderie qui sous-tendent l'obsession sexuelle d'Ovide et ses tentatives frustes mais sincères de mériter l'amour de sa femme. Quant à Thérèse, elle se réfugie dans ses rapports avec des animaux, un vieux cheval Soldat, un chat nommé Revenant, et surtout dans sa fascination pour l'Ashuapmushuan, cette grande rivière qui longe la propriété d'Ovide. Sans doute, les plus beaux passages du livre portent-ils justement sur les randonnées solitaires de Thérèse près de l'Ashuapmushuan en hiver alors qu'Ovide est parti couper du bois. Le titre du livre exprime la fragilité de cette jeune femme enceinte et seule au fond du bois que la glace étincelante de la rivière sous le soleil tour à tour rappelle à la vie et pousse à l'anesthésie du suicide.

Divisé, comme le roman du terroir classique, en quatre parties selon les quatre saisons, *Les Oiseaux de glace* offre une intrigue qui suit en apparence le rythme de la nature. Les deux jeunes se marient au

printemps. Ovide défriche sa terre en été et chasse l'original en automne. Vers la fin de l'hiver, Thérèse donne naissance à son premier enfant. S'ajoutent aussi à cette apparence d'un roman du terroir des dialogues réalistes fidèles au langage oral de la région et les descriptions détaillées de quelques scènes collectives ou sociales, comme la veillée de Noël au village ou la visite de Thérèse chez une voisine pour faire du pain. Mais ces brefs tableaux réalistes servent surtout à ancrer le drame affectif des personnages principaux. "Un roman d'une grande sensualité, lisons-nous sur la couverture, qui nous mène au seuil du possible et du tolérable." Pour une fois, ce n'est pas une vaine promesse.

A la troublante violence instinctive des *Oiseaux de glace*, *Le Sexe des étoiles* oppose une vision bien plus urbaine du couple. Le jeu et l'astuce remplacent la lutte et le silence, la femme y trouvant sa juste part du plaisir comme des déceptions. Du reste, les différences entre hommes et femmes sont d'autant plus aplanies qu'un des personnages, Marie-Pierre, biologiste de renom et père de famille, est une transsexuelle. Le sexe de l'être humain, comme celui des étoiles, nous laisse entendre Monique Proulx, mérite sans doute d'être examiné, ne serait-ce par divertissement, mais ne joue guère de rôle déterminant dans le déroulement d'une vie.

Après une entrée en matière un peu lente, due à un cumul encombrant d'adjectifs, Monique Proulx trouve le ton mi-comique, mi-ironique qui convient parfaitement aux différentes histoires cocasses qui composent l'intrigue du livre. Fondées toutes sur la recherche d'un(e) partenaire, ces histoires mettent en scène quatre personnages principaux: Gaby, recherchiste à la quête de l'homme de ses rêves, Dominique Larue, écrivain impuissant en écriture comme en amour, Marie-Pierre, transsexuelle, à la recherche de son identité et du parfait amour, et sa fille adolescente, Camille, astronome brillante

qui meurt d'envie pour l'idole de son école, Lucky Poitras.

Or, si les aventures invraisemblables que connaissent ces personnages nous tiennent en haleine d'un bout à l'autre du livre, leur fonction principale consiste à assurer la toile de fond d'une critique, mordante mais jamais didactique, des mœurs sexuelles. Sur ce plan, l'efficace du personnage transsexuel, procédé qui n'est pas original mais que Monique Proulx exploite avec raffinement, est sans conteste. Séduisante et libre, appelée à défendre sa vertu dans des situations les plus inouïes, Marie-Pierre découvre une double discrimination, celle que subissent les transsexuelles et les femmes. D'une égale bonne humeur, Monique Proulx expose les petits jeux de pouvoir, les anodins comme les mesquins, qui entâchent la vie de couple. On éclate de rire, mais le message ne passe pas inaperçu.

Trois histoires d'amour, donc, où chacun(e) pourrait, en principe, trouver son plaisir. Mais seul *Le Sexe des étoiles* me semble dépasser définitivement des stéréotypes sexuels et emprunter un discours nouveau où les femmes pourraient se retrouver à l'aise. Cette observation ne mine en rien le jugement esthétique, très favorable, que l'on pourrait porter sur *Les Oiseaux de glace*. Situé dans le passé, ce dernier roman de Paré peut se lire comme un document émouvant de la solitude et de l'isolement de la vie des colons. Mais en témoignant de la violence et des malentendus qui sous-tendent les rapports entre hommes et femmes dans une société patriarcale, *Les Oiseaux de glace* signale aussi l'élatement de celle-ci. C'est sans doute là aussi le sens ultime tant de la question qui hante *La Femme de Sath* (y a-t-il eu viol, meurtre ou amour?), que de l'incapacité de la narratrice à y répondre en représentant une rencontre qui, au fond, n'a tout simplement pas eu lieu.

AGNÈS WHITFIELD

## PARLER D'IMAGES

JEAN-YVES COLLETTE, *Perspectives*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

PIERRE MORENCY, *Quand nous serons: Poèmes 1967-1978*. L'Hexagone, \$19.95.

*Quand nous serons* est un ouvrage collectif regroupant quatre recueils publiés entre les années 1967 et 1978. Cet ouvrage qui paraît un an après *Effets personnels*, un recueil à faible tirage ne rassemblant que vingt-trois poèmes, constitue une véritable "rétrospective poétique" qui nous permet de parcourir avec l'écrivain le cheminement de son entreprise créatrice. En vue de son classement d'ordre chronologique qui recouvre plus d'une décennie de productions littéraires, *Quand nous serons*, peut en quelque sorte être traité comme un récit intime retraçant une époque influente de la vie littéraire de Pierre Morency.

Le premier recueil, *Poèmes de la froide merveille de vivre* qui représente la première publication de Morency, lui mérita le "Prix du Maurier." Publié initialement en 1967 aux Editions de l'Arc, cet ouvrage révèle une sensibilité subtile envers certains thèmes bien connus: le bonheur, l'amour, le mal de vivre, la solitude, la mort. C'est par cette conscience affective que Morency fait naître chez le lecteur les passions auxquelles il s'attarde. Dans *Poèmes de la vie déliée* c'est un air de mélancolie et d'amertume qui règne. Le titre des textes réunis dans cet ouvrage: "Quand j'avais la vie," "Complainte de la misère noire," "Nous mourrons tous assassinés" ne fait qu'accentuer le contenu dysphorique de cette oeuvre. En dépit du ton mélancolique inscrit dans presque tous les poèmes de ce recueil, Morency déploie, comme dans son premier volume, une facilité d'élocution un esprit pénétrant capable de faire éprouver tout un spectre de sensations. Qu'il s'agisse d'un accès de gaieté ou d'une affliction, ce qui émane de l'écriture de Morency est une certaine

sensibilité aux pouvoirs évocateurs du langage poétique: "c'est dans ma poitrine que j'écris perdu coulant dans mon propre sang entre des vases de fleurs et des visages de femmes."

Le ton maussade de ce vers n'aura qu'une présence éphémère dans *Lieu de Naissance*, où l'auteur évoque divers actes de naissance par la mise en scène d'un langage imagé. C'est par l'entremise de comparaisons et de métaphores que l'aube sera décrite comme un "traîneau d'orange et de rose," comme un "océan de lueurs" et un "puit de rayons." A l'encontre de certains auteurs qui accompagnent leurs textes d'illustrations afin d'accentuer ce dont ils parlent, Pierre Morency exploite la valeur représentative du langage poétique. L'effet esthétique obtenu par les figures de style dans ce dernier recueil est maintenu dans *Torrentiel*. La précision des détails présentés ne fait que mettre en relief la valeur expressive de l'écriture de Morency qui possède un sens des réalités et le pouvoir langagier nécessaire pour nous les dévoiler. "Le Carquois de l'indien," dans lequel sont décrits les premiers actes du nouveau né est un parfait exemple de ce souci pour la précision et la pureté des détails:

On m'a lavé m'a verse  
dans le ventre d'une mère  
pour que j'apprenne  
pour que je me lie  
[...]

Quand on m'a sorti je savais ou aller  
je me retrouvais à la fontaine du lait  
je me retrouvais  
petit marin de périples fermés

Grâce à l'acuité de son regard, Morency parvient à conférer aux thèmes de l'amour, de la nature, de la solitude, de la mort de nouvelles résonances poétiques. Par la richesse et la puissance évocatrice de son langage, notre perception d'événements et d'objet familiers se trouve également renouvelée. C'est en somme cette pureté séduisante, cette puissance d'émo-

tion qui rend l'oeuvre de Morency plus accessible et donc plus apte à atteindre la sensibilité du lecteur.

*Perspectives*, livre dans lequel sont rassemblés tous les textes écrits par Jean-Yves Collette entre 1971 et 1975 doit être lu comme une suite à *Préliminaires* où figure également de nombreux textes remontant aux années 1965 à 1970. L'ordre chronologique qui avait veillé au classement du premier volume a été maintenu et de façon analogue à *Préliminaires*, *Perspectives* est doté d'illustrations et d'images photographiques. A l'exception de quelques textes dont certains extraits ont paru dans *L'Etat de débauche*, *La Barre du jour* et *Etreintes cosmiques*, le dernier recueil de Collette présente de multiples inédits, fait qui suscitera sans doute l'intérêt de nombreux lecteurs.

Tout en conférant à l'oeuvre de Collette un certain dynamisme textuel, la valeur des images photographiques et des dessins disposés tout au long de l'ouvrage provient surtout de leur puissance visuelle. Qu'il s'agisse de la chevelure d'une jeune femme, d'une affiche publicitaire ou d'une figure géométrique, ces illustrations attirent et fixent l'attention du lecteur. En plus de nous permettre de visualiser ce qu'il décrit, par la mise en scène d'un métalangage qui ne fait que rappeler les techniques d'autoreprésentation propres à de nombreux romans modernes, Collette émet certaines pensées sur l'oeuvre littéraire. C'est par la mise en scène d'énoncés d'ordre commentatif que l'auteur offre au lecteur sa perspective sur le "jeu de la création," "l'architecture du texte" et l'imagination des "rédacteurs d'images":

Parler d'images ou parler de vie, quelle différence? La vie fait les images, et les images sont la vie. Le rédacteur d'images, lui, ne conçoit d'expression vivante qu'à partir du moment où elle se traduit en images palpables, appréciables par le fait même, communicables.

Plusieurs des textes introduits dans la

rubrique "Textes épars 1971" sont frappants de par les remarques et les observations qui y sont inscrites, l'effet visuel qu'ils engendrent et les impressions et les sensations nouvelles qu'ils produisent. Dans "Manifeste pour l'amour des mots," texte qui a déjà paru en 1974 dans *Le Bord' du jour Cahier de la Patathèque*, Collette introduit sous forme d'un avertissement au lecteur, un leitmotiv qui sera repris dans plusieurs des poèmes: "à ceux qui veulent méthodiquement dire quelque chose" écrit Collette, "ne lisez pas ce qui suit."

De ce petit vers naît un assez long texte où l'auteur explique ce qui rend une certaine oeuvre digne d'attention: "Le jeu de la création, et lui seul, donne au texte et à l'exercice du texte (l'image écrite), l'intérêt vital." Vient ensuite une véritable énumération de commentaires et de suggestions qui ne font qu'explicitier ce qui représente pour Collette une des seules véritables possibilités d'expression:

[l'homme-dit] ne s'attardera pas à explorer les cratères structuralomarxistes;... désormais l'homme-dit... ne se rendra plus enragé d'écouter déblatérer sur la pseudo-inefficacité du langage (ou sur son efficacité);... il ne sera pas question pour lui d'"inscrire" l'écriture dans une structure.

Le titre de plusieurs des textes regroupés dans *Perspectives*: "Histoire de marquer," "Image et lettre communicantes," "Petit vocabulaire illustré" ne servent qu'à accentuer le désir de la part de l'auteur de mettre en scène ses préoccupations scripturales. C'est la présence de ce discours autoreprésentatif qui nous invite à suggérer, qu'en dépit du décalage temporel entre la production et la parution de ce dernier recueil de textes, les sujets traités par Jean-Yves Collette il y a plus d'une décennie ont survécu à l'épreuve du temps. *Perspectives* ne fait que réitérer l'"introversion littéraire" toujours présente dans de nombreuses oeuvres contemporaines.

JULIE LEBLANC

## VERS L'INCONSCIENT

JACQUES MARCHAND, *Le Premier Mouvement*.  
L'Hexagone, \$14.95.

MARCEL GODIN, *Après l'Eden*. L'Hexagone, n.p.

“J'ÉTAIS CONDAMNÉ à ne rien savoir, à devoir tout deviner.” Cette phrase issue du premier roman de Jacques Marchand nous paraît être le fil conducteur qui nous invite à travers ce livre remarquable à participer à un voyage vers l'inconscient. C'est le narrateur auquel l'auteur donne la parole qui résume ainsi l'énigme proposée par le comportement de son frère Marc au cours d'un voyage qu'ils ont fait ensemble et qui constitue la majeure partie du roman. Le narrateur, d'origine montréalaise et serveur de restaurant en Floride, se rappelle les événements quatre ans après quand il apprend que son frère a été libéré sur parole et s'apprête à venir le voir.

Suivons le souvenir du narrateur — évidemment historien de formation — qui a entrepris ce voyage parce qu'il avait signé un contrat de recherche. Il devait dépouiller les archives d'une petite ville des Montagnes Blanches afin de reconstituer l'histoire d'une petite communauté francophone. Marc, qui avait 17 ans à l'époque, tenait à le joindre. Pendant leur séjour dans la petite ville de province Marc et son amie, la jeune prostituée Gabrielle disparaissent fréquemment. Entre-temps le narrateur essaie de travailler, mais il reste hanté par des souvenirs d'enfance. Ces miettes du passé — soulignées par la mise en italiques — qui coupent le fil du récit surgissent et menacent le protagoniste. Les scènes revues par lui comme dans un film évoquent ses impulsions sadomasochistes et pyromanes qui avaient déterminé la relation avec celui qui est son cadet de quatre ans. Toute tentative de refoulement se révèle vaine; le passé surgit des profondeurs à chaque instant. Ainsi l'aspect des fruits rouges d'un co-

mier provoque chez lui une vision qui rappelle celle du chevalier Perceval contemplant les trois gouttes de sang. Mais, au lieu de provoquer une rêverie mélancolique, elle fait monter l'angoisse:

Ces grappes lumineuses me rappelaient, en se découpant aussi nettement sur une plaque de neige, une autre image. Mais je ne voulais pas la retrouver. Je voulais tenter de ne plus m'abstraire, de ne plus rattacher l'immédiat — ces points rouges — à la toile, à la photographie peut-être, qu'ils évoquaient.

Au cours de récit, le narrateur découvre que son travail, son voyage et le fait d'avoir quitté son frère lorsqu'il était suivi par la police à la suite de circonstances étranges ne sont qu'une fuite perpétuelle devant lui-même. Incapable de saisir son identité — “Celui qui j'avais voulu devenir n'allait nulle part” — à travers son érudition dont Marc se moque constamment, il remet en question toute tentative de fonder une identité de qui que ce soit, voire d'un groupe ethnique sur les débris légués par l'histoire: “Je ne terminai pas mes recherches, je ne retournai pas aux archives.” Vers la fin du roman, le trio énonce la destination définitive de leur voyage qu'ils poursuivent d'abord ensemble: “Descendre dans le Sud.” Après avoir abandonné ses compagnons de route, le narrateur poursuit sa fuite afin de se réfugier en Floride au bord de la mer, éternel symbole des profondeurs de l'âme: “Nous croyons sentir sous nos pieds la morsure de ce qui repose enfoui dans le sable depuis la nuit des temps, troncs d'arbres, ossements, mâts, objets de culte, peut-être rien.” Comme son frère approche, celui dont tout danger émane — à voir l'épigraphe de E. A. Poe mis en tête de l'ouvrage par l'auteur — le narrateur s'aperçoit de l'inutilité de sa fuite et de la véritable cause de celle-ci. La rivalité avec son frère, rendu monstrueux par des terribles jeux d'enfance, n'est que cette lutte perpétuelle avec son propre passé. Il ne

reste plus qu'accomplir l'acte devenu inévitable: "Il sait que je suis enfin prêt à lui donner la mort." Avec ce monologue d'un homme prêt à commettre un meurtre, Jacques Marchand se place proche des débuts littéraires de nombreux auteurs tels que Claude Simon (*Le Tricheur*), Ernesto Sabato (*El túnel*) et Albert Camus (*L'Étranger*). Chacun des assassins narrateurs (un terme de Volker Rolloff) créés par ces auteurs accomplit à sa guise un acte qui renvoie au "lieu du geste premier — le plus juste, le moins réfléchi des mouvements." Par son style clair et ses phrases souvent sobres, Jacques Marchand semble rester à la surface des événements. Mais cette surface reste fragile et c'est par le caractère resserré du récit que le lecteur découvre le drame psychique. L'auteur donne en même temps l'impression d'une fatalité inexorable. C'est en cela que réside la réussite de son premier roman.

Marcel Godin, auteur éminemment connu au Canada, nous présente un recueil de huit nouvelles sous le titre "Après l'Éden," huit nouvelles construites en passages courts et souvent lyriques qui révèlent par leur regroupement le plan d'un ouvrage bien conçu. Cet ouvrage se divise en deux parties: sous le titre "L'Envers" sont regroupées quatre "nouvelles" désignées par les noms des saisons dans la suite de leur rythme naturel, tandis que dans la deuxième partie — "L'Endroit" — les quatre points cardinaux délimitent les textes courts en commençant par le Nord pour tracer une ligne qui aboutit à l'Est après avoir traversé l'Ouest et le Sud. "L'Envers" et "L'Endroit" font penser au célèbre recueil d'essais d'Albert Camus dont le titre implique la nostalgie d'un univers clos, voire le replis de l'individu solitaire sur soi-même. Le recueil de Marcel Godin, en revanche, c'est le dynamisme. La première "nouvelle" de "L'Envers" recommence l'ouvrage par des images hivernales comme si elle reprenait

le fil d'un récit tout en constituant une homologie de mouvement — pour employer le terme structuraliste — par rapport à la première partie:

Nord blanc des fumées des cheminées des usines, blanc aseptisé des laboratoires où les Blancs enfantent d'autres Blancs dans la blancheur du temps infini de blanchitude, blanc, neige du Nord et des glaciers, étendue sans fin et cause de fitude. Blanc du Nord des hivers qui se suivent.

Ainsi l'homologie entre les deux parties dans la répartition des chapitres est constituée par une structure circulaire qui évoque la notion de "l'éternel retour" de Nietzsche:

aucun lieu de repos n'est plus ouvert à ton cœur où il n'aurait qu'à trouver sans plus chercher, — tu te refuses à une quelconque dernière paix, tu désires l'éternel retour de la guerre et de la paix: homme de renoncement, tu veux renoncer à tout cela? Qui t'en donnera la force? Nul n'a encore eu cette force jusqu'alors!

Passons donc — pour mettre au point le contenu de ce livre étrange — dans cet univers des contrées septentrionales du Canada qui semble réaliser toute rêverie de solitude et de repos — l'emploi des formules si chères au penseur français G. Bachelard nous paraît plus que légitime — et qui provoque à l'aspect immuable de son hiver le sentiment d'éternité vécue. Prenant en considération notre point de départ, ce voyage vers l'inconscient nous mène sans transition de l'envers à l'endroit: les deux facettes de la réalité qui sont celle de la transformation consciente de la matière par l'homme et celle du rêve. Ces deux facettes transcendent toute dialectique, toute synthèse vers une unité primordiale de repos, à supposer qu'Éden soit. Mais "Après Éden" implique le voyage sur les chemins tracés dans l'inconscient par les archétypes, ces images "résumant l'expérience ancestrale de l'homme devant une situation typique, c'est-à-dire dans des circonstances qui ne sont pas particulières à un seul indi-



vidu, mais qui peuvent s'imposer à tout homme" (Robert Desoilles). Un tel voyage ne touche jamais à sa fin et le désir, cette quête de l'éternel chevalier errant-symbole de l'humanité même — trouve son assouvissement ni dans l'imaginaire paradis méridional où aboutissent les chemins du jeune Albert Camus et vers lequel tend en vain le "Premier Mouvement" de J. Marchand ni dans l'austérité du paysage septentrional, mais reste soumis au perpétuel renouvellement de la lutte entre les forces opposées de la création et de la destruction; cette dernière trouve son apothéose dans le mythe crépusculaire de l'Ouest :

L'hégémonie, le totalitarisme, le génocide, l'unanimité, la dictature, la guerre essentielle, oui la guerre, sont les thèmes gravés sur leurs blasons et ces mots suintent et maculent tout ce qu'ils laissent sur leur passage de puis des siècles et des siècles de sang versé au nom de leur puissance.

C'est, par contre, quand le lever du soleil à l'est et le printemps se rejoignent, effaçant toute notion de temps et de différence, que sa propre condition se révèle à l'homme :

Tout le monde buvait du lait, les pauvres comme les riches. Tout le monde sortait, les pauvres comme les riches, et du level du jour comme de l'arrivée du printemps, j'appris la condition humaine. Et j'aimai!

Si Marcel Godin a appelé les chapitres courts de son ouvrage "nouvelles" (d'après Gide une nouvelle est faite "pour être lue d'un coup, en une fois"), c'est que le lecteur peut entrer à travers chacun dans l'univers créé par cet auteur et il est toujours renvoyé au cours inexorable du cycle. Ce dépassement de la réalité vers cet éternel cycle de la vie et de la mort, de la civilisation et de sa décadence marque le degré zéro de la littérature d'un pays, d'une nation qui s'affirme et cherche son expression sans ce soumettre à l'hégémonie culturelle de n'importe quel vieux monde.

TILL R. KUHNLE

## LE DESTIN

LISE GAUVIN, *Lettres d'une autre*. Editions de l'Hexagone, n.p.

FRANCE THEORET, *Entre Raison et déraison*. Les Herbes rouges, \$17.75.

*Lettres d'une autre* de Lise Gauvin reste aussi pertinent et vivifiant dans cette nouvelle édition "Typo" que lors de sa parution en 1984. Citons deux passages dévoilant ses grands thèmes :

Quand on me demande ce que je pense de la spécificité culturelle du Québec, je dis: "Venez avec moi, traversons la frontière et allons dans une petite ville *Canadienne* choisie au hasard. Vous trouverez moins de points communs entre ces fils de loyalistes puritains et les Québécois qu'entre ceux-ci et n'importe lequel peuple d'Amérique ou d'Europe, y compris l'Angleterre."

J'ai mis un certain temps à comprendre que, quand on dit d'une femme qu'elle a mauvais caractère et d'un homme qu'il a du caractère, on parle de la même chose.

Les deux grandes préoccupations de *Lettres d'une autre* sont donc les rapports entre Québec/Québécois et Canada/Canadiens, d'une part; et d'autre part, les femmes et la condition féminine au Québec.

Interrogations et réponses sont d'autant plus piquantes, qu'elles émanent d'une narratrice/commentatrice étrangère, Roxane, étudiante "persane" qui produit une série de lettres adressées à une amie restée dans le pays d'origine. Montesquieu, dans ses *Lettres persanes*, a montré admirablement le parti que l'on peut tirer d'un tel faux-semblant.

Roxane analyse de façon juste les trois grands thèmes de ses lettres. Les descriptions de divers aspects de la vie culturelle québécoise sont intéressantes, visant juste en peu de mots. La démonstration de l'état d'infériorité que subit encore le français et les francophones au Canada reste incontournable. En amenant Roxane à choisir de devenir immigrante et de rallier la population qué-

bécoise francophone, Lise Gauvin esquisse une partie de la réponse à la question qu'elle ne cesse de poser: un Québec francophone pourra-t-il survivre? Peu de commentateurs au Canada anglais ont compris que la loi 101 (y compris en matière d'affichage) a, parmi ses grands buts, un objectif qu'aux Etats-Unis et au Canada anglais on trouve normal: intégrer les immigrants.

Or, toutes les Roxanes, persanes ou autre allophones du Québec, ne suffiront pas à garantir le maintien d'une société québécoise francophone forte. Il y faut aussi des bébés plus nombreux. L'analyse très juste que fait Roxane de la condition féminine au Québec explique quelques raisons de la dénatalité actuelle. Il reste surprenant que l'auteure de ce livre ne traite pas ce problème de façon plus explicite, car il est la clef du thème fondamental qui hante *Lettres d'une autre*: le destin du Québec.

"La raison appropriée," premier essai d'*Entre raison et déraison* de France Théoret, est rythmé par la phrase "Ecrivaine et Québécoise." Dans cet essai et dans ce livre, toutefois, les thèmes de l'écriture, de la lecture, de la femme et de la condition féminine l'emportent de beaucoup sur la question nationale. Doté d'une intelligence ferme, perspicace, nuancée, lucide, F. Théoret est une excellente praticienne de la raison; celle-ci, chez elle, a parmi ses objets d'exploration et d'expression l'irrationnel: "J'écrirai pour faire voir les dégâts psychiques de la civilisation. . . Il faut reprendre à la psychanalyse le champ verbal de la connaissance psychique." Buts réalisables, car "entre raison et déraison il y a encore une pensée méditante, une langue créatrice de l'être, de l'espace et du temps."

Les deux premiers essais, "La raison appropriée" et "Femmes et Pensée" date de 1987, et sont sans doute les plus intéressants. Dans le deuxième, Théoret fait remarquer que des écrivains masculins pro-

jettent leur morbidité sur le corps des femmes, alors que, nous dit-elle. "L'inverse me semble impossible." La généralisation est sans doute excessive (*Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* offre peut-être, par moments, des exemples de cet "inverse") mais la discussion est passionnante.

Les autres essais se répartissent parmi trois autres parties, "La turbulence intérieure," "Les nouvelles formes de la subjectivité," et "Une inscription québécoise." Seule le dernier essai, "La transformation du roman québécois (1965-1985)" déçoit par une superficialité que lui inflige sa brièveté. Mais dans l'ensemble, Théoret traite de façon intelligente et intéressante de sa propre écriture, du féminisme, du l'écriture au féminin, de la question du sujet, des genres, et de l'écriture d'autres écrivain(e)s québécois(es).

Souvent *Entre raison et déraison* aborde les mêmes problématiques que *Lettres d'une autre*, et leur lecture se révèle fort complémentaire. Les deux livres sont des modèles d'intelligence, d'émotion raisonnée, de sincérité, et d'écriture.

NEIL B. BISHOP

## CONTES

MICHELINE LA FRANCE, *Le fils d'Ariane et autres nouvelles*. La pleine lune, \$12.95.

GILLES PELLERIN, *Ni le lieu ni l'heure*. L'instant même, \$14.95.

ESTHER ROCHON, *Le traversier*. La pleine lune, \$12.95.

APRÈS BIEN DES ANNÉES reléguée aux oubliettes, la nouvelle au Québec semble connaître ces dernières années un essor indéniable. La popularité de ce genre littéraire — trop longtemps considéré comme le pauvre frère du plus noble roman — se voit confirmée par la parution récente d'une revue qui lui est exclusivement consacrée, *XYZ*. Il va sans dire qu'il y a dans cette récolte du bon et du moins

bon, mais une fois le bon grain séparé de l'ivraie, nous nous retrouvons devant un corpus respectable auquel appartiennent les trois recueils qui font l'objet de ce compte rendu. Il est par ailleurs révélateur de noter que tous les trois répondent, à de degrés différents, à l'engouement prononcé tout dernièrement pour le fantastique, quoique chaque auteur s'en serve à sa propre façon.

L'univers de Micheline LaFrance dérouté par sa ressemblance au monde de tous les jours. Mais c'est un monde parallèle au nôtre, un monde où l'incident le plus banal peut nous basculer dans l'irréel. Parfois elle nous offre une étude de caractère où l'accent est mis sur la psychologie des personnages. D'autres fois, c'est l'horreur tout court d'une fonctionnaire qui se métamorphose en un amas informe de matière rouge, ou bien, la simple histoire d'une déception amoureuse. Ce qui lie tous ces récits, cependant, est le doute qui semble planer sur eux. On hésite à en donner une interprétation. Nous ne pouvons pas distinguer entre le réel et l'imaginaire. Le petit Nicolas Bertrand, enfant solitaire, anormal, serait-il un extraterrestre? Lorsqu'il dit, "je suis une étoile filante," avant d'être pendu par les autres enfants parce qu'il est différent, sommes-nous devant un acte de violence gratuite ou s'agit-il de quelque chose de plus complexe, d'indéchiffrable? "Emma" et "Le fils d'Ariane" reprennent cette nuance d'ambiguïté en introduisant la notion du double. C'est précisément là où réside le fantastique. Rien n'est noir et blanc, on vit dans un univers d'incertitude, un univers qui revêt un extérieur parfaitement anodin mais qui inquiète par son ambiguïté. Comme le résume la dernière phrase du recueil: "Pourquoi Rodolphe? Pourquoi?" On ne saurait répondre.

Cette incertitude qui nous fait hésiter entre la réalité et le surnaturel et qui constitue l'une des caractéristiques du fantastique est non sans rappeler l'un des plus

grands praticiens du genre: Guy de Maupassant. La dette envers cet auteur se voit aussi dans le recueil de Pellerin. Il fait allusion plus d'une fois à ce maître du fantastique, mais, plus important, ses récits comportent cette ambiguïté dont le fantastique se nourrit. Le recueil est divisé en trois sections dont la première met sur scène un narrateur qui se décrit contre une toile de fond opaque: la plupart des récits ont pour cadre un bar rempli de la fumée des cigarettes. La réalité est occultée par ce voile qui ne révèle que des ombres, créant ainsi un effet fantasque. Et, comme chez Maupassant, l'action de plusieurs des récits de Pellerin a lieu la nuit. En lisant "Et quart," on ne peut pas s'empêcher de penser à "La nuit" de Maupassant: "Les heures se sont éteintes . . . Dehors tout s'est figé. Les lumières ne scintillent plus, elles ont gelé. La neige reste suspendue à mi-chemin . . ." Les scènes irréelles se multiplient contre un décor parfaitement normal, ce qui favorise le développement du motif si cher à Maupassant: le double. Cependant, là où Pellerin se distance du conteur français est dans l'usage d'un narrateur comme fil conducteur. Ce dernier nous fait part, à travers ses visions, de son angoisse, de sa peine d'amour, de sa solitude et de ses sentiments de marginalité. L'accent mis sur l'état d'âme du personnage se reflète dans le style de Pellerin. Les récits courts (de 2 à 6 pages), l'entrée en matière abrupte, l'écriture dense et le ton très personnel génèrent une ambiance quasi-onirique.

Avec *Le traversier* d'Edith Rochon, nous quittons le domaine du fantastique pour entrer tout court dans la science-fiction. Elle vise cependant le même objectif que Pelletier: la quête d'un équilibre entre le moi et les autres, entre l'identité personnelle et la société. Cette quête se voit à son mieux dès la première nouvelle, "Le labyrinthe." Divisé en trois "parcours," ce récit utilise en fait la métaphore du laby-

rinthe comme prétexte pour mieux élaborer la recherche de l'absolu et pour interioriser les sentiments. "Le labyrinthe" peut être vu comme le parcours de la vie, une sorte de parabole pour une certaine prise de conscience chez l'individu. La narratrice, se sentant à vingt-trois ans étrangère à la société dans laquelle elle vit, entreprend d'atteindre le centre de la dédale. Tout au long du chemin elle, comme nous tous, est tentée par différentes expériences qui la retardent dans son progrès: amour, travail, amitiés, etc. Ces digressions lui enseignent qu'elle doit continuer seule à voyager dans le labyrinthe de la vie.

Les autres nouvelles du recueil nous font voir d'autres aspects de cette quête d'un absolu que nous devons tous entreprendre. Le centre est une sorte de lieu de renaissance où l'on retrouve l'être aimé et, par extension, le vrai moi intérieur. L'harmonie — "l'équilibre exquis" — est atteinte. Cependant, nous apprenons que le centre n'est que l'étape préliminaire, une étape nécessaire à la communication entre les êtres qui errent dans un univers irréel de ruines, d'extraterrestres et de beauté mystique. C'est un univers qui témoigne d'une imagination peu commune. Rochon, faisant preuve d'un style sobre et précis mais non sans poésie, réussit à créer un monde dont les reflets extérieurs surnaturels nous servent de guide dans ce parcours qui a pour but la découverte de notre propre univers intérieur, un univers d'harmonie, de paix et d'équilibre. Un parfait antidote à la menace nucléaire qui hante le quotidien.

MARK BENSON

## SKELTON ON HOLIDAY

ROBIN SKELTON, *The Memoirs of a Literary Blockhead*. Macmillan, \$27.95.

"REVOLUTIONS ARE the holidays of life," said one of the characters in André Mal-

raux's novel of the Spanish Civil War, *L'Espoir*. One might paraphrase that remark, and assert that autobiographies are the holidays of a writer's life, the occasions when he disregards the imperatives of originality, forgets the fashionable cant that what one writes must be different from what one lives, and applies the powers of invention to arranging and embellishing what has happened in real life rather than what has happened in the imagination. Sometimes, in the process, the writer comes to the realization that his most interesting invention is perhaps himself.

This, I think, is especially the case with non-fiction writers, who have not been able to fulfil their need to create personae by inventing strong characters in novels. A Margaret Laurence, having created a Morag Gunn, would feel no need to project herself in a more direct and personal way. But the man-of-letters (and essentially Robin Skelton is a man-of-letters), who spends his life in a variety of literary crafts, from poetry to criticism and to editing the works of others, often finds himself with an overflow of inventive energy, and this often leads him into autobiography, that border zone where fiction meets history.

One feels that overflowing in Skelton's newest book, *The Memoirs of a Literary Blockhead*. The title is an ironic comment on Johnson's remark — itself somewhat blockheadish — that "No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money." For some, writing is an addiction, and for others — if there is any real distinction between the two states — it is a source of pleasure that demands no financial reward even though what comes may be acceptable. And though Skelton certainly has not starved, his dedication to literature and literary scholarship, and his achievements, including some fine poetry, good criticism, excellent editorial work on Synge and other Irish writers, and the

creation of one of Canada's best literary magazines, the *Malahat Review*, have brought him far less in material rewards than have descended on less talented popular writers like Pierre Berton, Farley Mowat and Peter Newman. There is perhaps a justice in that situation, as Stendhal, not particularly popular in his own day, recognized long ago when he remarked, "I have taken out a ticket in a lottery; to be read in a hundred years' time." Stendhal, of course, won his bet with interest, and I suspect Skelton is among those who will be read long after the popularly successful writers of our own day have been forgotten.

That is why his *Memoirs* are interesting. They are different from anything else Skelton has written, for the persona that is revealed to stand beside all the other Skelton personae — poet, editor, scholar, teacher, occultist — is that of the genially gossiping elder, for there is a curiously patriarchal quality to Skelton, with his grey bird's-nest beard and his talismanic ornaments, and this, of course, fits in with the role of literary father, in which he has encouraged many young writers in western Canada, mainly through his activities as editor of the *Malahat Review* and of Sono Nis Press and as the founder of the creative writing department at the University of Victoria.

Growing old is often a liberating factor with writers and other artists — at least in the modern age — and the memoirs of ageing writers tend to show them relaxing into a more malleable persona than their other works might reflect. This is certainly the case with Skelton, for his *Memoirs* is an easy-going book in which he is not afraid to be trivial as well as profound. For me personally, much of it strikes familiar echoes, for, like Skelton, I had a literary career in Britain before coming back to Canada, and many of the people Skelton brings to life in his pages, like John Gaasworth, David Gascoyne and

Herbert Read in England, and Ted Roethke and Carolyn Kizer later in the United States, were also my friends, while our courses in Canada, each arriving as a writer with a bit of a name, and each founding an important literary magazine that has weathered the years, have run parallel in many ways.

Skelton writes a sequential autobiography, beginning with childhood in Yorkshire, going on to university days and early literary life in England, continuing through his curious empathetic relationship with Irish writers and literary traditions, and coming forward to his years in Canada. Gossip is given full rein, and for this alone the *Memoirs* will be a valuable source book for those studying both English writing in the 1940's and 1950's and Canadian writing in more recent times.

Skelton glories in the more curious aspects of his career, and indeed writes at length on his studies in the occult and his proficiency in benign witchcraft, aspects of a persona that found expression in some of his less known books, like *Spellcraft* and *Talismanic Magic*. As one whom experience has taught to take ghosts seriously, I find this aspect of Skelton as interesting as the rest, and a revealing insight into a writer who seems driven by the power of words, whether written in poems or spoken in spells.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

## BEAUTÉS EN MARGE

ROGER MAGINI, *Saint Copperblack*. Les Herbes Rouges, n.p.

ANDRÉE MAILLET, *Les Montréalais*. L'Hexagone/Typo-Nouvelles, n.p.

CHRISTIANE ST-PIERRE, *Sur les pas de la mer*. Editions d'Acadie, n.p.

L'ATTRACTION DE LA littérature réside dans la communication qui s'établit entre la voix du texte et celle du lecteur. L'expression personnelle ne peut réussir qu'à

condition d'offrir au moins à un groupe restreint, un code à partager. Ce sont d'ailleurs les textes qui visent un public particulier qui réussissent le plus. Roger Magini, Andrée Maillet et Christiane St-Pierre comprennent l'importance de l'être marginal et refusent de suivre les sentiers battus des belles-lettres ainsi que les clichés qui continuent de nourrir nos littératures nationales.

Avec *Sur les pas de la mer*, Christiane St-Pierre a reçu le prix littéraire France-Acadie en 1987. Le livre comprend dix "contes et nouvelles" précédés d'une introduction signée Marielle Cormier-Boudreau. Le premier conte, "A travers Julie," est hautement révélateur du réseau thématique qui domine *Sur les pas de la mer*. Il nous montre une narratrice tentée par une mort très douce: revivre l'aventure incompréhensible de la petite Julie. Cette dernière, attirée par la mer un jour de fièvre se laissera aller au désir de "connaître le monde, de l'autre côté du grand brouillard." Au-delà de la tragédie, une touchante solidarité unit les femmes à leur symbole: la mer. Dans "Hermance ou l'île de la tendresse," la petite héroïne, séduite par l'histoire de Léonie, réussit elle aussi à partir en mer tout en livrant à la folie douce sa maîtresse d'école. Le cas de "La Corde à linge" nous montre la sainte nitouche Marie-Rose séduite par la mère célibataire Evelyne. Seule la complicité entre les femmes semble pouvoir faire accéder les protagonistes de Christiane St-Pierre à la vraie vie, à la libération.

Cette structure thématique s'affirme particulièrement bien dans le dernier conte: "Complicité." Eléonore a été violée par le vaurien Jean-Eudes. C'est la mer qui, en engloutissant l'homme dans ses vagues, vengera la pauvre femme. La portée symbolique et idéologique du livre peut bien se résumer grâce à l'une des phrases de ce dernier conte: "Mère et mer prennent une même respiration, re-

prennent un même rythme." C'est la nature qui protège ainsi la femme contre la violence des hommes symbolisée par le vent.

Ecrivain québécois né en France, Roger Magini est marginal dans la mesure où il est associé à la littérature expérimentale. Ce n'est donc pas au niveau référentiel mais dans la signification du texte même qu'il se distingue, c'est-à-dire qu'il s'éloigne du centre, de ceux qui se contentent de peindre l'uniformité de leur société. *Saint Cooperblack* est un recueil de trois nouvelles dont la première, qui est aussi la plus longue, donne son titre au livre. Ayant préféré le silence à la parole, Cooperblack, garde-feu au milieu de sa forêt d'épinettes, se dédie à l'écriture, c'est-à-dire à l'auto-représentation d'un moi hanté par son écho. Une jeune aveugle, Shiny, viendra le troubler, le forcer à entrer dans l'univers de la parole. C'est l'oralité qui fait peur à celui qui a préféré le *graphiein* au *vécu*. En effet, puisque l'aveugle ne lit pas, elle pourra reléguer l'écriture à ce rang de supplément jadis si cher à un autre solitaire: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A cette question si théorique, Roger Magini sait donner une dimension des plus concrètes:

— Je ne suis qu'un cul pour toi, Cooper B., bonne à peloter, à baiser, à coudre tes belles chaussettes écoeurantes. Un cul, oui! Tu veux savoir la suite?

— T'as trop d'imagination, Shiny d'amour...

— Ecoute-moi bien, Cooper B., écoute-moi bien!

— Shiny d'amour...

— Ou tu parles, Cooper B., ou je crisse mon camp d'icitt', tabarnac! Je suis crevée de divaguer seule, de parler à un mur, à un monstre!

— Sais pas parler, Shiny, peut-être qu'en écrivant...

— Non, parle, maudit chien sale!

Après avoir parlé, Cooperblack retournera au silence, à l'introspection. Le profil

psychologique du protagoniste de la deuxième nouvelle est également fondé sur la fascination. A Topos, un architecte construit le Couvent des mendiants, mais il succombera au génie du lieu et ne pourra plus quitter la ville. La dernière des trois nouvelles a pour titre "Rome" et s'inscrit sous le signe des *Villes invisibles* d'Italo Calvino. Là aussi un voyageur écrivain se laisse engoutir pas les profondeurs d'une ville à la fois éternelle et imaginaire.

Un être entouré par son oeuvre c'est bien Andrée Maillet. Pas toujours compris des critiques, cette femme-écrivain demeure malgré tout l'un des phénomènes littéraires les plus intéressants au Québec. *Les Montréalais* (1987) comprend les ouvrages suivants: *Les Montréalais* (1962), *Nouvelles montréalaises* (1966), *Un Noël pour Chouchou* (1964), *Sir Alfred* (1972) et *Au concert avec Roy Royal*, nouvelle inédite et écrite en 1952. Cette nouvelle édition des contes d'Andrée Maillet sera fort utile aux amateurs ainsi qu'aux professeurs qui y trouveront une variété de textes pour leurs étudiants.

La perspective marginale d'Andrée Maillet s'apparente à celle du James Joyce de *Dubliners* et de l'Alberto Moravia des contes romains. Qu'il s'agisse des immigrants, des conspirateurs du dimanche ou de l'enfant qui découvre les mystères de la taverne où boit son père, Andrée Maillet demeure l'une des rares épiphanistes de la littérature québécoise. Cette poésie n'empêche pas que l'on frôle parfois le réalisme d'Albert Laberge.

Rien de pompeusement universel donc chez ces trois écrivains qui se penchent sur des objets littéraires peu fréquentés et qui cherchent leur voix sans se plier aux modes dictées par une majorité qui semble avoir perdu son imagination dans les cafés de la rue Saint-Denis en 1976.

ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ

## STRIKING EARTH

RICHARD SOMMER, *Fawn Bones*. Nu-Age Editions, \$8.95.

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Plummets and Other Partialities*. Sono Nis Press, \$16.95.

DI BRANDT, *questions i asked my mother*. Turnstone Press, \$7.95

SOMMER, GUSTAFSON AND BRANDT all write with a powerful sense of place, and are at their best when they do so. *Fawn Bones* is Richard Sommer's seventh book of poetry. The title is taken from a poem that recounts a ghoulish early morning discovery for two game wardens:

Fawn bones. Hard to talk about.

They want to belong to the fawn.

They want to nestle in young muscle & soft bright fur.

Sommer's poems often yoke disparate ideas together in ways that are subtle and elusive. He is most effective when firmly rooted in flesh and blood. In one poem he suggests commemorating the highway deaths of animals by putting up little cardboard signs stating "ANIMAL DEATH HERE," until the highways are littered with them. In another untitled poem the speaker and a woman examine their bodies and converse intimately, not sexually; an epiphany links flesh to earth in a fashion reminiscent of the Metaphysical poets:

I have smelled your skin in the sun itself  
striking earth and entering. Our conversation  
ended itself this way, in natural grace  
and deep sensing. And, of course, never ends.

Ralph Gustafson draws together in *Plummets and Other Partialities* essays and prefaces published between 1948 and 1985. Gustafson's prose, tantalizingly peppered with unidentified quotations of poetry, is not a quick read. The essays are primarily attempts to uncover the essence of poetry: he touches relationships between poetry and music, poetry and history, poetry and nationalism, poetry and morality. Gustafson can be at his least

interesting when writing critically about music ("Bayreuth in Review"), but when he writes emotionally, as he does in his treatment of Liszt ("Devil in a Cassock"), he can be moving. "Some Literary Reminiscences of the Eastern Townships" is the finest piece in the book. First published in *Ellipse* in 1981, it demonstrates the creative connection Gustafson's work has to the same region where Sommer resides:

It is not difficult to discover the basic reason why the Townships hold and attract writers and make them fall in love with what they offer. This stretch of lakes and rivers and hills and valleys is incomparably beautiful. I wish we could keep quiet about it and so preserve the Townships as they are. . . .

Gustafson refreshingly recalls other literary residents. As a child he enjoyed recitations of William Henry Drummond's *habitant* poems, and he still admires the peace they discovered between the two solitudes: "Whatever the limitations we may put to his poems, we must admit they are pretty well equalized by their tone of warmth and affection, and never a condensation. . . ."

Di brandt's first book gained her a nomination for the Governor General's Literary Awards. Brandt writes freshly, but some poems are little more than fragments. Now a resident of Winnipeg, brandt writes out of her repressed Mennonite childhood in Winkler, Manitoba: "betraying once & / for all the good Mennonite daughter i tried so / unsuccessfully to become." Her voice is prosaic, and a number of the poems are stream-of-consciousness prose poems. In the title poem she asks her parents one of the eternal questions, and is met with a scolding for questioning the Church's teachings:

. . . sometimes i just felt i would burst with all the unanswered questions inside me i thought of writing the *Country Guide* question & answer column but i didn't have stationery & anyway no one ever asked questions like that i imagined heaven as a huge schoolroom where all the questions of the

universe were answered once & for all God was the cosmic school inspector pointing eternally to a chalkboard as big as the sky . . .

Brandt writes with a sense of her place on the prairies by combining landscape and sensuality:

hold me my sweet on this  
flat chested earth with its  
wild shining surfaces . . .

In another poem she compares her steadfast love to "straight & true" Mennonite grain, and sees in her lover "the lake & trees miracle of you." In its forms, and their connections to earth, *questions i asked my mother* is an impressive first book.

ROSALIND EVE CONWAY

## DREAMS & FIRES

VALMAI HOWE, *The Dreams of Zoo Animals*. Nu-Age Editions, \$12.95.

ROBIN SKELTON, *Fires of the Kindred*. Porcepic Books, \$9.95.

*The Dreams of Zoo Animals* is one of those novels which comes along occasionally to startle and unsettle readers, and to challenge their perceptions about literature. An excellently written novel, it has the power to make a reader think. It is a novel written in the first person, using stream of consciousness techniques with constant shifts of time, one of the most difficult techniques to use successfully. Valmai Howe makes it work.

This novel has the intense focus and suppressed power of Virginia Woolf's writing. Yet, Woolf always maintains her power through to the end. Near the end of this novel, around the time of the trial of the narrator's lover, the book loses power. Howe becomes too intent on being mysterious and ambiguous. The narrator's motives, more or less recognizable throughout, suddenly become utterly opaque, and the lucid simplicity of the



character, which makes the difficult narrative technique so effective in the rest of the novel, fails.

However, the characters in this novel do remain vivid. The narrator, a young woman named Sarah, is in her late teens or early twenties at the time of narration. In flashback sequences, as well as through straight narration, she tells the reader the important events of her life, almost all of which revolve around four people: her father, her lover Leon, her best friend Emma and, to a much lesser extent, her grandmother (who dies part way through the novel). Her mother, a shadowy figure at best, appears always in concert with either Sarah's father or her grandmother.

Sarah's life is composed of a series of influences, actions by and reactions to those four figures. Through her narration, each comes vividly alive: her bullying, manipulative father, her caring, manipulative friend, her troubled, manipulative lover and her gentle, hurt grandmother. The one person who does not emerge so clearly is Sarah herself, perhaps because she is largely unknown to herself and is simply in process from reaction to reaction; whatever the reason, the reader's desire to know her seems to be matched only by Sarah's unknowing. Perhaps part of the apparent weakness of the ending of the novel is that when Sarah decides to get to know herself, away from the manipulative figures and strong influences of her father, lover and friend who have defined her, her own lucidity becomes opaque as she begins the long and confusing journey toward self-knowledge.

*Fires of the Kindred* by Robin Skelton is a completely different type of book. It is also a story of the coming of age of the two central characters, and may be even about the coming of age of humanity. However, rather than being "realistic," it is a "historical fantasy." The novel takes the reader back to what might have been our early beginnings as humankind, back

to the time of the earth-mother religion and its matriarchal society.

But although *Fires of the Kindred* uses many of the trappings of fantasy, it is largely concerned with romance, particularly the triangular romance between Plara, Gron and Skang, and the manipulative romance between Fleay and Talker. The novel is overtly concerned with these romantic involvements to the detriment of the interesting and central theme of change. The frequent concentration on the sexuality of different characters, sexual relationships between characters and sexual acts in general becomes a little tedious and, for the most part, does not serve to forward either the motion of the novel or the development of the characters.

The movement of a matriarchal society toward a patriarchy, and the opposite movement depicted through the conversion of Skang, is most interesting, and sensitively handled. The theme of harmony with the natural world is also important. However, despite the engaging strength of several of the themes, this novel is very difficult to read. Unfortunately Skelton has fallen into the trap of writing the narrative in two voices: the first, the voice of the narrator, uses ordinary, everyday late twentieth-century English. The second, the voices of the characters when they speak or think, uses a somewhat muddled mixture of modern English and a more "primitive" style. These two voices make the novel very difficult to follow. Furthermore, the double use of names for many characters and objects, and the illogical nature of the primitive language, make the reading unnecessarily laborious. When new names are suggested for objects in the world, part way through the novel, some coincide with current usage, such as "river," while some do not, such as "paeg" for "pig." When Skang enters the story halfway through and adds his inconsistent language from

his patriarchal society, the book becomes even more difficult to follow.

The characters frequently lack clear motivation and remain shadowy. They are neither true individuals nor simply members of a collectivity. The few who do stand out such as Fleay, Talker, Manka, Plara, Skang and Gron do so because of a single identifying characteristic. Blurred development and motivation cause the reader real problems. Why does Talker suggest they burn dead bodies instead of letting the pigs eat them, as has always been done before? Why is everyone so horrified at this idea? And why does the matriarchal deciding-body accept his suggestion when they are all so disturbed by it? Unanswerable questions such as these can be asked at almost every point of discussion or action in the novel, which serves only to confuse the reader increasingly as the novel proceeds.

*Fires of the Kindred* is an interesting experiment which largely fails. Its overt and passionate feminism is also distracting, although it is interesting to find such vehemence in a male writer. But Skelton's insistence that a community controlled by women is a good and natural community, whereas one controlled by men must immediately and inevitably become unharmonious and violent, is distasteful to a less extreme palate.

J. R. WYTENBROEK

## MODERNITÉ OUBLIÉE

ROBERT LAHAISE, *Guy Delahaye et la modernité littéraire*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

A LA PAGE 453 de cette merveilleuse étude savante de 549 pages, Robert Lahaise affirme: "Il nous semble que l'originalité manifeste des *Phases* et le modernisme percutant d'une *Mignonne* indûment ignorée pourraient mériter à leur auteur une relecture permettant de le mieux resituer dans son rôle d'avant-gardiste

mystico-surréaliste." On ne peut accuser l'historien de céder à la tentation de l'hagiographie, même s'il écrit au sujet de son père, Guillaume Lahaise, alias Guy Delahaye. En effet, toute la question de la modernité au Québec est à revoir, surtout parce que "chacun fait débiter la poésie avec sa génération."

Je n'hésiterai pas à appeler Guy Delahaye, Paul Morin, Marcel Dugas, René Chopin et quelques autres 'La Génération de 1910,' ou mieux, 'La Génération oubliée.' En effet, la littérature du Québec aurait pu entrer de plein pied dans la modernité dès le début de ce siècle. A cette époque la majorité de nos écrivains était au service du "terroirisme": l'idéologie dominante faite de messianisme agricuturiste, de nationalisme xénophobe et d'intolérance religieuse. Soudain quelques voix s'élèvent contre cette sclérose intellectuelle: ce sont les "exotistes" qui se rendent compte qu'il y a toujours un abbé Roy pour mettre l'imagination au cachot; ce sont les "exotistes" qui, comme le crie si bien René Chopin, ont *Le Coeur en exil* (1913).

C'est avec rigueur et sensibilité que Robert Lahaise retrace l'itinéraire qui mena son père de l'avant-garde littéraire à une ardente vie religieuse, à la médecine pratiquée avec une vaste charité. C'est peut-être là le destin de tout véritable artiste: psychiatre ou aliéné. On n'aura rien expliqué en littérature québécoise tant que l'on ne se sera vraiment penché sur la conjoncture exceptionnelle qui menait l'aliéniste Robert Lahaise au chevet de l'aliéné Emile Nelligan. Notre héritage spirituel vient de là, de cette phrase, bien des années plus tard, trouvée dans un livre d'un autre grand incompris: "Comme le docteur Lahaise qui fut si bon pour Nelligan." Qui, docteur Ferron (*Du fond de mon arrière-cuisine*), plus que l'idéologie il importe de saisir le sens du chemin qui mène de l'esthétique à la Croix. En effet, *L'Unique Voie à l'unique but* (1934), que

celui qui signait Guy Delahaye fit publier anonymement, n'est autre qu'un recueil de méditations sur la Passion du Christ.

Comment saisir tant de contradictions aux sources de notre modernité littéraire? L'ouvrage de Robert Lahaise me semble avant tout un travail de biographe. Il sera cependant indispensable à ceux qui voudront comprendre l'évolution et la nature de notre littérature au-delà des lamentables manuels qui ont permis à leurs pieux auteurs de diriger, pendant longtemps, une conspiration du silence contre tous ceux qui refusaient d'accepter le conformisme à la Soeur de Sainte-Anne.

A mon avis, la partie la plus importante du livre est la deuxième: "Delahaye le Moderniste." Ces pages stimuleront de vastes études littéraires; mais elles commenceront par étonner. En les lisant je me croyais dans le Paris de l'avant-siècle, plus précisément chez les *Zutistes* entre Arthur Rimbaud et Germain Nouveau. Celui qui connaît cette *Bohème littéraire* se doit d'admettre que c'est à bras ouverts que Guy Delahaye (Quelle coïncidence: le nom du camarade de classe de Rimbaud!) aurait été reçu parmi ces Symbolistes et Décadents:

L'on rive un lien, l'on pousse un verrou,  
La tête illuminée on la rase,  
Et l'être incompris est dit un fou.

Si le contenu de *Les Phases* est de nature prophétique, la forme, elle, nous montre que cette folie littéraire fait preuve de la plus haute organisation. On découvre en fait que ce poète est tout aussi préoccupé de l'architecture de son livre que l'avaient été avant lui des leurs Charles Baudelaire et Stéphane Mallarmé.

Mais ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable c'est *Mignonne, allons voir si la Rose*. . . Avec ce livre le docteur Lahaise fait de l'avant-garde dix ans avant que tous ces mouvements ne se lancent à la conquête de l'Europe littéraire, "cinq ans avant que

Marcel Duchamp fasse à la Joconde barbe et moustache."

Le génie de Guy Delahaye consiste à avoir posé le problème fondamental du Symbolisme déchiré entre l'esprit et le monde. Un peu comme Hegel à la fois séduit et irrité par le cristal des pyramides, le docteur à touché aux limites du Formalisme. Il a su en rire et, au-delà de sa crise, il a saisi que l'histoire nie le Symbolisme et que le langage crée son propre sens entre le rêve et la douleur. On ne peut que remercier Robert Lahaise de nous avoir fourni un solide point de départ où le mystère théorique et l'histoire littéraire se regardent en chiens de faïence. Tant de nos écrivains qui suivent encore les sentiers battus devraient se rendre compte que notre imagination, comme le coeur de René Chopin, est toujours en exil.

ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ

## BOUNDARIES

CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY, *Permugenesis*. Nightwood Editions, \$7.95.

CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY, *The Radiant Inventory*. McClelland & Stewart, \$9.95.

IN HIS REVIEW of *The Radiant Inventory* (*The Canadian Forum*, April 1989), Victor Coleman suggests that Dewdney's *Permugenesis* and *The Immaculate Perception* were "mistaken for poetry by some reviewers." We must consider, however, that at least *Permugenesis* calls itself a "Poem" on its copyright page, and its publishers call it "a book-length prose poem" on the promo sheet they give reviewers. And the text of this book is fragmented grammatically, so that we would be hard pressed to read it as straight prose. The point to be made is that the difficulty reviewers and critics have in "slotting" Dewdney's work arises because he transcends literary boundaries in a unique way. His writing is challenging and diffi-

cult because he experiments, not simply with fragmented lines or with transgressed linearity, but with diction itself:

TRIASSAC AFTERNOONS BLENDING IMPERCEPTIBLY INTO early forest morning. Each huge spring bud a transparent Cenozoic asylum. All mammals quickened wings unfolding into bats. Every organism burning more fiercely. Distant radar tunnels. The glass machinery intact as remoras vacuous and cold that lurk in hearts burning bittersweet dreams.

Dewdney reaches beyond the lexicon of the humanities and into the scientific realm, using language that he knows will escape the knowledge of most of his readers. He obviously expects a great deal of us; we must do a lot of "looking up" if we are to understand his work, but often it seems that the resonance and rhythm of his terms are paramount and not necessarily their meaning.

If nothing else, Dewdney can make language seethe. Through his word choice a forest world in *Permugenesi*s can be taken as a real place, but it also pulses, is erotic, relentless, and swollen. Each fragmented sentence savours both the awe-inspiring beauty of nature and the erotic "nature" of a woman's (women's) nakedness. The forest metamorphoses into the body, the body back into the forest: "The forest is filled with nostrils, genitals, hands & formulates its own disguises." The woman is naked; "The forest is naked."

*Permugenesi*s is indeed like a rich and extended lovemaking — it can go on too long. The difficulty of the poetic prose; the demanding syntax of each line; the sense in which each line is a "take" — a suggestion or image which exists only momentarily, with little apparent connection to what comes before or after — all of these "problems" add up to a book that is virtually inaccessible. But then Dewdney is clearly challenging our notions of accessibility. Perhaps he wants us to read in a new way, to make connections and associations that have nothing to do with logic, or cause and effect.

Having said that, we find in several poems in *The Radiant Inventory* an apparent retreat to a more conventional lyric form. While in this, his latest, book Dewdney continues to pursue his interest in the relationships between consciousness, physiology and science, his lyric poems are recognizably lyric and his prose poems are perhaps less discontinuous than those in his previous volumes.

Dewdney's lyric poetry, while very different from what critics call his "avant-garde work," is not divorced from it. In all of his work the physiological, scientifically knowable world interlocks with the imaginative realm; what and especially *how* we "know" are, finally, questioned. Perhaps even more important, sensual, personal experience escapes its fleshly limits. These last several lines from "The Owls" exhibit Dewdney's skill in wedding intimacy and a transcendent power in his language:

Yet now, embracing underwater,  
our bodies come unlocked and  
we gush upwards, rising  
from the dark lake  
in a storm of music. And there  
in the absolute theatre of night  
we fuse, recover  
the lost disorder of the stars.

Dewdney has always written very movingly of the interconnection between humanity and "the stars."

CYNTHIA MESSENGER

## BOOKS RECEIVED

### 1) Anthologies

LEAGUE OF CANADIAN POETS COMMITTEE, *Garden Varieties: An Anthology of the Top Fifty Poems From the National Poetry Contest*. Cormorant, \$8.95.

BEVERLY DAURIO, ed., *Love & Hunger*. Aya, \$9.95.

STUART GILLESPIE, ed., *The Poets on the Classics: An Anthology*. Routledge, \$49.95.

- JACQUES GOUBOUT, *Plamondon: Un coeur de roqueur*. Éditions de l'Homme, \$29.95.
- IRVING LAYTON, ed., *Rawprint*. Concordia University Printing Services, n.p.
- JOHN METCALF, ed., *The Macmillan Anthology*. Macmillan, \$14.95.
- GRETA HOFMANN NEMIROFF, ed., *Celebrating Canadian Women: Prose and Poetry By and About Women*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, \$35.00.
- TED STONE, ed., *13 Canadian Ghost Stories*. Western Producer Prairie Books, \$22.95.
- ROSEMARY SULLIVAN, ed., *Poetry by Canadian Women*. Oxford, \$19.95.
- 2) The Arts
- DANIEL GAGNON, *Riopelle: grandeur nature*. La collection Approches 2. Fides, \$19.95.
- W. McALLISTER JOHNSON, *Art History: Its Use and Abuse*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$45.00.
- 3) Children's Literature
- GINETTE ANFOUSSE, *Le Héros de Rosalie*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Roman Jeunesse 12.
- , *Rosalie s'en va-t-en guerre*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$6.95. Roman Jeunesse 19.
- CHRISTINE BROUILLET, *Le Caméléon*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Roman Jeunesse 9.
- , *La Montagne noire*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Roman Jeunesse 14.
- DENIS CÔTÉ, *Les Prisonniers du zoo*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Roman Jeunesse 11.
- , *Le voyage dans le temps*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$6.95. Roman Jeunesse 18.
- SYLVIE DESROSIERS, *Le mystère du lac Carré*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Roman Jeunesse 15.
- , *Qui a peur des fantômes?* Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Roman Jeunesse 10.
- BERTRAND GAUTHIER, *Le blabla des jumeaux*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$6.95. Premier Roman 5.
- , *Pas fous, les jumeaux!* Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Premier Roman 1.
- , *La revanche d'Ani Croche*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Premier Roman 13.
- GILLES GAUTHIER, *Babouche est jalouse*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$6.95. Premier Roman 7.
- , *Ne touchez pas à ma Babouche*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Premier Roman 3.
- GUY GOYER, *Les plumes d'amour et les enfants des hommes*. Éditions des Plaines, \$7.95.
- MARIE-FRANCINE HÉBERT, *Un blouson dans la peau*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$6.95. Premier Roman 6.
- , *Un monstre dans les céréales*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Premier Roman 2.
- ROBERT MUNSCH, *L'avion de Julie*, illust. by Michael Martchenko. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p.
- , *Les pompiers*, illust. by Michael Martchenko. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p.
- ROGER PARE, *Plaisirs d'aimer*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$14.95. Incl. 1 livre, 2 casse-tête, 2 affiches.
- RAYMOND PLANTE, *Caméra, cinéma, tralala*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$6.95. Roman Jeunesse 17.
- , *Le roi de rien*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Roman Jeunesse 16.
- , *Véloville*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$6.95. Premier Roman 8.
- FRANÇOIS PRATTE, *Le secret d'Awa*. Éditions la courte échelle, n.p. Premier Roman 4.
- JOCELINE SANSCHAGRIN, *La fille aux cheveux rouges*. Éditions la courte échelle, \$6.95. Roman Jeunesse 20.
- ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON and VICTOR GAD (ed. and illus.), *Happy Thought: and Other Poems for Children*. Midway Publications, n.p.
- 4) Criticism
- ROBERT LECKER, JACK DAVID, and ELLEN QUIGLEY, *Canadian Writers and Their Works: Essays on Form, Context, and Development*. Fiction Series, vols. 3 & 9. ECW Press, n.p.
- STEPHEN OWEN, *Mi-Lou: Poetry and the Labyrinth of Desire*. Harvard Univ. Press, \$29.95.
- LILIANE WELCH, *Seismographs: Selected Essays and Reviews*. Ragweed, \$12.95.
- 5) Fiction
- FRANCE BOISVERT, *Les Samourailles*. L'Hexagone, \$16.95.
- MICHAEL BULLOCK, *Randolph Cranstone and the Veil of Maya*. Third Eye, n.p.
- , *Randolph Cranstone Takes the Inward Path*. Third Eye, n.p.
- JÉAD-CLAUDE CASTEX, *Le gros lot*. Éditions des Plaines, \$8.95.

BEVERLEY DAURIO, *Justice*. Moonstone Press, \$7.95.

JEAN-YVES DUPUIS, *Bof génération*. Editions Québec/Amérique, \$15.95.

MAURICE GAGNON, *La mort à pas feutrés*. VLB éditeur, n.p.

LOUIS GAUTHIER, *Le pont de Londres*. VLB éditeur, n.p.

SHAUN HERRON, *At the House on Pine Street*. Macmillan, \$19.95.

WAYNE JOHNSTON, *The Time of their Lives*. Oberon, \$29.95/14.95.

JONES, *South of Queen Street*. Streetcar Number Two. Streetcar Editions, \$4.00.

ROBERT LALONDE, *Le fou du père*. Boréal, \$13.95.

MICHEL MICHAUD, *Coyote*. VLB éditeur, n.p. Préface de Philippe Djian.

JAMES MICHENER, *Journey: A Quest for Canadian Gold*. Macmillan, \$24.95.

JEAN-JACQUES PELLETIER, *L'homme trafiqué*. Editions du Préambule, n.p.

MARION QUEDNAU, *The Butterfly Chair*. Random House, \$9.95.

ROBERT SAINT-AMOUR, *Visiteurs d'hier*. Editions Québec/Amérique, \$16.95.

#### 6) Folklore

GUY LAFLÈCHE, *Histoire du mythe*, vol. 1, *les Saints Martyrs canadiens*. Singulier, \$35.00.

———, *Le Martyre d'Isaac Jogues par Jérôme Lalemant*, vol. 2, *les Saints Martyrs canadiens*. Singulier, \$35.00.

#### 7) History

CHRISTOPHER ARMSTRONG and H. V. NELLES, *Southern Exposure: Canadian Promoters in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$35.00.

PETER NEARY, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World 1929-1949*. McGill-Queen's, \$32.95.

GEOFFREY W. TAYLOR, *The Railway Contractors*. Sono Nis Press, \$17.95.

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *A Social History of Canada*. Penguin, \$27.95.

#### 8) Life-Writing

GÉRARD FILION, *Fais ce que peux: En guise de mémoires*. Boréal, \$24.95.

STUART RAMSAY TOMPKINS, *A Canadian's Road to Russia: Letters from the Great War*

*Decade*, ed. Doris H. Pieroth. Univ. of Alberta Press, \$30.00.

MARGARET WHITEHEAD, ed., *They Call Me Father: Memoirs of Father Nicolas Coccola*. Recollections of the Pioneers of British Columbia, vol. 7. Univ. of British Columbia Press, \$29.95.

#### 9) Native People

DOROTHY ANGER, *Noywa'mkisk: Vignettes of Bay St. George Micmacs*. Bay St. George Regional Indian Band Council, \$7.95.

#### 10) Paperback Reprints

MORLEY CALLAGHAN, *The Loved and the Lost*. Macmillan, \$6.95.

LOVAT DICKSON, *Wilderness Man: The Strange Story of Grey Owl*. Macmillan, \$5.95.

DOUGLAS FETHERLING, *Gold Diggers of 1929: Canada and the Great Stock Market Crash*. Macmillan, \$6.95.

GILBERT LAROCQUE, *Serge d'entre les morts*. VLB éditeur, n.p.

GREY OWL, *Selected Wildlife Stories*, ed. E. E. Reynolds. Macmillan, \$5.95.

———, *Tales of an Empty Cabin*. Macmillan, \$5.95.

———, *The Men of the Last Frontier*. Macmillan, \$5.95.

ALICE MUNRO, *Who Do You Think You Are?* Macmillan, \$5.95.

#### 11) Poetry

LAUREN BOYINGTON, *Precision Vacuum*. Streetcar Number One. Streetcar Editions, \$4.00.

MICHAEL LYNCH, *These Waves of Dying Friends*. Contact II Publications, \$5.00.

#### 12) Reference

R. B. BYERS, ed., *Canadian Annual Review of Politics and Public Affairs, 1985*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$50.00.

ANDRÉ GAGNON and ANN GAGNON, *Canadian Books for Young People/Livres canadiens pour la jeunesse*. 4th ed. Bilingual ed. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$14.95.

SHARON K. HALL, ed., *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Yearbook 1987*. Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index, vol. 50. Gale Research, \$95.00.

NORBERT SPEHNER, *Ecrits sur le fantastique: Bibliographie analytique des études & essais*

*sur le fantastique publiés entre 1900 et 1985*.  
Préambule, n.p.

ALLAN WEISS, *A Contemporary Bibliography*  
1983. ECW Press, \$70.00.

13) Science & Nature

LOUISE DE KIRILINE LAWRENCE, *To Whom  
The Wilderness Speaks*. Natural Heritage,  
\$14.95.

14) Translation

SAAD ELKHADEM, *The Plague*. Bilingual ed.,  
trans. by Saad El-Gabalawy. York Press,  
\$6.95.

NEGOVAN RAJIC, *Seven Roses for a Baker*, trans.  
by David Lobdell. Oberon, \$25.95/12.95.

SZLOMA RENGICH, *When Paupers Dance*,  
trans. by Zigmund Jampel. Véhicule, \$12.95.

GAIL SCOTT, *Héroïne*, trans. by Susanne de  
Lotbinière-Harwood. Editions du remue-  
ménage, \$16.95.

15) Travel

P. G. DOWNES, *Sleeping Island: The Story of  
One Man's Travels in the Great Barren  
Lands of the Canadian North*. Western Pro-  
ducer Prairie Books, \$18.95.

GARY and JOAN MCGUFFIN, *Where Rivers  
Run: A 6,000-mile Exploration of Canada by  
Canoe*. Stoddart, \$28.95.

JEFF MACINNIS with WADE ROWLAND, *Polar  
Passage: The Historic First Sail Through the  
Northwest Passage*. Random House, \$21.95.

16) Women's Studies

MARJORIE AGOSIN, *Women of Smoke: Latin  
American Women in Literature and Life*.  
Williams-Wallace, \$9.95.

Arab world all receive close attention, and the illustrations and diagrams are carefully chosen and clear. Also from Cambridge is the updated *Chambers English Dictionary* (\$27.95), with a strong emphasis on "international English." Bruce G. Wilson's *Colonial Identities: Canada from 1760 to 1815* (National Archives of Canada, \$24.95) combines capsule histories of episodes in Canada's past with colour illustrations of maps, paintings, literary first edition pages, fur trade accounts, and other manuscript items from the NAC collection.

*Year's Work in English Studies 1985*, vol. 66, ed. Laurel Brake (Humanities Press International, \$110.00), includes an extensive analytic and evaluative survey of Canadian criticism published during the year, pp. 702-19. *Literary Archives Guide* (National Archives of Canada, n.p.) describes the major post-Confederation Literary collections acquired by the NAC Manuscript Division before 30 September 1987, from Acorn and Allan to Waddington and Weaver. *Dictionnaire de l'Amérique Française*, ed. Charles Dufresne *et al.* (Univ. of Ottawa, \$34.95), provides brief identifications of persons, places, and institutions throughout French North America, from St. Boniface to Louisiana.

Jean Royer's *Introduction à la poésie québécoise* (Bibliothèque québécoise, \$9.95) surveys changes in Quebec poetry from the days of the first patriotic and religious writers, through the years of *terroir*, *Refus global*, *Hexagone*, and *Parti Pris*, to contemporary feminism, multiculturalism, and verbal play. *Les Textes poétiques du Canada français 1606-1867* (vol. 2, 1806-1826), ed. Jeanne d'Arc Lortie (Fides, \$49.95), samples the work of Mermet, Bibaud, Quesnel, and numerous others; extensively annotated, the volume challenges canonical norms by drawing substantially on periodical verse and manuscript material.

Reprints and selections include *Infinite Worlds: The Poetry of Louis Dudek*, ed. Robin Blaser (Véhicule, \$12.95); Guy Delahaye, *Oeuvres* (Hurtubise HMH, n.p.); and George Woodcock, *Powers of Observation* (Quarry, n.p.), the last a series of feuillets printed first in *City & Country Home*.

W.N.

## REFERENCE

FROM Cambridge University Press comes Robert Foster's elegant edition of a history of *The Middle Ages* (vol. 1, 350-950; \$14.95); Byzantium, The Kingdom of the Franks, and the

\*\*\* HEINZ LEHMANN, *The German Canadians 1750-1937*. Trans. & ed. Gerhard P. Bessler. Jespersen, \$48.00 There are many parallels between Heinz Lehmann's *The German Canadians 1750-1937* and Marcel Giraud's *The Métis in the Canadian West*. Both were the work of foreign scholars working in Canada during the 1930's, both were published decades

ago in Europe and first appeared in English translation in 1986, and both remain, despite much later research, the most exhaustive works on their respective subjects. *The German Canadians* is actually a compilation by its translator-editor of two books by Lehmann, *Zur Geschichte des Deutschtums in Kanada* and *Das Deutschtum in West Kanada*, originally published in 1931 and 1939 respectively, and two articles on German immigration into Canada after World War I. They fit well into a single cohesive narrative, and Bassler has added a lengthy and well-annotated introduction which brings us up to date by discussing more recent evidence of early German immigration into Canada that was not available when Lehmann was carrying out his research. Together, *The German Canadians 1750-1937* forms the fullest account to date of the history of the large and lengthy pre-World War II German immigration into Canada, a subject that up to now has been surprisingly neglected.

G.W.

## ON THE VERGE

\*\*\* *The Journals of George M. Dawson: British Columbia, 1875-8*, edited by Douglas Cole and Bradley Lockner. UBC Press, 2 vols., \$35.00 ea. George Mercer Dawson was a striking figure in the records of Canadian exploration, a kind of scientific Toulouse Lautrec, dwarfed by childhood illness into a small, sharply intelligent hunchback, but inspired by the passion of enquiry. Virtually ignoring his physical disabilities, Dawson travelled far in the Canadian West in the hard days before the railways had been built, and in fact, working for the Boundary Commission and the Geological Survey during the 1870's, he assembled and plotted much of the information that led to establishing the route of the CPR. But Dawson was more than a mere surveyor; he was interested in the broad range of the sciences, so that living plants and animals were as important to him as fossils, and human societies as worth studying as those of bees or bison. Dawson wrote only for his colleagues; one reads him in scientific journals and in publications of the Geological Survey or not at all. Yet he was a man of multiple awareness, as becomes evident in these journals of his British Columbian travels, now for the first time published. They are first and foremost the working diary of a trav-

elling geologist, noting his observations of the surface of the land and speculating on its inner structure. But there are also clear and perceptive observations of the habits of animals and birds, sketches of characters encountered in the frontier society of the coast, and above all quite extensive notes on the Coast Indian cultures, which Dawson was one of the first to report in detail. Though there are some fragments of very bad verse, Dawson could — when the landscape moved him — weave some fine lyrical prose into describing it. Above all, he projects himself, alert, stoical and in his muted way heroic.

G.W.

\*\*\* MICHAEL PAYNE, *The Most Respectable Place in the Territory*. Canadian Parks Service, \$11.95. This is a well-documented account, purged of the mock heroics of recent popular histories of the fur trade, of daily life in one of the great Hudson's Bay Company depots, York Factory on the bay itself. It covers the main facets of ordinary living outside the activities that can be classified as trade; it writes of social relations, work and leisure patterns, sickness and medical care, education, and religious and even intellectual life. The people of York Factory in fact survived as much by their ingenuity as by their fortitude. The servants were not the cowed toilers of many accounts; they often stood out for better conditions and successfully defied injustice, which in fact was rarely offered since the officers recognized that their own peace and security depended on relative harmony between the two classes. Some individuals were badly affected by the isolation, but most seem to have created individual or collective leisure patterns that filled the hours and years of their engagements. Perhaps most striking is that when the engagements came to an end a surprising number elected to stay. Deficiencies in food seem to have been in nutritional value rather than in quantity. In most seasons the tables were amply filled; it was the lack of fresh food which caused the scurvy that, apart from drowning, was the principal cause of death. By exploring these various aspects of post life through contemporary documents, Michael Payne convincingly suggests that the company's servants probably lived better than they would have done in contemporary London or the new towns of the industrial revolution, while the officers, whose salaries were often as great as the incomes of English country gentlemen, probably found their greatest hardship in the lack of enough things to spend their money on.

G.W.



## BENTLEY'S KATIE, BACHOFEN, & PSYCHOLOGY

BENTLEY'S EDITION of *Malcolm's Katie* in general renders yeoman service to students of one of Canada's most considerable and interesting poets. Thus, Bentley provides a text of Crawford's romance that is far better than any previously available. Not only does he correct the errors which "decorated" (xi) the first edition of *Malcolm's Katie*, but he also purges the text of Garvin's later "improvements." Bentley likewise provides a very useful editorial apparatus, including a lengthy critical introduction, detailed explanatory notes, and the manuscript fragments of *Malcolm's Katie*. Bentley's editing of the poem is accordingly (in the words of a colleague nationally recognized in nineteenth-century American textual studies) "most responsible." The only major deficiency in Bentley's apparatus is its lack of an annotated secondary bibliography.

A consideration at some length of Bentley's critical introduction is warranted if only because of its likely influence upon users of his edition. Bentley's essay is, alas, by no means a model of stylistic felicity and ease. Somewhat given to overloaded sentences, his unduly laboured writing making for equally laborious reading. Bentley likewise displays on occasion the over-solemn pretentiousness of too much contemporary academic writing. "It is — to elevate Katie's closing speech to the level of its implications for Crawford — to reconcile the demands of the proper lady and the woman writer by inscribing within a patriarchal discourse (the Ten-

nysonian domestic idyl, the Christian myth of Eden) a version of the female consciousness that such potent forces of patriarchy as education and economics have rendered self-contradictory" (xxvi-xxvii). As both a professor of English and a critic of leading stature in his field, Bentley has a responsibility to provide a better model of critical expression than the preceding (which conjures up the indomitable Alley Oop with his mighty cudgel astride a brontosaur).

Bentley's analysis of *Malcolm's Katie* employs critical theory, utilizing in particular feminist approaches taken from Mary Poovey and others. Thus, Bentley reads Crawford's romance in terms of two opposing tendencies noted by Poovey in Mary Woolstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen. The first is the compliance of these authors as "proper ladies" with the conventional expectations that are attached to established genres. However, such forms are also used subversively by a second authorial personality. This is the "woman writer," who is a covert feminist concerned with "female identity" (xv). The "woman writer" uses "strategies of indirection, obliqueness, and doubling" to contrive for herself within conventional "structures" "opportunities for self-expression" (xvi). The dichotomy defined by Poovey is in Bentley's view reflected by *Malcolm's Katie*. For instance, the critic sees Katie's concluding, "if I knew my mind" (vii.40), as expressing Crawford the "woman writer." Her heroine's apparently insignificant afterthought obliquely yet complexly suggests the Victorian female's unhappy lot in her patriarchal society. Thus, Katie's last words may for Bentley imply either (1) "a final failure of self-confidence," or (2) "a chilling admission of [the] alienation [of Crawford's heroine] from . . . her very identity," or (3) a self-protective "*pretence* of uncertainty and ignorance" (xxvi). Such subtle insinuations of feminist perceptions

into a male-generated literary form may indeed occur in *Malcolm's Katie*. However, more significant for that poem is its creator's bold and brilliantly successful appropriation of the masculine-gendered Romantic role of "strong poet."<sup>1</sup> That forthright strategy for dealing with a male-dominated literary culture is reflected in the phallic symbolism of *Malcolm's Katie*, and in its imaginative and metrical-phonetic potency.

It should also be noted that ideological and academic viewpoints such as feminist theory have a way of preventing the full appreciation of complex human realities. Thus, Bentley's analyses of Katie's opening and concluding responses to Max basically ignore their leavening element of playfulness. Katie as a sportive, "spirited," and very erotic young woman is engaging Max in a benevolent sexual game-playing. This variously involves combat or contest, teasing, and intercourse on the emotional and intellectual planes as a substitute or correlative for physical union. In such a context, could not Katie's final "if I knew my mind!" be simply a playful paralepsis? Crawford's heroine indeed knows her mind, and Max knows full well that she knows it. But Katie is playing for the mutual stimulation of herself and her husband a seductively teasing game. That combines evasion with alternating "show and hide" so as to lead into hide and seek. Similarly, Katie's "You build them [i.e., words] up that I may push them down" (1.36) is an adult version of games based upon combat and/or a reciprocal give and take, "back and forth," up and down. This last sort of play gives spirit to a relationship while helping to work out its tensions.

Bentley's feminism does not only disregard significant human phenomena. The critic's feminist interpretations likewise illustrate the danger in imposing contemporary ideologies upon the past. That can all too easily produce distorted or incorrect assessments of works with perspec-

tives differing materially from our own. In this regard, Bentley's feminism leads him into two complementary errors concerning *Malcolm's Katie*. These are to unduly stress Crawford's negative views about gender, while underemphasizing the predominant positive. To restore the proper proportion, it must be noted that *Malcolm's Katie* does not present men as being mainly women's oppressors or possessors. Alfred indeed proclaims he is courting Katie for her economic "use value" (xvii). But Alfred in so asserting (1) speaks as the villain of the piece, and (2) is in part attempting to deny his very real love for Katie. The girl's father, although far too "possessive" (xvi) of his only child, likewise dearly cherishes her. He will not force her to marry Alfred, and experiences deep anguish over her possibly accepting the wrong suitor. As for Max, he is obviously (in keeping with Crawford's romantic idealism about love and marriage) the man divinely elected to be Katie's companion, partner, lover and soul-mate. In this relational context, the very tensions between the sexes seen in Katie's "talk[ing] back" (xvi) to Max contribute to a dialectic developing both parties.

A valuable corrective to the limiting and distorting tendencies of Bentley's contemporary ideologies would have been greater use of the "old historicism." Bentley indeed sometimes employs that method to very good effect, as when he relates Katie to Ruskin's "Of Queens' Gardens." How more such historical scholarship could have offset Bentley's ideological biases is illustrated by his statement that "Where *homo economicus* rules[,] all things . . . become commodities . . . in an economy based on a gold, or, more often . . . a silver, standard" (xxiv). Bentley in his academic humanist's distaste for matters pecuniary misses a probable socio-political antithesis for Crawford between gold and silver. In this regard, *Malcolm's*

*Katie* was written against the background of the Great Depression of 1873-96.<sup>2</sup> That long, deep slump was in North America particularly cruel to small pioneering farmers like Max. Such men in the U.S. often espoused the populist cause of bimetallism with free coinage of silver (the aim of which was to increase the money supply and thus raise the prices of agricultural commodities).<sup>3</sup> The call for bimetallism was in turn opposed by economic conservatives who favoured the gold standard. Given this debate, silver may for Crawford have a populist connotation, and gold a reinforced connection with established wealth. This antithesis is implied by the poet through connecting silver initially with Max, and gold mainly with Malcolm. In the former case, silver becomes a fairly obvious populist symbol in the engagement ring Max hammers from his "first well-priz'd wage" (13). The silver ring is a symbol of Max's love for Katie as inseparable from the economic hopes and strivings of a small man regarding his dreams. The contrast between such aspiring effort and the harsh realities of a depression brings overtones of both irony and pathos to Crawford's celebration of the pioneer yeoman.

We can also, using historical "source" scholarship, give *Malcolm's Katie* a feminist reading in terms taken from its own age. Thus, Crawford's views about the sexes and their relations appear to have been extensively influenced from Bachofen's *Mutterrecht* (1861).<sup>4</sup> To begin with, Crawford seems to have espoused the German scholar's thesis of a primordial cultural stage of female "hetaerism." Such licence as having for Bachofen a natural correlative in luxuriant swamp vegetation is suggested by Crawford's yonic water lily. That flower implies how Katie is moved by the hetaeric "tellurism" (97) of primeval woman towards an unbridled sexual expression. For instance, Crawford's heroine intending to pick yonic

water lilies runs over obviously phallic logs. On this occasion her long hair, for Bachofen a counterpart to swamp luxuriance, flies "wild" (III.200) behind her. Katie's naturally promiscuous eroticism may in turn be restrained by the *ethos* of Bachofen's "Demetrian" matriarchy. In that cultural stage, sexual relations are restricted to monogamous marriage (established by women to stop the male exploitation accompanying hetaerism). Such regulation of female *libido* may be implicitly contrasted by Crawford with that of the patriarchy. First and foremost, woman's sexuality is controlled in Demetrian society by her own initiative rather than a male authority. This is suggested by Katie's self-imposed fidelity to Max. Moreover, the Demetrian sexual code does not, like the patriarchal, involve a severe repression of the female's natural eroticism. Rather, Katie's Demetrian faithfulness concentrates her primal hetaeric sex-drive upon a single object. That focusing at once regulates and intensifies woman's desire, a happy combination implied through Max and Katie's firstborn. The child is called Alfred, suggesting his mother's amorous attraction to his namesake. However, this "hetaeric" yen has at once been restrained by and displaced into Katie's monogamous passion for Max.<sup>5</sup>

Bachofen's Demetrian matriarchy may thus provide Crawford with a basis for solutions to some critical and difficult sexual problems. Demetrian society also seems to have given the poet a vision of a possible utopia for her own day. In this regard, Bachofen's matriarchy fulfils the ideals proclaimed by the French Revolution, and espoused by nineteenth-century liberal/leftist thinkers. Thus, the Demetrian world is an idyll "of love, of union, of peace" (79), of a "universal fraternity among all men" (80), of "universal freedom and equality" (80). The patriarchal golden age likewise has a heroic aspect,

Demetrian woman's "unblemished beauty . . . chastity and high-mindedness" (83) moving the male "to defy danger, to seek out adventure, and to serve beauty" (84). In that way, the matriarchy encourages a constructive expression of masculine phallic energy. Both the heroic and the pastoral sides of Demetrian culture are reborn through the romance of Max and Katie. Gordon is inspired by his beloved's "beauty . . . chastity and high-mindedness" with precisely the chivalric virtues that Bachofen mentions. These are in turn devoted by Max to re-establishing the Demetrian arcadia with its liberal/democratic/humanist principles. Gordon's success in that endeavour is suggested by Crawford's final scene, in which an infant Alfred, a mature Max and a rejuvenated Malcolm are all happily centred upon Katie. This tableau brings to mind Bachofen's description of the matriarchal Eden:

[a] dominant mother lavishing eternal loving care on an ever dependent son who, growing more physically than spiritually, lives beside his mother to a ripe old age, enjoying the peace and abundance of an agricultural life. (81)

Just as the Demetrian Eden represents for Bachofen the "fullness of a nation's youth" (84), so Crawford associates her matriarchal utopia with the burgeoning of a newly created Canada through its frontier. The poet thereby suggests her country's pioneering is (or at least ideally should be) largely feminine in its inspiration/spirit. In this regard, some central emphases of Crawford's frontier society (the providing of material plenty, love, the family) arise from womanly nurture and relatedness.<sup>6</sup> It is to the realization of such feminine values that the strength and phallic drive of the male pioneer are devoted. Similarly, Crawford's historical *mythos* of Canadian nation-building subsumes the masculine faith in linear progress (suggested by westward expansion) into a female affirmation of regenerative

cyclicity (implied through the restoration of the ancient Demetrian utopia).<sup>7</sup> Crawford accordingly presents Canada's pioneering from what could be regarded as a feminist perspective.

Bentley therefore seems wrong in suggesting that *Malcolm's Katie* manifests throughout the patriarchal oppression of women. Rather, patriarchy appears in Crawford's conclusion to be reconciled with the Demetrian in a balanced, harmonious synthesis. Such a union is intimated by Max and little Alfred becoming Malcolm's male inheritors through "motherright" (vested in Katie as her father's heiress, and exercised through her free choice of her husband). However, Crawford's Demetrian matriarchy is severely threatened by a degenerate form of the patriarchal in Bachofen's Dionysus. That solar deity, who seductively combines "sensuous beauty and transcendent radiance" (101), is represented by Alfred with his "Saxon-gilded locks [and] . . . fair, clear face" (III.57). Like Bachofen's Dionysus, Alfred is associated with an insane frenzy, with the serpent, and with an orientation "toward matter and the embellishment of physical existence" (102). Moreover, just as the Dionysus of *Motherright* causes a reversion among women to the Paphian, so Alfred (1) is a burnt-out ladykiller who (2) tries Katie's fidelity. In this regard, Alfred may, like Bachofen's Dionysus as reviving hetaerism, represent a cultural decadence. More specifically, Alfred, who is probably British<sup>8</sup> could be meant to suggest the moral and spiritual decay of Europe. He would do so alike as a libertine, a materialist and a nihilist. Such Old World decadence would in turn be contrasted with the revival in Canada of the Demetrian Eden (a cultural renewal in which Crawford's villain ultimately shares to imply a historical cycle of death and rebirth).

Alfred's negative Dionysian connotations are pertinent to Bentley's discussion

of Katie's two suitors. The critic argues that Crawford partly subverts the convention of tracing a heroine's maturing through her relations to a "right" and a "wrong" suitor. Thus, Bentley maintains that Crawford (1) makes her villain attractive with his intellect and eloquence and (2) variously undercuts both Max's outlook and his stature. In this connection, Bentley is very good on the ironies qualifying Max's "idealistic visions of love and pioneering" (xxxviii). However, the critic is also patently unjust to Gordon in characterizing him as "somewhat taciturn and curiously faceless" (xxviii), as "a doer rather than a thinker" (xxxiv). Concerning the first set of accusations, Max is shown by his speeches in Part I to be imaginatively virile and poetically eloquent. Such qualities together with Gordon's heroic labours give him a powerful presence. Moreover, his doing is not mindless and shallow, but rather expresses a vision which is deeper than any "argument" (iv.157). Bentley not only misjudges Max, but is also far more sympathetic with the pre-regenerate Alfred than was his creator herself:

Indeed, so memorable is Alfred as a character and a thinker that . . . his self-centered nihilism remains to contest the poem's concluding vision of a loving and accommodating community. . . . (xxxiii)

Bentley errs here from once again attempting to be trendy. Thus, he argues that Crawford presents her villain sympathetically because he expresses a deconstructionist tendency in the poet herself. That bent involves (1) Alfred's belief that "words and myths . . . [have] no truth value" (xxix), and (2) his vision of an "ateleological" (xxx) universe ruled by "Blind Chance" (iv.244). These positions have in Bentley's view some sort of philosophical validity for Crawford herself. Her villain's cynical nihilism is accordingly to some extent intended to offset and undercut the optimistic idealism of

Katie and Max. In so regarding Alfred's negation, Bentley misconstrues its significance for Crawford. Her villain's "down-pulling and disbelief" is like "Sorrow" (vi.1) a providential "instrument / Close-clasp'd within . . . [God's] great Creative Hand" (iv.17-18). In this context, Alfred's "deconstruction" is meant more to test and strengthen Max and Katie's faith than to qualify it. Moreover, Crawford would surely have us judge her villain's arguments at least in part by their underlying psychological motivations. These are the perversities of a diseased soul which is destructive, self-divided and ultimately deranged. Such mental sickness produces not deep insight, but rather a deception of self and others that masquerades as philosophy.

Bentley fails to recognize these essential points about Crawford's villain. The critic further misses a complex of mythological allusions which intimate Alfred's true darkness. Besides being pejoratively linked to Dionysus, Alfred recalls Narcissus alike in his physical resemblance to Katie, his self-centredness and his association with water. Still more sinister are Alfred's connections with Pluto, to whom Crawford's villain is linked as both the god of wealth and of death. Alfred's rescue of Katie would indeed seem to reverse the rape of Persephone (to which Crawford alludes through her heroine's attempt to pick flowers as did her Greek counterpart). However, Alfred later reverses his reversal of Persephone's abduction when he tries to drown himself and Katie. The episode reveals Alfred's true Plutonian nature:

Come, come, my little Kate;  
The black porch with its fringe of poppies  
waits — (vi.102-03)

Crawford's linking of her villain to Narcissus and Pluto implies the psychological negativity which Alfred represents for Katie. He allures her as Narcissus back to an infantile self-love. That regression is

suggested by Katie's "amniotic" immersions in Alfred's embrace. He likewise in his Plutonic role stimulates Katie's Electra complex as fostered by her father's possessiveness. In this regard, Crawford's villain is a psychological double of Malcolm. Just as Alfred wants to have Katie for her father's goods, so the old man clings to his daughter with an avaricious feeling of ownership. Such grasping renders Malcolm doubly Plutonian for Katie. His hoarding her as yet another possession (i.e., wealth) encourages in her an Electral fixation (which is a psychosexual death). That emotional danger for Katie is symbolized by the log which almost drowns her. This "monster" (III.203), which is stamped with Malcolm's "potent" (III.166) initials, is a phallic symbol of his *libido* as cathected to his goods.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the log rearing "like a column" (III.210) to immerse Katie brings to mind the rising of Pluto to abduct Persephone. From such a "rape" by her father's possessiveness, Crawford's heroine indeed appears to be saved by Alfred. However, he later reverses his rescue, acting as Malcolm's counterpart by almost "drowning" Katie in her subconscious Electral feelings. Put differently, Alfred replicates Malcolm as Katie's Pluto by nearly taking her to a psychological "underworld" of death.

Such psychoanalytic approaches to *Malcolm's Katie* are especially useful given its creator's remarkable feel for depth psychology. Therefore, Bentley's failure to provide a detailed Freudian or Lacanian reading of Crawford's romance is a significant deficiency. Moreover, Bentley does not notice that Katie, Max, and Alfred are interwoven in a nexus of Jungian relationships. The two men function as one another's "shadows." In this regard, each represents the antithesis of his rival's "ego" personality in a psychic dialectic that brings growth through the integration of unconscious contents. Thus, Alfred

is the inner darkness in Gordon which he must confront and redeem to become spiritually mature and so worthy of Katie. Conversely, Max is the rejected and repressed goodness in Crawford's villain that progressively reaches Alfred's consciousness. As for Katie, she is in Jungian terms a positive *anima* for both Max and Alfred, projecting their capacity for feminine *eros* (relatedness) and spiritual perception. Finally, Crawford's hero and villain are for Katie respectively positive and negative *animus* figures. While Alfred represents a perversion of the male *logos* in Katie to destructive nihilism, Max is the "mediator of . . . religious experience" who "connects . . . [Katie's] mind with the spiritual evolution of her age."<sup>10</sup>

I have taken issue at such length with Bentley not because he is a really bad critic of *Malcolm's Katie*. On the contrary, his often fruitful thought and research have yielded many useful insights into Crawford's poem. Even when Bentley seems most wrong, he at least stimulates a re-assessment of his text. Still and all, Bentley's discussion of *Malcolm's Katie* does exemplify some serious problems with critical theory. The movement has indeed provided many valuable new perspectives and concepts. Unhappily, these have not as Bentley illustrates always been applied with the soundest critical judgment. In this regard, theory is perhaps best used in conjunction with the "new" critical and "old" historical methodologies. Such conservatism can help ensure that any interpretation pays due heed to (1) what a text most obviously says and (2) its historical and cultural background. However, even if responsibly employed, critical theory still has a certain narrowness of outlook. This could as with Bentley's consideration of *Malcolm's Katie* unduly limit our range of approaches to literature. To cite one final case in point, Bentley does not do proper justice to Crawford's poetic technique. He should in a

general introduction have said much more about such matters as sound play, metrics, diction, imagery, and stylistic influences. *Malcolm's Katie* is after all not an ideological tract, but a poem. As such, it may continue to be appreciated long after our present "little systems" have had "their day and cease[d] to be."

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Anne K. Mellor, ed., *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 13-51.
- <sup>2</sup> However, the upbeat celebration of the settlement and development of the West in 11.191-253 may reflect the interlude of prosperity during the years 1879-83. In Canada under the Macdonald administration, this included the "Manitoba boom" and the beginning of the CPR in 1880 (the latter being probably alluded to in 11.195 and 232).
- <sup>3</sup> See Milton Friedman and Anna Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867-1960* (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 113-16.
- <sup>4</sup> Crawford could have been directed to this work by Lewis H. Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), a book that the poet may well have read given her interests in Classical and Amerindian cultures. All quotes from Bachofen are uniform with J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right* (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1967). Page numbers in parentheses refer to this translation, by Ralph Manheim.
- <sup>5</sup> A parallel control by the Demetrian *ethos* of Gordon's powerful eroticism is suggested through his pioneering in the Western forest. Here, Max confronts the "wild growth" (97) that is for Bachofen a counterpart to the hetaeric. Gordon could thus be tempted to indulge in primitive promiscuity, perhaps with Indian women. However, Max instead devotes his phallic libido to clearing the "wild growth" for farming, an occupation which is a correlative in Bachofen to matriarchal monogamy. In this way, Max indirectly and symbolically channels his virile sexuality into his Demetrian devotion to Katie.
- <sup>6</sup> Such a basis for the society of a new Canada is implied by Katie's description of the Western lands as "bounteous mothers" (VII.32). However, in 11.230-39, what could be seen

as masculine values also make their appearance on the frontier. The male "machine" (to use Leo Marx's terms) enters the female "garden." As Bentley suggests (xxxix-xl), Crawford is probably ambiguous about the masculine goals of economic exploitation and industrial development.

- <sup>7</sup> A spatial analog is provided by the conclusion of territorial penetration and expansion in stable settlements.
- <sup>8</sup> That Alfred is English is suggested by both his name (ironically recalling the heroic and good Anglo-Saxon king) and by his "Saxon-gilded locks." If indeed British, Crawford's villain could well be a remittance man. In that case, there is an irony in his being "reputed wealthy" (III.56). Even if Alfred is Canadian, he in several ways exemplifies Byronism, with its connections to the Old World aristocracy.
- <sup>9</sup> There is a strong element of anal eroticism in Malcolm's possessiveness, the "brown" log (III.203) being in Freud's terms a gigantic fecal "stick." See Sigmund Freud, "On the Transformation of Instincts with Special Reference to Anal Eroticism," in vol 2 of *Collected Papers* (London: Hogarth, 1953), p. 169. Freud expounds in this essay upon the metaphorical relation in anal eroticism of penis, stool, and child. That nexus is fundamental to the significance of the log for Malcolm's relationship to Katie.
- <sup>10</sup> M.-L. von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," in C. G. Jung, ed., *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 207.

JOHN OWER

## bpNICHOL: 1944-1988

"sometimes you just want to get off one long sentence before you die"

THAT IS THE FIRST LINE OF PART LXXVIII of *Monotones* (1967-70), a poem book that was excluded from bpNichol's *The Martyrology*, but which will find its way back in, if things go as expected.

The long sentence, in a commonly held metaphor, became a life sentence, of course. The poet Nichol was committed to that term, with no time off for good behaviour, though he was, as everyone

will tell you, the best-behaved person in the Canadian writing scene.

He died in Toronto General Hospital on September 25, 1988. He left, besides his wife Ellie and daughter Sarah, besides his parents in Victoria and his siblings, an enormous family. Never has the passing of a Canadian writer brought out such shock and grief from human beings *who knew him*.

2. There was a poet who was born in '44, who in his young manhood gave himself over to a lifetime's vocation. In his poetry he spread the boundaries of verse form and enriched the sounds of the English language inside his accomplished works. He was a sound poet. He did not sound like the rest of the poets of his time. At the age of 44 years he died.

His first long poem was about some martyrs, and it was about the relationship between the suffering and singing of those martyrs, and the making of a poem. The poem was "The Wreck of the Deutschland," and the poet was Gerard Manley Hopkins.

a ship in perilous storm  
the lover doth compare his state to  
often he loses  
(sinking out of view)

wrote young bpNichol in the first book of *The Martyrology*. He too was born in '44. When he died he was a few days short of 44 years old.

3. With the literal death of the author, *The Martyrology* is an unfinished poem; but then it always was. It is, in fact, a poem that seems as if it will never get started, either. A reader opening Book I finds that she has to pass two dozen pages of variously employed words before the long work begins — "so many bad beginnings" — and then the true beginning is a remark about "the poem," found and lost again.

Here is a nation's famous poem, reluctant to begin but refusing to exclude, impossible to close but filled with conclusions as nice as this:

an ending  
in itself  
unending

Nichol's poem often has a reader thinking again, and thinking: oh, it also means *that*. So the poem is more than double its length, and in fact at times it demands measurement, hefting, that has nothing to do with onward extension. Let's say, though, two thousand pages.

4. As bpNichol was always reminding his dear friend and critic Steve McCaffery, Nichol was the creator of many things besides *The Martyrology*. His first major publication was a package from Coach House Press, titled *bp*. It contained a book, a record, a flip-book, a little book for burning, a computer card poem, a poster poem, a love letter in an envelope, silver initials, and various other brightly printed things. A treasure trove. A present. One imagined the young author at the funky Coach House, assembling these packages; imagines him there right now. A gift.

Through his career, or rather through his life, and often with his wife, Nichol put together poetry packages and sent them to his friends. For him publication was not part of the career economy; it was part of the gift economy. When it came to publishing more formally, Nichol gave his manuscripts to small presses rather than selling them to big businesses. When he was recognized with a Governor General's Award despite that, the award recognized four books at four small presses.

According to the gift economy, art is not a commodity but rather a presentation. The artist has received the gift called talent, and understands that for art to stay alive it has to be handed on. If you pay some money for a bpNichol book, you



are putting groceries in front of a small-press worker's family.

Here is another aspect of the gift economy: there won't be anyone who has acquired all of bpNichol's writings. He gave lines of poetry to many tiny magazines. Sometimes a Nichol "edition" was the same line typed seven times, folded, and distributed to fellow artists. The question arose among some fond readers: could a poem typed on bp's typewriter once and given to a friend for his birthday be called a limited edition?

5. "He is a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely." Pard-like figures and others, all through the last months of 1988, and all across Canada, came to the places where his spirit was visiting, and mourned together, and celebrated bpNichol's career of gifts together. There were wakes and mass readings and spiritual services in several cities, several times in some of them. This spontaneous national desire to observe such a loss has never before happened in our literary world, at least not in our lifetimes. It resembles mass sorrows we have heard of from Europe, perhaps, in an earlier time.

Nichol took the chance of writing a life-long poem while we all watched. Maybe that has something to do with our passion.

All he had loved, and moulded into thought,  
From shape, and hue, and odour, and sweet  
sound,  
Lamented Adonais.

6. *The Martyrology* has been our first great life-poem, yes, and often its subject is death. Readers will now re-read the books and remark the ironies, the continual treatment of mortality. There are dead animals, dead friends, dead children, dead poets, stanzas of grief and verses of eschatological speculation.

A martyrology must take account of the dead, of course, and let us know about the significance of their passing. Nichol's long

poem, though, is *made* of martyrs, the suffering particles of language. It is a poem that, like Christendom's most famous martyr, shares our fate rather than transcending it. In a late interview the poet said:

That's my notion of what I'm trying to get at, a writing which partakes of the human condition in the sense that we're all vulnerable, we could die at any moment. I wanted the writing to somehow come to grips with that, not to stand above it, as though that were not the human condition, and pretend to pass on solutions that are nonexistent. That's really the project I'm working on. (Burnham, 295)

In his last few years Nichol was in constant pain, and the chance of death was on his mind. But he continued to fight against cancellation, appearing as much and as often as he could all over the country and sometimes outside it, to encourage all young writers who came to him. At the end of the Writers on Campus Workshop in Red Deer, in July 1987, he raised his arm and commanded that his charges "go forth and publish." In their magazine a year later appeared the poetic sequence he had been writing while the workshop was on. It is called "Read, Dear":

\* july 5th

things remembered or recalled

the way that old song refuses to  
leave the mind

alone

conversations with gone friends  
how it seemed you would all go on  
foreverie

/frag/mented/memory of /  
beginnings stories of  
the world before you came to be

we are all  
somebody's dead  
baby

eventually

As the years go by, scores of young (and other) writers and editors will develop the

gifts bpNichol passed freely to them, and in that way his life will go on. We will still bitterly resent the absence of his late-life poems. His last work, the radio piece *I Don't Remember This*, showed astonishing maturity and would have promised a wonderful later body of work.

That is not to be, but all that bpNichol caused to be will be, and as many of us who can be here to hear it, will.

## WORKS CITED

Burnham, Clint. "Nichol Interviewed: on *Book 6 books*," in *Tracing the Paths: Reading & Writing 'The Martyrology'*, ed. Roy Miki (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1988).

Nichol, bp. "Read, Dear." *Secrets From the Orange Couch*, 1, no. 2 (August 1988), 19.

GEORGE BOWERING

In *Canadian Literature* #100 James Reaney sets out in lively detail the handbooks and histories which provide the essential "extradisciplinary layers" for his courses in Ontario Literature and Culture; of his students, he remarks, "No one has bothered teaching them anything so concrete and useful to poetry and drama as the name[s] of wild birds." The best guidebooks for the student of literature are, I suggest, those most sensitive to language and nuance. Tim Fitzharris's *Wildflowers of Canada* (Oxford, \$34.95) is not remarkable for stunning colour close-ups; the species descriptions are sometimes silly, but at their occasional best interested in the "story" that might lie in a particular plant, such as the information, new to me, that Queen Anne's Lace or wild carrot is also known as "Bird's Nest" because the umbrella curls in on itself as the seeds mature. Even such relatively minor "extras" are unlikely to amplify the cryptic entries in Hancock House's extensive series of nature guides, such as *Sagebrush Wildflowers* (by J. E. Underhill, \$4.95), a book useful for quick reference in the field, but of little continuing value in the library. Somewhat more useful, both in text and illustration, are the simplified introductions in Hancock's parallel series on North American native culture, such as Reg Ashwell's *Coast Salish: Their Art, Culture and Legends* (\$4.95) and R. Stephen Irwin's *Hunters of the Sea: Hunt-*

*ing and Fishing Methods of North American Natives* (\$3.95). "If you don't know the weed that grows at your doorstep," Reaney laments, "you're not rooted in your environment." For this specific purpose, and for readers who go blank when they read 'mullein' or 'meadow-sweet' in a poem, Gerald A. Mulligan's *Common Weeds of Canada* (NC Press, \$14.95) is a helpful pocketbook, although its texts provide only a cryptic summary of reproductive method and habitat. All these sharply contrast with Andy Lamb and Phil Edgell's *Coastal Fishes of the Pacific Northwest* (Harbour, \$14.95), its colour photographs in natural habitats complemented by clear drawings labelled to highlight distinctive features. Very specific place names identify each species' distribution and relevant details are provided under the categories angling, diving, commercial fishing, shoreline observation, and dining. The writers pay careful attention to language, translate scientific names (coastal cutthroat, *salmo clarki clarki*, is named after William Clark of the Lewis and Clark expedition), meticulously list alternate names (fourteen for Dolly Varden), and generally write with flair. Because this is a book which would provide fascinating beginnings for story-makers and poets, it is a model of a good guidebook for the amateur, and for the reader.

An amateur naturalist who takes up Reaney's concern for one's "intimate surroundings" is Philip Croft, whose *Nature Diary of a Quiet Pedestrian* (Harbour, \$24.95) is a year-long journal with his own colour illustrations of walks in West Vancouver filled with much affectionate details on birds, insects, trees and flowers, and responding to some of the features of the more objective guidebooks. Reaney would be pleased that Croft devotes a full page to Hedge Bindweed, its ignored beauty, the counter-clockwise spiral of its growth, the implications of its Latin name, and its place in a ditty by Flanders and Swan. Covering much of the same material in a more objective manner is the recently reprinted *Nature West Coast: A Study of plants, insects, birds, mammals, and marine life as seen in Lighthouse Park* (Sono Nis, \$12.95) which suggests the extent of Reaney's challenge by devoting 280 pages to a 185-acre area. Another version of such thoroughness is Jon Gerrard and Gary Bartolotti's *The Bald Eagle: Haunts and Habits of a Wilderness Monarch* (Western Producer, \$18.95), a carefully documented and lively 175-page diary of the life of the eagle throughout North America, which extends its potential audience by frequent reference to the appearance of the eagle in folklore and poetry.

A more immediately writerly handbook is Alan Twigg's *Vancouver and its Writers: A Guide to Vancouver's Literary Landmarks* (Harbour, \$10.95), which startles with a trenchant introduction lamenting Vancouver's Britishness and its ignoring its own writers. Twigg states opinions ("Keath Fraser's *Foreign Affairs* (1985), the best work of fiction ever produced by a native Vancouverite . . ."), and incorporates the engaging obliquity (that the whale pool at the Vancouver Aquarium "had much to do with . . . *Not Wanted on the Voyage*"). He includes Harlequin romance writers, and a poignant glimpse of the reclusive Sinclair Ross. This book, which has little documentation but a good index, goes well beyond the touristy "x-lived-here" form, or the book-of-lists' format to some engaging biography and a developing argument about a diverse and often invisible literary scene.

Considerably more lavish versions of the guidebook form, intended for book displays rather than backpacks, include *Canada: A Natural History* written by John Livingston, with photographs by Tim Fitzharris (Viking Penguin, \$50.00). Arranged according to geologic land forms, this book displays some stunning photography, but the subtitle proves to be a misnomer as the text is usually banal, awkward, and apparently written to be ignored. Considerably more literate is *The Best of Alberta*, compiled by Tom Radford and Harry Savage (Hurtig, \$34.95), which complements its photographs of landscapes and faces with the ink of thirty-one artists and excerpts from the work of twenty writers. This book in the Bob Edwards tradition is an eye opener, from the reproduction of H. G. Clyde's expressionist landscape "She Sat Upon a Hill above the City" (1939) to Judy Schultz's vignette "Cornpatch politics." Two recent photo albums continue to elaborate the mythology of Canada's railways: Robert D. Turner's *West of the Great Divide: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia, 1880-1986* (Sono Nis, \$39.95) and Donald MacKay's *The Asian Dream: The Pacific Rim and Canada's National Railway* (Douglas & McIntyre, \$29.95). Turner's book is very liberally illustrated and loaded with statistics, including grade profiles and tables of tonnage rating. MacKay's *Asian Dream*, a commissioned book, is more narrative and anecdotal, and tells the less familiar story of the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern, the two lines amalgamated in Canadian National Railways. The railway is a technological force whose presence in various constituencies marked the end of the gold rush phenomenon.

Two other kinds of guidebooks merit mention in this survey. *More Victoria Landmarks* by Geoffrey Castle (Sono Nis, \$19.95) is a sequel to a 1985 collection of weekly columns in the *Times-Colonist*. Here is a more urban guidebook, with careful pen and ink illustrations by Barry F. King, which not only documents heritage buildings but also records the anecdotes associated with boats, statues, and bridges. Finally something of a guidebook for the pre-literate set is Nicola Morgan's *The Great B.C. Alphabet Book* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, \$12.95), whose intriguing concept, to link each letter of the alphabet with a place name ("Ursula from Ucluelet is digging for clams"), is dulled by the absence of any playing with the names (à la Dennis Lee), and by the trite tourist notes that are buried in each illustration. But the shadow of the conventional alphabet book (H is for horse, L is for Lion) implicit in the illustrations does offer some stimulating and bizarre interplay with the place names.

L.R.

Doris French's *Ishbel and the Empire: A Biography of Lady Aberdeen* (Dundurn) tells the by-now-familiar story of a capable, ambitious Victorian woman who "was obliged to deal in subterfuge, as a mere wife, in the exciting world of politics which [should] have been hers," and who channelled some of her unused energies into illness and an intense relationship with the naturalist Henry Drummond. Conscientiously researched, this book chronicles Lady Aberdeen's travels through Canada, her work for the Victorian Order of Nurses and the National Council of Women, but also the tedium of social life in Ottawa. To the student of 1890's Canadian cultural history, there is much of interest here, including amusing trivia like the following: a ball at Government House in Toronto with the motif "The Victorian Era," featured ladies dressed as codfish, the Aberdeen's daughter Marjorie impersonating "forests," "while men were dressed as telephones, ladies had wings on their shoulders and postcards sewn to their gowns to celebrate the postal service, and a sparkling ensemble announced the arrival in the civilized world of electricity." Also concerned with exhibitions, although of a more orthodox nature, is Susan Sheets-Pyenson's *Cathedrals of Science: The Development of Colonial Natural History Museums during the Late Nineteenth Century* (McGill-Queen's), which compares natural history museums in Canada, Australia and Argentina. Together with Donald Fleming, the author argues that

the study of natural science "was a fundamental part of the quest for a national identity in societies where the cultural differentiation from Britain was insecure and the sense of the land correspondingly important for self-awareness." But here too Britain, and Europe as a whole, remained dominant: specimen collections were bought there, and museum directories were often hired abroad. The concept of the museum is of course also imperialist, and its appropriateness was severely tested in exotic countries where heat, humidity and vermin quickly destroyed the displays. *Patterns of the Past: Interpreting Ontario's History*, edited by Roger Hall, William Westfall and Laurel Setlon MacDowell (Dundurn), presents comparative cultural perspectives of a different kind. The volume commemorates the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Ontario Historical Society. The essays presented offer a wide range of topics, including native history, agricultural development, urban planning, prison reform, labour laws, ethnicity, and others. Of particular interest to literary critics will be John Weaver's "Society and Culture in Rural and Small-Town Ontario: Alice Munro's Testimony on the Last Forty Years."

E.-M. K.

Benoît Lacroix, *Le Religion de mon père* (Editions Bellarmin, \$15.00), a collection of conference papers and essays, contains valuable information on popular practices of religion in Quebec (liturgy, feasts, saints, processions) and their roots in medieval theology. The author also outlines a "mythologie religieuse traditionnelle des Canadiens-français," in which — following Mircea Eliade and others — the ancient elements of water, fire, air, and earth are explored as complex components of Quebec's popular imagination. For the literary critic interested in better understanding the cultural backgrounds of works like Carrier's *La Guerre yes sir* or *De l'Amour dans la ferraille*, this book will be a good introduction with its excellent bibliographical references and several illustrations. Also concerned with the mythology of Quebec history, although from a very different perspective, is Heinz Weinmann, *Du Canada au Québec: Généalogie d'une histoire* (L'Hexagone, \$24.95), an ambitious work tracing the imaginative sources of Quebec mentality in central mythic characters and plots, ranging from the explorers to Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and from the Conquest to "le roman familial canadien." In the bibliography Weinmann's ideological

mentors are identified as René Girard, Freud, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Habermas, Philippe Ariès, Kristeva, and Barthes: *Du Canada au Québec* seductively combines the breadth of an all-encompassing philosophical vision with the reductiveness of structuralist analysis. As a result, the book is thought-provoking and often immensely inspiring, but just as frequently annoying and unsatisfactory, because it channels richly diversified historical fact into preconceived system. Moreover, it is difficult to determine the author's tone, which uneasily combines the flippancy of the popularizer with the detachment of the committed scholar. All in all, a strange book, well worth reading and puzzling over.

E.-M. K.

*Le Québec depuis 1930* (Boréal, \$29.95) is the second volume of the *Histoire du Québec contemporain* prepared by Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert and François Ricard. In 740 pages, it outlines the history of the last fifty years in three distinct phases: the economic depression, the Duplessis era, and the Quiet Revolution. Cultural developments are analyzed as well as political and economic ones; there are extensive bibliographies, and the illustrations are particularly well chosen. A poster from the 1930's, for instance, urges Quebec farmers: "Nourissez et finissez bien vos porcs pour fournir du meilleur bacon à la Grande Bretagne," and another from World War II shows a radiant girl announcing "Je fabrique des bombes et j'achète des obligations: Achetez des obligations de la victoire." Despite its four authors, *Le Québec depuis 1930* is a unified volume; by contrast, *Les Pratiques culturelles des Québécois: une autre image de nous-mêmes* (Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, n.p.) deliberately strives to present a multiple perspective, much in the way in which the HOLIC/HILAC project at the University of Alberta attempts to outline a polysystem of Canadian literature. *Pratiques* contains essays on the press, archives, government funding of the arts, theatre, music, dance, radio, television, sports, tourism, and other topics. The essays alternate between scholarly exposition, demographic analysis and polemic; some — such as the piece on archives — are useful for reference purposes. A more specialized kind of volume is *Québec Women: A History* (The Women's Press, \$19.95), written by the Clio Collective (Micheline Dumont, Michèle Jean, Marie Lavigne, Jennifer Stoddart) and translated from the French (the original title was

*L'Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*) by Roger Gannon and Rosalind Gill. Like *Pratiques culturelles, Québec Women* mixes exposition and polemic; titles and subtitles often assume the belligerent tone of a manifesto, and the design of the book too resembles an activist poster: noteworthy anecdotes, biographies, songs and recipes appear in separately outlined boxes, such as items on "The Concealment of Pregnancy and Infanticide," "The Church and Sexuality," and "The Litany of the Old Maids." Thoroughly researched and documented, *Québec Women* is a model of innovative historiography and an indispensable research tool. Another specialized history, Robert Painchand's *Un Rêve français dans le peuplement de la Prairie* (Les Éd. des Plaines, n.p.), focuses on the influence of the Church on the settlement of the West and contains useful information for readers of Gabrielle Roy, Georges Bugnet, and Marguerite Primeau. Another book, *Évolution et éclatement du monde rural: structures, fonctionnement et évolution différentielle des sociétés rurales françaises et québécoises XVIIe-XXe siècles*, edited by Joseph Goy, Jean-Pierre Wallot, and Rolande Bonnain (Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris/PUM, n.p.), is also concerned with rural culture, and readers will find valuable background information on the *roman du terroir* or the historical novel in a variety of essays grouped under the headings Histoire des comportements démographiques; Economie rurale, économie globale; Famille, mariage, patrimoine et reproduction sociale; Attitudes culturelles de comportements religieux; and Histoire de la culture matérielle.

E.-M. K.

ALSO RECEIVED: Elizabeth Smither, *Professor Musgrove's Canary* (Auckland UP, NZ\$14.95); David Eggleton, *South Pacific Sunrise* (Penguin, NZ\$11.99); John Millett, *Blue Dynamite* (South Head, n.p.); Silvana Gardner, *The Devil in Nature* (Univ. Queensland, A\$8.95); Susan Afterman, *Rain* (Univ. Queensland, \$A7.95); Robert Majzels, ed., *The Guerrilla is Like a Poet: An Anthology of Filipino Poetry* (Cormorant, n.p.); Nuzrat Yar Khan, ed., *Dreams and Destinations: Shaheen and his poetry* (Canada-Pakistan Association, n.p.); Nicholas Hasluck and C. J. Koch, *Chinese Journey* (Fremantle Arts Centre, A\$13.50); Richard Kelly Tipping, *Nearer By Far* (Univ. Queensland, A\$14.95); *Index of American Periodical Verse: 1986* (Scarecrow, \$37.50).

W.N.

ALSO RECEIVED: Marjorie Barnard's biography of *Miles Franklin* (UQP, \$12.95); Mary Lord's sampling of the works of *Hal Porter* (UQP, \$16.95); and Vivian Smith's collection of *Nettie Palmer's* diary, essays, and poems (UQP, \$19.95); Thomas Shapcott's history of *The Literature Board* (the Australian equivalent of the Canada Council; UQP, \$28.95); reprints of fiction by Kate Grenville (*Dreamhouse*; UQP, \$11.95); Thomas Keneally (*Bring Larks and Heroes*; UQP, \$9.99); Elizabeth Jolley (*The Sugar Mother*; UQP, \$11.99); Jolley's new evocative novel *My Father's Moon* (Penguin, A\$22.99); Salman Rushdie's brilliant and controversial *The Satanic Verses* (Viking, \$24.95), a parable about the triumph of good over the forces of prejudice and misdirection; and Mark Blaug's two-volume set of bio-guides to 200 world economists, *Great Economists Before Keynes* and (vol. 2) *... Since ...* (Cambridge, \$14.95 ea.); *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Dick (Random House, \$45.00), an expanded and corrected second edition; *Nights in the Gardens of Brooklyn* (Viking, n.p.), the collected stories of Harvey Swados; *Home and Away*, a collection of "travel stories," ed. Rosemary Cresswell (Penguin, A\$9.95); a paperback version of Gabrielle Roy's autobiography, *La détresse et l'enchantement* (Boréal, n.p.); Jonathan Rée's *Philosophical Tales* (Methuen, \$11.95), an enquiry into the literary strategies of Descartes and Hegel; *New Directions 52* (\$24.95; pa. \$11.95), a collection of new works mostly by men, including George Steiner and Charles Simic; a paperback version of James K. Baxter's *Collected Poems*, ed. J. E. Weir (Oxford, n.p.); Catherine A. MacKinnon's lucid exposé of the power politics of pornography and legal misogyny, *Feminism Unmodified* (Harvard, \$34.95; pa. \$12.95); and two textbook anthologies of contemporary theoretical position papers, *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searly (Univ. Presses of Florida, n.p.), and *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge (Longman, \$24.50). The two theoretical volumes overlap contributors only partly, and strikingly supplement each other's choice of particular texts. An elegantly produced two-volume photographic reproduction of the manuscript version of *Huckleberry Finn* (Yale, \$250.00) serves yet another kind of critical enterprise.

W.N.



## ON THE VERGE

\*\*\*\* SUZANNE ROSENBERG, *A Soviet Odyssey*. Oxford Univ. Press, \$24.95. As Auden pointed out long ago, history has different ways of treating the victors and the defeated. The crimes of Nazism are rightly kept before our eyes, the Holocaust looms heavily in our view of the recent European past, and its surviving perpetrators are still being hunted down and punished. Stalin's Russian terror, which lasted longer than the Holocaust and claimed even more victims, is paid far less attention. The secret police that carried it out survived under another name, and its directors hold high positions in the Russian hierarchy. No attempt has been made to bring to justice those who created the infamous prison camps where so many died of starvation and exhaustion or those who organized the secret executions of the flower of Russia's intelligentsia and of many thousands of ordinary people whose only crime was a joke about Stalin or a word of discontent spoken in the presence of an informer (and informers were everywhere, for one of the great crimes of regimes like those of Hitler or Stalin is that they terrorize the population into complicity). Suzanne Rosenberg's *A Soviet Odyssey* is especially interesting because she has seen the whole gamut of Russian experience since the Revolution, which she witnessed as a child. Her family moved to Montreal in the early 1920's and Irving Layton was among her schoolmates. In 1931, fired by idealistic enthusiasm, her mother took her back to Russia, where both fell victim to the Stalinist terror, which could engulf whole families for the "thought crime" of one member, and found their way into the most rigorous of the labour camps. She was lucky enough to survive and be released after Stalin's death, and to be able to flee to Canada. Her book is a vivid and valuable document that reminds one uncannily of Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead* and suggests how little in some respects life in Russia has changed since the days of bad Tsar Nicholas. We are led to believe it is changing now. But still the same secret police, under another name, presides over the destiny of Russians and the killers in the cellars of Lubyanka prison, unlike Hitler's thugs, have gone unidentified and undenounced. The story of Suzanne Rosenberg's sufferings is perhaps as near a real indictment of these faceless monsters as we shall ever get.

G.W.

\*\*\* PHILIP MARCHAND, *Marshall McLuhan: the Medium and the Messenger*. Random House, \$24.95. Marshall McLuhan early abandoned a quite promising career as an academic literary critic, and perhaps this was why, though he could talk strikingly and sweepingly in a generalized way about print as a medium, he never got round to discussing what the various genres within a medium can do with a message. Thus he failed to anticipate the effect of biography, on himself as well as others. Literary critics have long ceased to take McLuhan seriously as any kind of writer, but his repute as a cultural guru still lingers in non-literary quarters, and it is really on the man behind the image of the guru that Marchand concentrates in his *Marshall McLuhan*. It is a well-crafted book, a "cool" book in McLuhan terms, with none of the erratic brilliance that at times inspired McLuhan's best one-liners (though rarely his unwilling books), but with a great deal of understanding of this strange eccentric, this belated modernist of reactionary politics and obscurantist faith who tried to be a Pound in prose. What influence in the end did McLuhan have? On literature little, and none on the politicians he so assiduously courted. Little even on the advertisers who already knew most he could tell them in a practical way or on the business administrators who in the end had a vague feeling of having been conned by him. Yet he remains in our minds as a figure of the times, a man with fragments of genius and some splendid insights, and with such people biography inevitably deals more kindly than criticism could, since the oddities they project are the very features biographers most appreciate as the colouring of their narrative. Read this book nostalgically; most of it will amuse you until at the end the laughter dies down into uneasy pity for a man destroyed by his racing mind.

G.W.

\*\*\* JOHN S. MILLOY, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870*. Univ. of Manitoba Press, n.p. Most Canadian histories up to now have been records of the white men in Canada, neglecting the prehistory of the aboriginal peoples, seeing the encounter between native and intruding cultures from the invasive European viewpoint. Fortunately that pattern is at last changing. General historians of the country are seeking a more balanced view, and new series of monographs are appearing, like the Manitoba Studies of Native History, whose volumes, like Milloy's *The*

*Plains Cree*, fill some notable gaps. Writing the history of a preliterate people is always difficult because of the absence of written records, and a different selectivity from that of the archival scholar is needed. Still, Professor Milloy has assiduously collected his fugitive information, mostly the recorded memories of fur traders, missionaries and the Indians themselves, and has produced a convincing account of an Indian group which shows that, contrary to many pre-suppositions, such peoples do not follow a static unchanging way of life but evolve as a society while their circumstances change.

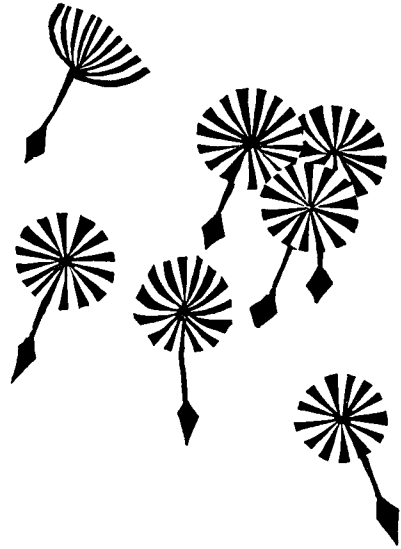
G.W.

\*\* DAVID CRUISE & ALISON GRIFFITHS, *Lords of the Line: The Men Who Built the CPR*. Viking Penguin, \$25.00. One is at a loss whether to class this book as history, biography or hagiography. It is a kind of history since it covers the creation of the CPR and the kind of changes which the concern — swollen eventually into a great conglomerate — has undergone over the past century and a bit. But it is written as a series of biographical portraits of the men who financed and directed the construction and operation of the CPR (not those who *really* built it as the subtitle suggests). And like most popular history these days it lays on the colours hard and heavy, highlighting the flaws of some men and the virtues of others, so that we find a hitherto 'heroic' figure like George Stephen portrayed (somewhat convincingly I must admit) as a scheming villain conspiring just an equally cold and calculating Donald Smith for their mutual profit, while the ruthlessness which was undoubtedly a dominant aspect of Van Horne's character (did he care much — or at all — about the hundreds of Chinese labourers who died getting the railway through British Columbia's "sea of mountains"?) is minimized by stressing the undoubtedly attractive sides of his character, his boundless zest and curiosity, his secondary accomplishments as a perceptive patron of the arts and a learned amateur geologist. It is all quite well crafted, at times even engagingly written, but it is still an example of the "big man" view of history, false because incomplete. Surely it is time a book were written about the men who *really* built the CPR with their strength and skill and endurance, and the people whom it exploited and who cursed it.

G.W.

\*\*\* DAVID MILLS, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850*. McGill-Queen's, \$27.95. The Loyalists have had something of a comeback recently among historians, with books like Jane Errington's *The Lion, the Eagle and Upper Canada*. Now David Mills examines what has always been regarded as the great Loyalist principle, loyalty itself, and specifically loyalty to the British Crown. His thesis is that a changing concept of loyalty made it a quality no longer peculiar to the actual Loyalists and their descendants, and that its acceptance by the Reformers, as distinct from Mackenzie and his rebel following, brought them close to the moderate Conservatives, and in fact helped to dissolve the influence of the Family Compact and to make responsible government inevitable in Canada, once the alliance between Baldwin and Lafontaine had been forged. On the whole it is a convincing if somewhat flatly written book.

G.W.



## LAST PAGE

SOME THREE DOZEN BOOKS of poetry sit on my desk, asking to be read. They range from *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets* (A\$16.95), an anthology that just hints at Australia's increasing multiculturalism, and a two-volume *Folk Songs of Australia* (NSW Univ. Press, A\$19.95 ea.), with tunes and comments on sources and singers, to volumes of Collected and Selected poems by Sam Hunt (Penguin, NZ\$15.50), Gavin Ewart (New Directions, \$18.95), Stevie Smith (New Directions, \$18.95), Michael Dransfield (Univ. Queensland, A\$12.50), Kevin Ireland (Oxford, NZ\$18.95), and Ian Wedde (Oxford, NZ\$18.95). "I like the sense that words have histories," writes Wedde, and his poems repeatedly ask what relevance Classics can have in an age engaged by process and confounded by system. "Oh so this is what entertainment's / all about, somehow you're sure repairs / are always possible. . . ." But the emptiness of public rituals, which also preoccupies the older Ireland, leaves a hollow at the heart of poetry. What is it to be a poet, Wedde asks, and like Shelley and Klein before him, answers: to drown. Smith and Dransfield, who both died young, seem to have absorbed this notion as principle, and neither Smith's aspirations to childlike innocence nor Dransfield's drug-induced escapes from it proved an adequate counter. Dransfield writes, "don't / preach to me / you're preaching / to the converted / don't wait for me / to fight your war / i've been on / that trip once." Smith asks: "Oh Christianity, Christianity, / Why do you not answer our difficulties? / If He was God He was not like us / He could not lose." Hunt is more laconic, Ewart more satiric: "Mosque or temple, church or steeple, / religions are keenest / on killing people!" Wit is sometimes very effective; but often it's a thin defence against despair.

Among other volumes are two by Edward Brathwaite: *Jah Music* (Savacou, n.p.) and *X/Self* (Oxford, \$20.95). The former is alive with the politics of sound, the latter (the conclusion to a trilogy begun with *Mother Poem*) a claim upon identity (sun / home / "new breath here") *against* but also *out* of place and the past, "face / and faith / . . . seed and soul and lissom / touch." It, too, is full of politics, both in assertion and in asides ("there will be no more promises before election time / in fact, there will no longer be election time"). Savacou has also issued *EKB*, a bibliography of Brath-

waite's work, 1948-86, compiled by Doris Monica Brathwaite. But while language and politics lead one poet to celebration, they lead another to mordant distance. Louis Johnson's two volumes, for example — *Winter Apples* (Mallinson Rendel, n.p.) and *True Confessions of the Last Cannibal* (Antipodes, NZ\$12.50) — take refuge in the shapes of irony, no less political for their illusions of neutrality: "Behind the palms / a faceless music registers dismay from its can / as neutrally as maybe"; "All said / and known to be said. I must play it over again"; "Flight is the mythological way to go." These are poems about (and involving) closure, enacting one of the perpetual ironies of aging: that the learned vernacular of the next generation harnesses one's sense of order ever more securely to the uncertainties of youth.

Roy Fuller's *Consolations* (General, \$15.95) sets out a parallel predicament; the poet revisits Kenya, finding a country different from the colony of his own memory — and "I fail to impose on my shapeless memories / the rigour of the city's Yankee grid." But memory — and observation — provide their own consolations; the cadences of organized speech are the means of reconciling changes in norms of judgment with whatever, despite these changes, to an individual still seems strange. The power of concentrating, the inexactness of precise detail: these structure the "signs without wonders" that lie in the middle of Allen Curnow's *The Loop in Lone Kauri Road* (Auckland, NZ\$10.95). Other poets are more direct, often in disagreement. Lewis Packer's *Serpentine Futures* (Univ. Queensland, A\$12.50) tries to give voice to the dispossessed, the Jews in Auschwitz, the aboriginals in Australia. Gloria Escoffery, in the Jamaica of *Loggerhead* (Sandberry Press, n.p.) — "Our loggerhead / dreams / instruct us / in the art of patience. . . ." — bluntly concludes: "I am at loggerheads with a world that burns / its forests for the sake of developers." But Michael Sariban, in *A Formula for Glass* (Univ. Queensland, A\$8.95), condenses the predicament of even those who would make changes in their lives: "we deal in surfaces / and what the walls permit."

Yet language remains attractive, and the myths of identity. In Philip Salom's *Sky Poems* (Fremantle Arts Centre/Penguin, A\$12.00) are several ghazals on poets, "the natural choice" he writes, to countermand the force of the Abstract: the natural choice "to throw off the thinly rational / and to drink long and hard from the vast distillery. Think back. / Solomon was such a drinker, a body drinker. He knew the body was translucent, conditioned by music. A drunkard of allegories." For Thomas



OPINIONS & NOTES

Shapcott, in *Travel Dice* (Univ. Queensland, A\$8.95), location is such an allegory: "The problem with maps is they take imagination. / Our need for contour invents the curve, our demand for straight lines will have / measurement laid out in bones." And for Andrew Taylor, in *Travelling* (Univ. Queensland, A\$12.50), "All language, / the invisible family, is a landscape / of trees and waters" beyond the reach of the standard senses; for "Seeds / in the feathers of migratory birds, / pollen in the wind, flotsam / eddying for years, messages / from jungle to forest, wood, / bush and back, the great conversation / continues, while our stammered / intimacies, our ultimata, even / those proud achievements of literature, / continue to begin."

W.N.

Shapcott, in *Travel Dice* (Univ. Queensland, A\$8.95), location is such an allegory: "The problem with maps is they take imagination. / Our need for contour invents the curve, our demand for straight lines will have / measurement laid out in bones." And for Andrew Taylor, in *Travelling* (Univ. Queensland, A\$12.50), "All language, / the invisible family, is a landscape / of trees and waters" beyond the reach of the standard senses; for "Seeds / in the feathers of migratory birds, / pollen in the wind, flotsam / eddying for years, messages / from jungle to forest, wood, / bush and back, the great conversation / continues, while our stammered / intimacies, our ultimata, even / those proud achievements of literature, / continue to begin."

W.N.

## contributors

Chris ACKERLEY teaches at the University of Otago; Alexandre AMPRIMOZ at Brock; Anne ARCHER lives in Hartington, Ontario; Mark BENSON teaches at St. Francis Xavier; Robert BEUM at Grande Prairie Regional College; Fred GOGSWELL at the University of New Brunswick; Gilbert DROLET at Collège Militaire Royal St-Jean; Jo-Anne ELDER at Ryerson Polytechnic; Graham FORST at Capilano College; Mary Jean GREEN at Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.; Lynette HUNTER at the University of Leeds; Patrick IMBERT at the University of Ottawa; Eleanor JOHNSTON at Gray Gables School, Welland, Ontario; Michèle LACOMBE at Trent; David LATHAM at the University of Lethbridge; Julie LEBLANC at Carleton; Jeanette LYNES at Mt. Allison University; Donald C. MURRAY at the University of Regina; Stephen MORRISSEY at Champlain Regional College; Kenneth MEADWELL at the University of Winnipeg; Cynthia MESSENGER at Massey College; Hilary THOMPSON at Acadia; Douglas MOFFAT at the University of Michigan; Irène OORE at Dalhousie; John OWER at the University of South Carolina; D. W. RUSSELL at the University of Waterloo; Frederick SWEET at Seneca College; Hildi Froese TIESSSEN at Conrad Grebel College; Gerry TURCOTTE at the University of Sydney; Lydia WEVERS at Victoria University, Wel-

lington; Deloris WILLIAMS at the University of Manitoba; and J. R. WYTENBROEK at Malaspina College. Rodney ANDERSON lives in Cobourg, Ontario; Peter BALTENSPERGER in Goderich; Marjorie BODY in Calgary; Laurel BOONE in Fredericton; Marilyn BOWERING in Sooke; Andrew BROOKS in Brampton; Brian BURKE in White Rock, B.C.; David DOWLING in Peterborough; E. F. DYCK in Winnipeg; Manina JONES in London, Ontario; Till KUHNLE in Augsburg, West Germany; Mary Lu MACDONALD in Halifax; Mary MEIGS in Westmount; Al PURDY in Sidney, B.C.; Heinz TSCHACHLER in Klagenfurt, Austria; and Allan WEISS in North York. Anne ARCHER and Agnès WHITFIELD teach at Queen's University; Barbara BELYEA and Jon KERTZER at the University of Calgary; Neil BISHOP and Elizabeth EPPERLY at Memorial University; George BOWERING, Paul Matthew ST. PIERRE, and John WHATLEY at Simon Fraser; Joanne BUCKLEY, Louise FORSYTH, and Catherine Sheldrick ROSS at the University of Western Ontario; Loena CROZIER and Patrick LANE at the University of Saskatchewan; Patricia DEMERS and Robert James MERRETT at the University of Alberta; Len EARLY, Linda LAMONT-STEWART, and John LENNOX at York University; David HAYNE, Edward HEINEMANN, and Carla VISSER at the University of Toronto; Richard KNOWLES and Margaret TURNER at Guelph University; Ross LABRIE, Patricia MERIVALE, Valerie RAOUL, and Jerry WASSERMAN at the University of British Columbia; Michael MASON and George PARKER at Royal Military College; Gerald NOONAN and Andrew STUBBS at Wilfrid Laurier. Mona Elaine ADILMAN and Frank MANLEY live in Montreal; John BARTON and Rosalind CONWAY in Ottawa; G. V. DOWNES, Anne KELLY, Charles LILLARD, and Alan WILSON in Victoria; Susan GLICKMAN, Kathleen KELLETT, Lola LEMIRE-TOSTEVIN, and Peter O'BRIEN in Toronto; Stefan HAAG, Eric NICOL, and George WOODCOCK in Vancouver; and Anne MARRIOTT and Tom MCKEOWN in North Vancouver.



# TSAR Publications

*Canada and the World...*

## **INDENTURE & EXILE** **The Indo-Caribbean Experience**

edited by  
**Frank Birbalsingh**

A unique study of the history, religion, politics, and literature of the Indo-Caribbean people.

ISBN 0920661-08-4  
272 pp. paperback, \$ 20.00  
with index and tables

## **JAHAJI BHAI** **an anthology** **of Indo-Caribbean Literature**

edited by  
**Frank Birbalsingh**

One-of-a-kind anthology of representative works, including fiction, poetry, folklore and travel writing; authors include Sam Selvon, Ismith Khan, Neil Bissoondath

ISBN 0920661-05-X  
152 pp. paperback, \$ 10.95

## **Cape Town Coolie** a novel by **Reshard Gool**

"...the atmosphere of the novel is perfect." ALAN PATON

In this tense work, an incorruptible Indian lawyer battles the forces of apartheid and those who would use it to further their own ends.

ISBN 0920661-09-2  
204 pp. paperback, \$9.95

## **LITERATURE** **& COMMITMENT**

ed. by **Govind Sharma**  
Studies of key Commonwealth writers, including Atwood, Rushdie, Ngugi, Soyinka, Walcott, Duggan, White...

ISBN 0920661-06-8  
156 pp, paperback, \$11.95

### **TO ORDER:**

Send check or money order to  
TSAR Publications  
P.O. Box 6996, Station A,  
Toronto, Ontario M5W 1X7 Canada  
*Include \$1.00 postage for 1st book, 0.60  
for subsequent books.*

*CML* seeks submissions from its subscribers on all aspects of Classical and Modern Literatures that reflect the knowledge and depth of the scholar's own discipline used to examine problems recurring in both a Classical and a Modern Literature.

# Classical and Modern Literature:

A  
QUARTERLY

*CML*'s Spring issue will carry its annual

**BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE CLASSICAL TRADITION** prepared by the Institute for the Classical Tradition. This will cover scholarship for the year 1986. You may wish to notify your library if it does not already subscribe. Previous bibliographies (5.3, 6.3, 7.3, 8.3, 9.3) are available.

#### CML Subscription

Please check one of the following:

	Individual	Institutions	
1 year	\$14.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	\$16.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	AMOUNT
2 years	22.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	25.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	ENCLOSED _____
3 years	31.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	36.00 <input type="checkbox"/>	(U.S.)

Countries outside U.S. add \$2.00 to each year's subscription to cover postage. Residents of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin add appropriate Sales Tax.

*CML* is published in October, January, April, and July.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Address all correspondence, subscriptions, and submissions (SASE) to:

*CML*, Inc.  
P.O. Box 629  
Terre Haute, Indiana 47808-0629

Classical  
and  
Modern  
Literature:

A  
QUARTERLY