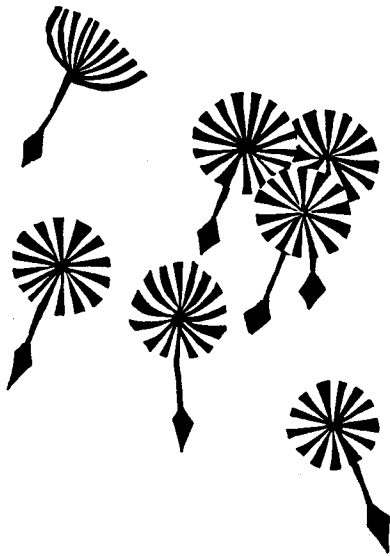


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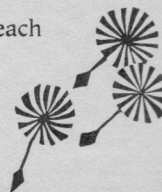
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L. R. Ricou

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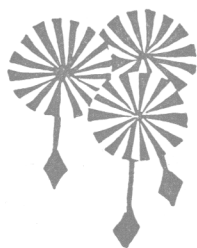
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DISCONTENT'S WINTER

LAST NOVEMBER — after Meech Lake had fizzled into recriminations, after Oka had dispersed in anger and disappointment, after “Free Trade” was closing Canadian businesses down and throwing thousands out of work, after 90 per cent of the citizens of Vancouver voted to oppose the Goods and Services Tax but \$350 million was going to be spent by the federal government to institute it anyway, after government funds dried up for social services and cultural expression but could be found to support militaristic posturing (in a GULF, no less: apt word), and after official committees had been struck to gaze at Canadians’ collective constitutional desires — rains inundated the Coast and Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Hundreds of people had their homes undermined, their livestock drowned, their roads washed out (likely as a result of upstream clearcutting), their ordinary expectations swept away by forces beyond planning and endurance. At one point, a dam in Washington State gave way, and the once-pent-up waters flooded north, directly through the Sumas border crossing, at one stroke closing the customs office and erasing the visible differences between the trails of two countries. It was hard not to read events at metaphor.

The September 14-20 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* published Margaret Atwood’s prescient poem “The Loneliness of the Military Historian” (it was reprinted, with different resonances, in the December issue of *Harper’s*). “Confess,” the poem opens;

it’s my profession
that alarms you . . .

and goes on:

especially at dinner,
though I am good at what I do.
My trade is in courage and atrocities.
I look at them and do not condemn.
I write things down the way they happened,
as near as can be remembered.
I don’t ask why because it is mostly the same.

Wars happen because the ones who start them
think they can win.
In my dreams there is glamour.
The Vikings leave their fields
each year for a few months of killing and plunder,
much as the boys go hunting.
In real life they were farmers.
They come back loaded with splendor.

But the poem makes clear that such splendour is illusory, however much one sympathizes with the “boys” and the loneliness they dream of as duty or adventure. In “real life,” their dreams of romance are less real than the banality of people repeating misconceptions. “I deal in tactics,” says the military historian, with Atwood’s muted eloquence; “Also statistics: / for every year of peace there have been four hundred / years of war.”

Statistics. In November, when the recording group Milli Vanilli had a Grammy award taken away from them because they had lip-synched the hit that won them recognition, a Roy Peterson cartoon in the Vancouver *Sun* depicted Canadian leaders as a subspecies “Canadilli,” with stars and stripes coming out of their effectively silenced mouths. Where is the real irony here: in the disparity between political dumbshows and cultural muteness, or in the ready applicability of American pop culture iconography to Canadian social dilemmas? Or is this choice too limited? Tactics.

It’s not fashionable in criticism to talk about a Canadian Identity any more; for awhile I didn’t even think it was necessary. But it’s necessary all the more if people are on the edge of losing their sense of the worthwhile values this country has at various times stood for. If as a people we no longer have — or even think we have — the capacity to choose what it is about our past that we want to leave behind *and what it is we want to hang on to, to shape our collective future*, then we no longer have our own voice at all. We’re simply inundated by another’s flood; we’re dandled on the ventriloquist’s knee; we’re opening our mouths only to let someone else’s opinions fill them with dust and rhetoric and straw.

The Canada I admire is the Canada that places community before irrational unbridled individualism; the Canada that chooses peace and negotiated understanding over the peacock-strut of militarism; the Canada that celebrates variety and the possibilities of change rather than the uniformed neatness and emotional smugness of a simple-minded nationalism; the Canada that believes genuinely in equality of opportunity and that attempts actively to avoid the isms of discrimination; the Canada that eschews violence; the Canada that refuses petty reprisals; the Canada that values children and commits its resources to educating them for the future; the Canada that accommodates to social needs, that prefers universal caring systems and preventive medicine to punitive action and the special privi-

leges of profit and class; the Canada that takes a quiet pride in the fact that it *has* a culture and that doesn't see the need to shout its cultural distinctiveness or publicly hold its heart every time a flag or a soapbox swings into view; the Canada that puts people before political ego; the Canada that can tell the difference between common currency and common sense. But does such a Canada exist, and did it ever? I wonder. It's not the Canada we *see* around us now, riddled with envy, pettiness, emptiness, and spite. But it's maybe still within reach — IF. . . IF as a community we refuse the many current invitations to disintegrate politically; IF we recognize that most separatist enthusiasms (of the east *or* the west) rely on the basest of emotional appeals to racist superiority and cultural "unity" and serve more fundamentally as ways of disguising arrogant aspirations for power; IF we admit openly that we gain from each other most when we willingly refuse to reject each other, when we compete without cruelty, when we dismiss the perennial appeals to re-establish cliques as our political masters, and when we accept the creativity of difference and no longer define it as an alarming sign of uncertainty or impending chaos. That's a lot of IF's. But it's also a lot of WHEN's. In other words, it tells of real present opportunities, not of pie-in-the-sky vagaries. And it tells of the need to sort out our social priorities, reaffirm who we collectively are, and distinguish between the opportunities we value (including the option of peaceably changing governments, of whatever stripe) and the illusions of crisis and management that opportunist politicians market in the name of desire and the hope of control.

Another relevant cartoon appeared last November, by Brian Gable, in the *Globe and Mail* of November 6th, just after one of several so-called "Citizen's Forums" was given the task of wallpapering a government's inadequate legislative imagination. The cartoon portrays a limousine, flags flying, with a committee drawing up to interview the citizens slumped in line in front of an *employment* (for which read "unemployment") *centre*. The interviewer asks: "First question . . . As a Canadian, is your greatest concern these days about (A) a flexible multifaceted constitutional amending formula? or (B) an operable veto provision enabling equitable regional representation throughout the legislative process? . . ." Of the many ironies this cartoon underlines, three stand out: (1) the recognition that economic survival matters more in most people's daily lives than does constitutional design, even when constitutional giveaways and constitutional takeaways are the subject governments are preoccupied with, the way weak office managers are preoccupied with the arrangement of furniture; (2) the recognition that a bureaucracy that is caught up in its own jargon cannot see the disparity between the language it uses in the name of clarity and the language that individual people in real economic and political relationships must use in order to be clear; and (3) the recognition that bureaucratic language has the power to be effective even if it isn't clear or doesn't adequately measure people's lives: that it has power both because it *is* the language of government and because disenfranchised, disempowered, dislocated, *slumped*

people are vulnerable. Such people are susceptible therefore to the gobbledygook of “efficiency,” “order,” “economic understanding,” and “command,” even when such language is empty of value and when it actively subverts the values for which the community has long stood. Recognizing the irony does not, of course, resolve the cultural disparities that cartooning exposes; indeed, such recognitions more often seem like invitations to despair. Despair, however, just works to entrench the power of those who would usurp community values. It isolates; it intensifies divisiveness; it encourages passivity; it must be opposed.

But how to oppose it? November seemed like a dispiriting month only until December dawned, with paper blizzards from all the bureaucracies, gale-force winds, power outages, and real ice and real snow in the once temperate outdoors. The ineffectuality of the Vancouver voters’ gesture — and of the active opposition of the great majority of Canadians — was made manifest when the Goods and Services Tax was manipulated into law. In practice inflationary, this tax will also be discriminatory, not least because Members of Parliament exempted their own office supplies from it. But the rhetoric that brought it into existence reveals another misapprehension as well: in the name of business efficiency (distorting the phrases “good management” and “fair practice”), the law relies on a misleading and simplistic binary distinction in order to transfer national economic authority from “public” to “private” hands. In fact at least two additional variables function in this unquiet equation: the “state,” whose bureaucratic commitment to structural power does not always serve the “public” to whom it should belong and with whom it is often misleadingly identified, and the “corporate,” which must be distinguished from both public and private conceptions of organization. “Corporate” management seeks characteristically to use authority in its own favour, arguing in the process that *public values* — ecological management and social care, for example — can be set aside as unaffordable. The state, comparably, serves itself, and the “private” and the “public” are alike sacrificed to expediency.

Transparently, the GST law will benefit the well-to-do and punish those with limited expendable incomes; in other words, it will punish young people, small householders, small business people, women, children. In these post-Meech months, punishment seems the discourse of the day, apparent in the flood of petulant political jibes uttered against Newfoundland, Manitoba, Natives, and anyone else — 70% of Canadians: that’s what polls have indicated — who refused the *politics* of Meech Lake, recognizing that (for all the attractiveness of the “unity” package in which it was marketed) this particular arrangement of hierarchies of power would in practice have re-established the Family Compact and the Château Clique as pre-emptive rulers of Canada. Why has there been so fierce a reaction to those who recognized its flaws? Angry attack, among other things, is an easy way to try to cover up a mistake: wars are declared for such reasons. The grim rhetoric of “crisis” thrives on anger and intensifies simplistic distinctions between *us* and *them*,

right and *wrong*. Clearly, there *are* gulfs in this country. But they will take more than a state (task)force to bridge. They will take trust, and tact more than ritual recrimination. Trust and tact, however, depend upon communication, and that's not always easy, particularly when, as history makes clear, the avenues of public and private communication — the avenues of resistance to crisis rhetoric, perhaps — can (like companies, like countries) be closed down.

Toronto's *Saturday Night* reached several times beyond Toronto during 1990 in order to warn that Canada's communications systems were in danger; in the September issue, Bronwyn Drainie oracularly warned: "if Canada disappears, so does the CBC. And vice versa." The publicly-owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is a unifying force within a potentially centrifugal country (*unifying*, not *uniform-alizing*). Because it is not immune to crisis rhetoric, nor free from bias, and because (as fall and winter progressed) no changes of any consequence could be perceived on the nightly TV screen, it even seemed as though the warnings of danger could be dismissed as overdramatizations. But then December struck. In December the government bureaucracy sliced \$108 million from the CBC's budget, and summarily cut scores of jobs — at a time when citizens were collectively being told that there was "no limit" to the amount of money that could be spent on *military* exercises. More striking even than the sums and the ironic contrast in political priorities that is represented by the difference between one form of expenditure and the other was the nature of the cutting. For what was cut was "local production." This term is by no means as innocent as it looks — it describes an activity, not a quality, and using it to dismiss something for qualitative reasons (however vaguely) betrays the narrow conception of nation and culture that underscores all the political tensions of the nascent 1990s. It reveals that the "garri-son mentality" is fundamentally a business model of social relationships: authoritarian in its defence of the corporate pyramid, willing to sacrifice whatever or whoever is deemed peripheral, without power, unlikely to stir resistance and "therefore" inconsequential. It is the Compact-Clique view of society, reinforcing the mutual exclusiveness of two (language-separate) "national" pyramids, and disallowing not just alternative perspectives but also the exchange of perspectives, perhaps because exchange might encourage some questioning of received versions of political reality.

The 108 million dollars' worth of cuts unilaterally cancelled all television production in western Newfoundland, cut English-language production facilities in Quebec, cut smaller-city productions in other parts of the country. The argument in favour of cuts involved expense; but even those programmes that were making consistent profits for the corporation were cut, which raises further questions about the rhetoric of reorganization. Cutting productions because they were "local" — not even "regional," to use the pyramid rhetoric — tacitly declared four things: (1) that "local" audiences need not be served by the public broadcasting system,

(2) that “local” programming would be of no interest across the nation, (3) that Toronto and Montreal were neither local nor regional but “central” (why aren’t Winnipeg and Moncton also considered “centres” of anglophone and francophone expression?), and (4) that whatever programming emerges from Toronto and Montreal must therefore be “national” — and therefore of national interest and consequence. (Why? Because of its source? Or because of the particular filters that these “centres” *locally* employ?)

None of these “reasons” addresses the real problem of “national” communication: *exchanging perspectives*. When it’s not readily possible in Quebec City to know what Winnipeggers and Vancouverites and Haligonians variously think about life, the nation, and the world — and not readily possible in Vancouver and Windsor to know what the others think, and so on, and so on — but only possible to know what the “central” filters permit people to know *and how they permit them to know it*, then we do not have an exchange, we have a corporate tyranny. We have a society more committed to pantomime than to speech, more committed to the *theatre* of “national crisis” and the *image* of “regional curiosity” than to community understanding. It is a frame of mind that permits “local” to mean “irrelevant,” “local productivity” to sound like an oxymoron, and cuts in “local production” to be marketed as wise management. But it is precisely this frame of mind that encourages separation. Whether people openly attack others (in the name of virtue or with a claim upon superiority) or celebrate their own “martyrdom” in order to construct a politically workable version of “enemy,” they diminish the value of exchange; and diminishing the value of exchange — even in the name of efficiency or unity — feeds the distrust of others, encourages petty authoritarianism, and so, fundamentally, fosters cultural disintegration.

The December news not just that the CBC was curtailed nationally but that \$3 million of federal money was to be spent on a missile testing site in Esquimalt and that an *additional* \$269 million of federal money was to be spent expanding Space Programme facilities in a Montreal suburb simply encourages cynicism. A purchased fidelity is a shallow commitment. While cutting back on regional voices will not do away with separatism, moreover, neither will the granting of absolute authority to every articulate “region” guarantee “national unity.” It is necessary, instead, to allow regional access to the whole communications network, to let voices from all parts of the country speak to *and be heard* by the national community. Of these activities, the *hearing* is the most difficult to bring about: it depends upon a willingness to listen and the will to understand the validity of differences. And that, in part, means giving the public more credit for intelligence, for being able to appreciate the diversity, the integrity, and the value of their society, and more power, plainly, than the rule-makers who serve only bureaucratic statism.

The Australian writer Les Murray, in “The Quality of Sprawl,” a poem dedicated to the Australian resistance to Cultural Authorities and Society Style, speaks

of “the rococo of your own still centre.” This phrase resonates with “sprawl” — the vitality that denies categorical organization and constitutive binaries, and that delights in the unpredictability of human experience. In some respects this is what irony is all about: the willingness to treat authoritarianism with a health-giving disrespect. (It’s one of the appeals of the satiric CBC programme *Double Exposure*.) Canadians have long used irony as a defence tactic, a technique for coping at rhetorical distance with misapprehension and discontent. Perhaps they have to learn to “sprawl,” too, a little. For apparently they now need to use irony as political cartoonists do: as an active *voice*, a way of *engaging* with history, of refusing life-as-a-mere-statistic, of celebrating the power of common sense and clarity, and of actively exposing the agents of incompetence and misrule.

November and December drew to their dismal close in drizzle and deep freeze. Gulfs yawned and widened. Reading was about to be taxed, and so was heating fuel. No flood insurance was available to protect against political rhetoric, but if there were, that would be taxed too. Meanwhile, a variety of cultural order papers were still in abeyance: a revamping of legislation controlling political broadcasting, and a reworking of the copyright act that will influence the distribution of books. It seemed appropriate to ask, in such circumstances, how to greet 1991. And somehow it still seemed possible, despite all the tensions, to answer: *in hope*. Not naively, by any means. But determinedly, watchfully. And maybe with laughter — if looking beyond the anguish was possible — as a way of resisting the intricate, arrogant absurdities of those who would thrive on cultural warfare.

January had yet to begin.

W.N.

THE LOBBYIST

Mona Elaine Adilman

Most old timers are humble, affable characters
like superannuated Andy Gump drawings in the comics.
Dear God, please let me grow old cantankerous
and feisty like a Maritime oak bursting through
a crop of government-subsidized cabbages.

Let me raise hell and hallelujah when our
 Prime Minister manipulates the environment
 portfolio into a juicy, political plum.
 Let my adrenalin explode when city hall awards
 fat contracts to shady slickers with numbered companies.

Ecology will still be my baby when I'm eighty-five
 taking cat naps during THE NATURE OF THINGS.
 Oh Lord, give me nine lives to hustle Parliament Hill
 and bless Canadian water, air and land with refugee
 status until their rights are protected forever.

TWENTY YEARS

Ellen Drennan

I always thought I'd be something
 special, the first woman
 Prime Minister, an Olympic flag-bearer,
 the proud and busy owner
 of a Toronto-based donut-chain.
 I would return to Coquitlam
 head high, heels clicking,
 recognized by the most common resident
 as "someone," first class
 all the way. I guess that's the real reason
 I didn't attend our high school reunion,
 Gail. My letter satisfied you
 but the truth is I just couldn't stand,
 surrounded, in the old gym,
 see the school colours — powder blue
 and yellow, paper decorations and balloons,
 smile politely at Gary and Iva,
 tell everyone that in twenty years
 all I did was move to Munster,
 raise three kids,
 paint the kitchen green, then yellow,
 then white.

HAGAR IN HELL

Margaret Laurence's Fallen Angel

Paul Comeau

MARGARET LAURENCE has afforded readers of *The Stone Angel* significant insight into Hagar Shipley's character through various allusions to literary archetypes embedded in the narrative. The biblical story of Hagar has garnered the bulk of critical attention for obvious reasons, although Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, Keats' *Meg Merrilies*, and Joyce Cary's *Sara Monday* have also received prominent consideration.¹ Nevertheless, whereas each of these analogues illuminates one or more key aspects of Hagar's predicament, none can be said in itself to embrace the whole. For this, I believe, we must turn to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, one of the most influential books in Laurence's background. Clara Thomas records that Laurence kept and treasured her mother's calfbound copy of the poem, which she reread "repeatedly, before and during the composition of every novel," and that among the author's papers at York University is "a sheaf of pages folded over and labelled 'Morag's Notes on *Paradise Lost*.' These are notes in Morag's voice, not Margaret's, on each book of *Paradise Lost*" ("Towards Freedom" 87). Not only does Morag study Milton's epic while boarding at the Crawleys', but she also marries a Milton scholar and titles one of her novels *Shadow of Eden*, all of which indicates how thoroughly the great work had been assimilated into Laurence's creative imagination. It is not surprising, therefore, that she should have turned to Milton's Satan as the prototype for her own proud, rebellious angel.² Indeed, within the context of the Manawaka Cycle, *The Stone Angel* represents Margaret Laurence's vision of Hell, with Hagar Shipley manifesting the characteristics of the most notorious fallen angel.

Paradise Lost begins immediately after the war in Heaven, with Satan and his host of rebel angels surveying the fiery wasteland into which they have been hurled: "A dungeon horrible, on all sides round / As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible" (1. 61-63). Pride, Satan realizes, has caused his downfall, but he emerges unrepentant, believing that "to be weak is miserable / Doing or suffering" (1. 157-58). He rationalizes that "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n" (1. 254-55); and he further concludes that it is "Better to reign in hell, than serve in heav'n" (1. 263). It is not clear how far Satan knowingly deludes himself here, since he has not yet lost all his original lustre and presumably has not therefore

succumbed entirely to his own evil. However, no amount of self-deception can alter the fact that his Hell is both a physical place and a mental state of torment, the latter assuming the greater relevance to him as the story unfolds. For even as he traverses the void to escape Pandemonium and discover Eden, "within him hell / He brings, and round about him, nor from hell / One step no more than from himself can fly" (iv. 20-22). Some portion of this Hell within consists in the knowledge that he is self-damned according to the doctrine of free will, and some part is composed of the grim reality, soon verified, that evil has power only to recoil back upon itself.

That Hagar's plight parallels Satan's is implied in her preliminary recollection of the stone angel her father had purchased "in pride" to mark her mother's grave, a "doubly blind" monument that symbolizes Hagar herself, who is blinded equally by overweening pride and slavish conformity to proper appearances. While not the only angel in the Manawaka cemetery, this one holds dominion over the rest by virtue of being "the first, the largest, and certainly the costliest" (2); Hagar is likewise first in her own mind, large in physical bulk, and has led a costly life in emotional and spiritual terms. The other angels are "a lesser breed entirely" by comparison, "petty angels, cherubim with pouting stone mouths," forever cast in diverse graceless poses: "one holding aloft a stone heart, another strumming in eternal silence upon a small stringless harp, and yet another pointing with ecstatic leer to an inscription" (2) bidding peaceful repose to one Regina Weese. The disparity among the angels in the graveyard mirrors that between Satan, who even after battle stands "above the rest / In shape and gesture proudly eminent" (i. 589-90), and his fallen brethren, whose unquestioning servitude and gullibility bespeak their inferiority. And just as the rebel angels' names are forthwith stricken from the Book of Life, so Hagar accounts herself "doubtless forgotten" in Manawaka. But she has not forgotten, either the proud glory of a childhood spent basking in her father's indulgence or her fall from grace precipitated by her defiant marriage to Bram Shipley.

THE CONCEPT OF THE FALL is as central to *The Stone Angel* as to *Paradise Lost*. Hagar's transgression, like Satan's, involves the challenging of a father figure and an ensuing casting out and rejection by him. Needless to say, Jason Currie is not God, although as one critic has noted he habitually calls on "religious authority to sanction his notions of dominance" (Hinz 84); he even comes to embody divine omnipotence in his daughter's eyes: "God might have created heaven and earth and the majority of people, but Father was a self-made man, as he himself had told us often enough" (13). But if Jason Currie is "self-made," his daughter definitely is not, as he reminds her when she returns home

from the young ladies' academy in Toronto. While she therefore settles in to "reimburse him for what he'd spent" (38) on her education, her rancour at having to serve in his house festers until marriage to Bram presents a viable means of escape. Given her father's autocratic nature and the fact that she has quite literally been created in his image, a confrontation seems all but inevitable; when it occurs, their battle is fittingly presided over by the spirit of "Michael with the flaming sword" (41), the archangel sent by God to drive Adam and Eve from Paradise. Hagar strikes first with the revelation that she intends to marry Bram. Momentarily stunned, her father looks "as though destruction were a two-edged sword, striking inward and outward simultaneously" (41), and then recovers to hurl back at her the argument that no decent girl would marry without parental consent. Hagar, "drunk with exhilaration at [her] daring" (42), threatens that she will do it, a decision leading directly to the loss of Heaven and all her woe.

Hagar discovers, ironically, that destruction is a two-edged sword, for no bells ring out on her wedding day and no family member attends the service. At her reception, she shimmers and flits about "like a newborn gnat, free" (43), her demeanour suggesting that she has not immediately lost her original brightness; but the insect imagery foreshadows her impending decline, as does the natural choir that celebrates her nuptials: "the frogs had come back to the sloughs and sang like choruses of angels with sore throats . . . and the bloodsuckers lay slimy and low, waiting for the boys' feet" (43). The allusion to frogs evokes Satan's first temptation of Eve, when disguised as a toad he whispers in her ear where she sleeps, and thereby complements the inherent treachery of the bloodsuckers lying in wait. What awaits Hagar is the physical Hell into which she has wilfully plunged, the Shipley farm with its dilapidated frame house, the antithesis of the antimacassared brick palace from which she has been evicted.

Once deprived of her father's influence, Hagar quickly loses the spark of life and with it her natural lustre. Her determination to make a Heaven of Hell is, like the arch-fiend's, destined to fail, and it is only with great difficulty and pride that she can sustain the illusion in her own mind. She learns that she cannot clean or furnish the house as she would like, and that she cannot refine Bram's behaviour as she had hoped. His one concession to comfort for their bedroom is a grotesque piece of secondhand linoleum patterned in parrots with "stiff unnatural feathers" and "sharp-beaked grins," a fitting adornment for a room that remains as cold as charity in winter and as hot as hades in summer. As Pierre Spriet has observed "separation in violence, not love, is the organizing principle of *The Stone Angel*" (321), and it is in this context that Hagar identifies with the "spit" and "fire" of the noisy sparrows that congregate outside the bedroom window, "splattering their insults in voices brassy as Mammon" (70); it is Mammon, after all, who counsels Satan's band to imitate Heaven's light and to prefer "Hard liberty before the easy yoke / Of servile pomp" (II. 256-57).

Hagar accurately characterizes her relationship with Bram in a single comment: "I'd sucked my secret pleasure from his skin, but wouldn't care to walk in broad daylight on the streets of Manawaka with any child of his" (88). Laurence here returns to the image of the bloodsuckers lying in wait, investing Hagar with the qualities of the vampire, that creature conceived of in folklore as the "living dead" and sometimes as the embodiment of Satan, the Prince of Darkness. Like Bram Stoker's Count Dracula, Hagar is descended from nobility, albeit remotely, since her grandfather Currie's title died with him; her ancestral castle is inscribed on a plaid pin as part of the Currie family crest; and like all vampires she finds sunlight and mirrors problematical. The vampire metaphor³ is particularly effective in projecting Hagar's devastating influence on others. She gains emotional nourishment and strength by feeding on the vitality of those around her, leaving them feeling empty and estranged. Her profound indifference toward her elder son Marvin (she scarcely considers him to be her own flesh and blood) ultimately drains him of all self-confidence, and even her beloved John is nervous about living alone with her in Vancouver. Thus, her returning to Manawaka to see Bram through his last days is as much a spectacle of the vampire retreating to her native soil as of Satan reverting to Hell.

THE PHYSICAL HELL that greets Hagar is the product of the drought and the Depression, which together hold Manawaka in a death grip. The Shipley farm, an extension of Bram himself, is at the very centre and appears about to expire. In the begrimed kitchen, Hagar disgustedly observes "a mammoth matriarchal fly laboring obscenely to squeeze out of herself her white and clustered eggs" (151), at which point John mockingly welcomes his mother to her "castle," implying a symbolic correspondence between her return home and this birth of pestilence. For his part, John is a veritable shade of Hell, having lost so much weight that his face looks "like a skull's" (151), whereas Bram, his eyes "mild and milky, absent of expression" (152), resembles nothing more closely than the moribund victim of an extended vampire attack. Despite her commanding presence in the house, though, Hagar is bewildered at the way John ministers to Bram with "such a zeal and burning laughter" (150), just as she is later perplexed to realize that Marvin truly loves Doris: "It's only natural, I suppose. But it seems unfamiliar to me, hard to recognize or accept" (236). John's laughter is repeated at the cemetery where they find the stone angel upended, her lips painted with lipstick. This powerful representation combines the Satanic with the Draculan, as the prostrate statue at once signifies Hagar's fallen state and evokes the white-faced, red-lipped vampire of popular legend. The immediate effect is to establish a direct opposition between Hagar's parasitic destructiveness and John's compassion in helping Bram

to die, a distinction underscored further when, after the funeral, it is John who weeps, not Hagar.

Hagar's inability to cry is highlighted on the night John is killed. Typically, she mourns her personal loss above all else and fails to perceive her own culpability in the events leading up to the accident. She is resting in the front room one sultry afternoon when John comes home with his girlfriend Arlene Simmons. The two make love on the sofa in the kitchen, unaware that Hagar lies concealed nearby on her Afghan "like an old brown caterpillar" (185). The scene closely parallels the one in which Satan spies Adam and Eve's lovemaking in the garden:

"Sight hateful, sight tormenting; thus these two
 Imparadised in one another's arms
 The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
 Of bliss, while I to hell am thrust,
 Where neither joy nor love, but fierce desire,
 Among our other torments not the least,
 Still unfulfilled with pain of longing pines;
 Yet let me not forget what I have gained
 From their own mouths . . .

(iv. 505-13)

Hagar, who is similarly condemned to a joyless, loveless existence, tormented by fierce desire (she continually longs for Bram's physical presence in the night), is at first "paralyzed with embarrassment" (185), and then grows irate at the couple's unmitigated nerve and lack of shame; but under the circumstances she can only fume in silence. From Adam and Eve's mouths the serpent learns about the fatal Tree of Knowledge and immediately sets about to destroy happy innocence by tempting Eve to eat the fruit. From John and Arlene the caterpillar learns of their plan to marry and promptly visits Lottie Simmons to prevent the union. And for all her professed altruism in saving the children from poverty and future pain, her motives are fundamentally selfish: "All else diminished in importance . . . when I thought what I'd gone through to get John away from just that sort of thing" (189).

Not for her son's wellbeing, then, but for her own jealous satisfaction Hagar drives John from the house to his death and her greatest loss, a prime example of how evil recoils back upon itself. Yet in the hospital John bears his mother no ill will, and even seems to comprehend the tragic irony of her fallen state. Seconds before he dies he calls out for her help in relieving his pain and then laughs knowingly: "'No.' he said distinctly. 'You can't, can you? Never mind. Never mind'" (215). He understands that she is unable to alleviate his pain because she is entirely wrapped up in her own. Following his death, Hagar moves back to Vancouver, where, in time present, she lives with Marvin and his wife Doris, and has done for seventeen years. During this time she has apparently experienced no respite from Hell, because she carries it about within her. Her first exchange with

Doris is sufficient evidence. After childishly refusing her daughter-in-law's offer of tea, she sulkily acquiesces, but then clumsily trips over the edge of her bedroom rug: "I jerk my head up like an old mare . . . at the sound of fire or the smell of smoke. Then I fall" (26). This and other references to fire in the opening pages locate us squarely in Hell, as does the allusion to the fall, but the vampire has also been at work; Doris is haggard and anaemic, whereas Marvin seems old and tired beyond his years. The ensuing performance of his tugging and hoisting to lift his mother off the floor harks back in time (forward in the narrative) to John's wrestling with the stone angel in the cemetery, and contradicts implicitly Hagar's unspoken contention that her falling is untypical.

THE DISCREPANCY between Hagar's biased portrayal of events and their natural occurrence reminds us that her viewpoint may not always be reliable. In William New's words: "Sometimes she knows lies, as when she tells Mrs. Steiner John died in the war, and wonders why, but more often . . . she does not even know" ("Every Now and Then" 88). Hagar's predicament in this regard is truly Satanic and serves to intensify her experience of the Hell within, as happens during her visit to Dr. Corby's office and in her subsequent trip to the hospital for X-rays. At Corby's she resents his cheerful manner as much as the indignity of his poking and prodding; and her impotence is further magnified in the "dungeon" of the hospital, where she envisions herself "in the pit of hell," helplessly enveloped by "a darkness absolute" (97). The flashing lights of the medical equipment dazzle her eyes but "illuminate nothing," and her ears are assailed by disembodied voices "babbling and plotting somewhere in the vault's dank air" (97). As the time drags on, she fancies that she has been "kept in storage here too long" and "may disintegrate entirely" (97) if suddenly exposed to sunlight, a vampire's enduring fear. This denotes a continuation of the imagery that characterizes her visit to Silverthreads, which is destined to be her next "castle" if Marvin and Doris have their way. The "mausoleum" of a Rest Home is approached through black iron gates, and Hagar, mummified in her "shroud of pillows" (83), has the impression of being "embalmed alive" (84), another reference to the living dead. Again in accordance with the vampire legend whereby Dracula transforms himself at will into a wolf, Hagar is astonished at her own ill-mannered recriminations and wonders how she has "descended to such a snarl" (86). And it is in this context that she recalls sucking her secret pleasure from Bram's skin.

Determined like Satan never to submit or yield, Hagar rejects incarceration and escapes to Shadow Point. There she embarks on her most agonizing descent into the psychological Hell she has nurtured within herself since John's death. The steps leading down to the beach are "notched into the hillside" (133), not unlike

the terraces of Dante's Hell, but once her feet touch bottom she is exhilarated by the illusion of independence. Though her confidence is shaken momentarily when she notices that she has no water, she draws comfort from the self-deluding philosophy of Hell: "One day at a time — that's all a person has to deal with. I'll not look ahead. I shall be quite comfortable here. I'll manage splendidly" (135). Her discovery of an old brass scale without weights reassures her that "nothing can be weighed here and found wanting" (136); but just as God's weighting of the scales in Gabriel's favour over Satan in *Paradise Lost* confirms the Devil's inherent weakness, so Hagar's false bravado is quickly shown for the prevarication it is. Her attempt to pray finds her "wanting" spiritually, because "it works no better than it ever did," whereupon she resolves with vain defiance that if she cannot alter her past, then neither will she accept it, "not even if [she's] damned for it" (142).

With respect to its overall significance in the story, Shadow Point is, as the name implies, a place where Hagar confronts the bedeviling shadows of her past, chief among them Bram's death and John's fatal accident. Her frightened solitude at the cannery elicits recollections of the former, while an Edenic scene of two children playing house on the beach calls up the latter. Her initial enjoyment of the children's innocent play is reminiscent of her counterpart's when he first sees Adam and Eve and forewarns of their impending change, "when all these delights / Will vanish and deliver ye to woe" (iv. 367-68). Hagar likewise senses imminent change ("He'll become fed up in a minute. I long to warn her — watch out, watch out, you'll lose him" [168]) and then feels compelled to meddle in the children's game as she once interfered with John and Arlene. She tempts them with "real food," though realizes almost immediately that their mothers probably forbade them to accept it from strangers; the children run hand in hand from the beach (Adam and Eve leave *Paradise* walking hand in hand) "as though their lives depended on it" (169). Appropriately, when Hagar samples the forbidden food, her mouth fills with a "bitter bile taste" (170), much as Satan's cohorts are deceived by apples that turn to "bitter ashes" (x. 566) on the tongue. Immediately following this episode Hagar suffers her last physical fall and, upon torturously hoisting herself up, proclaims herself proud as Lucifer at the achievement.

Hagar's principal encounter at the Point is with Murray Lees, who is the mirror wherein she sees reflected her own tragedy, and given her vampiric nature she has always had problems with mirrors. According to folklore, a vampire casts no reflection in the looking glass, and Hagar contends that she has never seen her true image in one either. In the Manawaka public Rest Room, for instance, she discerns only the ravaged features of an impoverished drudge, and more recently her bedroom mirror discloses an equally unpalatable "puffed face purpled with veins" (69). Murray Lees functions as just such a mirror and Hagar reacts accordingly. His arrival is heralded by the wolfish baying of dogs which, like

Milton's hellhounds Sin and Death, signal the death of the spirit by killing the seagull Hagar has previously injured.

Under the influence of cheap wine, which Hagar unwisely shares, Lees relates the story of how his son died in a house fire, causing him to wonder if perhaps he had left a cigarette burning in the basement and had thereby started the blaze. Hagar's response that "No one's to blame" (209) is glib and self-serving in the light of what Lees has just described and what we subsequently learn about her own involvement in John's death. She has always deflected personal blame by arguing that John knew her well enough not to take her harsh words seriously, but as the wine begins to cloud her mind she inadvertently blurts out the incriminating details of that terrible night. Thus, evil rebounds upon itself once more, a fact verified in physical terms when Hagar throws up all over the floor. The best she can manage by way of reassuring her companion is "a parody of a smile, a serpent's grin" (220), and this directly qualifies her imagined reconciliation first with John and then with God. At this her lowest point in the story, Hagar has become the embodiment of evil in true gothic fashion, a grotesque both in physical and in spiritual terms; it is entirely fitting, therefore, that her X-rays should reveal an internal malignancy and that Marvin and Doris should find her alone at the cannery, lying in her own vomit. She is, like her fallen prototype, an object lesson in the destructiveness of pride. The question is whether she remains, like him, unrepentant and unredeemed.

THE ANSWER IS FINALLY a matter of personal interpretation, for Laurence offers no definitive statement one way or the other. Such uncertainty as exists derives in part from the confusion Hagar experiences after her night with Lees. She awakens with the unhappily clear memory of having drunk with and slept beside a complete stranger, but acknowledges that it was not so dreadful; she resents Marvin's appearance at the cannery, yet admits in her heart her relief to see him; she is glad when Lees goes away for good, but feels unaccountably blessed to have met him. In addition, Laurence juxtaposes images of reconciliation and hope with those of isolation and despair. For example, the crackers and wine the vagrants share add a religious dimension to their communion, but Hagar is unable to keep them down. Marvin's heroic struggle to drag his mother back up the earthen steps to safety is a symbolic ascent from the underworld, but Hagar makes the climb with her eyes closed, certain they will never reach the top. And upon closer scrutiny, her two so-called "free acts" are not as selfless as she deceives herself into believing. In fetching a bedpan for her young roommate, she has like Satan been temporarily abstracted from her own nature and rendered "Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed" (ix. 465) by Sandra's innocence of pain and humiliation: "She

shouldn't have to find out these things at her age" (268); but again like the arch-fiend, who swiftly recovers from his abstracted wonder at Eve's "graceful innocence" (ix. 459), Hagar questions whether she has done the deed for Sandra or for herself. Similarly, when she becomes aware that she can only release herself by releasing Marvin, she wilfully lies to him as an alternative to begging his forgiveness. Her rationalization that a lie is not a lie if spoken with "what may perhaps be a kind of love" (274) demonstrates how self-delusive she has become; words like "may," "perhaps," and "kind of" indicate how foreign to her is any definition of love. The fact that Marvin readily accepts the lie and is comforted by it is therefore no credit to her, but rather highlights simultaneously the extremity of his personal need and the abiding impotence of evil, symbolized nowhere more forcefully than in Hagar's confinement to a straitjacket, a transformation analogous in spirit and kind to the punishment God inflicts on Satan: "A monstrous serpent on his belly prone, / Reluctant, but in vain, a greater power / Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned" (x. 514-16).

Laurence's purpose, then, is not to imply full or even partial redemption for Hagar, but I think instead to establish its possibility independent of her and, in so doing, to bring her to a clearer apprehension of the magnitude of her loss. As ever, Milton's angel provides an important referent. Standing on the brink of Paradise, he ponders his recent fall to this effect: its cause was his proud inability to bear the immense debt of gratitude to his Creator; now, his supremacy in Hell prevents submission, because his dread of shame among his followers far exceeds his present misery; but even if he could repent, he would surely relapse, and in any case God is as far from granting pardon as he is from begging it. Thus, the Devil slyly shifts responsibility for his damnation from himself to God. In these terms, Hagar also stands unredeemed, though not unenlightened regarding her situation. Like Satan, she could never accept her father's plans for her, or indeed "bear to feel indebted" (230) even to the nurse who dispenses medication in the hospital. Additionally, she perceives with anguish and regret that pride and the "brake of proper appearances" (261) have negated every joy she might have had in life, and she accounts herself "unchangeable, unregenerate," (260) so that supplication to God is unthinkable: "*Our Father* — no. I want no part of that. All I can think is — *Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg*" (274); accordingly, she subtly thrusts the burden of her salvation onto God's shoulders. With Hagar rejecting salvation in this way, we must look elsewhere for the promise of redemption, notably to her granddaughter Christina,⁴ who like Christ in *Paradise Lost* represents hope for the future. Hagar confirms this, despite herself, when she bequeaths to Tina her mother's ring, thereby linking her granddaughter with the meek, docile woman who died giving her birth. Although Hagar, like Satan before her, disdains meekness in all its guises, she is apparently helpless to prevent this New Testament virtue from inheriting the earth.

Finally, the extent to which Hagar Shipley repeatedly subverts life-enhancing impulses in herself and others marks the extent to which she personifies evil in the Manawaka world. Indeed, her dominant characteristics — pride, envy, anger, selfishness, bigotry, among others — are the very ones Rachel, Stacey, Vanessa, and Morag battle against with varying degrees of success. This is not to suggest that Laurence either affirms through Hagar the formal constraints of Milton's religious philosophy or subscribes to the Puritan doctrine of predestination. Rather, I believe the creation of Hagar represents her humanistic and artistic response to the tragic irony of the Satantic predicament: the potential of self-deluding pride to strike inward and outward simultaneously, for proof of which she needed to look no further than her own grandfather.⁵ Moreover, the introduction of classic vampire imagery effectively takes Hagar's dilemma out of a strictly religious context by placing it in a modern Gothic construct. To be sure, there is grace and the promise of redemption in Laurence's vision, but Hagar eschews them even at the last and knowingly defeats herself in accordance with the provisions of free will: "I'll drink from this glass, or spill it, just as I choose" (175). I believe the wonderfully ambiguous "And then —" that concludes the novel implies that Hagar does in fact spill the water, rendering her final grasp for independence as futile as her escape to Shadow Point. Like Satan, she can traverse the miles to alter her estate, and she can distort language to mollify her guilty pride, but she cannot escape the Hell within.

NOTES

¹ For analysis of the story of Hagar in Genesis see Sandra Djwa's "False God's and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1, 4 (Fall 1972), 43-50; see also Claudette Pollack's "The Paradox of *The Stone Angel*," *Humanities Association Review*, 27, 3 (Summer 1976), 267-75; and Frank Presando's "In a Nameless Land: Apocalyptic Mythology in the Writings of Margaret Laurence," *The Canadian Novel Here and Now*, ed. John Moss (Toronto: NC Press Ltd., 1978), pp. 81-92. For analysis of the story of Hagar in Galatians see William New's "Introduction to *The Stone Angel*," rpt. in *Critical Views on Canadian Writers: Margaret Laurence*, ed. William New (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), pp. 135-42. Pollack also discusses the Lear story in "The Paradox of *The Stone Angel*," as does Douglas Killam in "Notes on Symbolism in *The Stone Angel*," *Etudes Canadiennes / Canadian Studies*, 11 (December 1981), 89-103. Eleanor Johnston develops the relationship between Hagar Shipley and the Ancient Mariner in "The Quest of *The Diviners*," *Mosaic*, 11, 3 (1978), 107-17. Joan Coldwell identifies Hagar with Meg Merrilies in "Hagar as Meg Merrilies, the Homeless Gipsy," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 27 (Summer 1980), 92-100. And Clara Thomas suggests a link with Sara Monday in "Pilgrim's Progress: Margaret Laurence and Hagar Shipley," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17 (Fall 1982), 110-16.

² Robert Chambers draws a few tentative parallels between *The Stone Angel* and *Paradise Lost*, but he deliberately stops short of identifying Hagar with Satan, saying only that the general framework of her fall is similar to his. See "The Women of Margaret Laurence," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 18 (Summer 1983), 18-26; rpt. in *Margaret Laurence: An Appreciation*, ed. Christl Verduyn (Peterborough:

Journal of Canadian Studies and Broadview Press, 1988), p. 84. While I agree that Hagar is not the equivalent of Satan in any religious sense, I believe that the parallels between them are more profound and far-reaching than Chambers indicates.

- ³ Laurence uses the vampire motif again in *The Diviners*, when she suggests that Morag would date Count Dracula if he asked her. Ironically, she does something very like that in marrying Brooke Skelton, "a prince among men" with his "aristocratic look"; at first, Morag is totally enthralled by Brooke as he draws vitality from her, but when they move to a castle-like apartment that she calls "the Tower," she slowly regains her sense of perspective by writing a novel entitled *Spear of Innocence*. Significantly, the book's dust jacket depicts "a spear proper, piercing a human heart," the accepted method of killing a vampire.
- ⁴ In an interview with Matt Cohen, Laurence revealed that the name "Christie" in *The Diviners* was deliberately chosen to signify "a kind of Christ figure." See "Rebel Angel," *Books in Canada*, 13 (February 1984), 7. There is every reason to believe that Christina's name was selected with equal care and similar import. The fact that Tina does not appear physically in the book demonstrates that the Christ figure is appropriately absent from this vision of Hell; ironically, though, it is Tina's move back East that indirectly generates the story, depriving Hagar of a full-time babysitter and thereby calling up the spectre of Silverthreads.
- ⁵ Laurence often identified Hagar with her Grandparents' generation, and indeed I believe the tension at the heart of Hagar's depiction represents that underlying Laurence's strained relationship with her Grandfather Simpson, a relationship based on conflict that was not finally resolved until worked through imaginatively in the Vanessa Macleod stories. Accordingly, Hagar embodies the more destructive propensities of Grandfather's generation as Laurence initially perceived and experienced them. It is in this context only that Hagar's fate is predestined, to the extent that blind adherence to a rigid moral and social code necessarily precludes the sympathetic tolerance of any other.

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AT THE JUNGFRÄU

Ralph Gustafson

1

I suppose the heavenly gates swing outward
 And aerialists see there equivalents
 Of what we have on athletic earth
 Of worth and wear and love and coming
 Spring? We are plainly here,
 Yet (for all the gloom and doom)
 Make as insistent stands and breathless
 Landings as any performed in heaven.

2

The ascent is here, a gorgeous heartbeat
 Ahead of heaven. Gospelers deny
 All this, look through the sultry cracks
 And pose contrivances to get us out of it,
 To a stretch of heaven nothing comparable.
 I stretch in a hot bath, nothing
 Sarcastic, nothing cynical, duly
 Sensible and dry myself afterward.

3

Hereabouts is real business,
 Death too soon to solve the love of it.
 Good health knows this.
 Even the dying go with a grace
 Hind-end-to as sort of a lackluck,
 Watch the finished who've had love
 And forgiven the pain, plucking the blanket
 As if they wouldn't let go earth.

4

The sun shone that day out
 On the Jungfrau. We talked of love and mountains;
 Of lost chances most likely. The sun
 Snagged on a ridge of ice, tipped
 Over, then was gone — the way
 Life goes. Instantly it got colder
 (Of course). We discussed regret as well,
 But it didn't seem to matter. Not much.

5

Have you walked along that abbey corridor
 Of tombs the lids off? near Burgos,
 Isn't it? Straw and a chicken brooding
 Inside one. *Cluck, cluck.*
 We were startled ourselves. Within the chapel
 The abbot was laid out in braid and velvet.
 No more. Vamoosed. Not any
 More. *Cluck cluck.* Yes.

6

At Lourdes the halt and sorrowful wait
 For their resurrection. By all means
 (Beyond what can be got cheaper
 In plastic saints and electrified Virgins).
 We thought of this among the mountains.
 The worth of iconology and departure
 Is mightily present among snowpeaks.
 It's the sense of space and breadth.

7

If you take one of the aerial lifts
 From Grindelwald to the upper meadows
 You can get to slopes that are dazzling;
 I mean, the effect of the wild colour
 Is — transcendent from the lift
 Then red, white, purple, red,
 Walked on. A mile in is Bachsee,
 A clear lake of significance — or not.

8

We still picture it. Then two girls
 Came up over the fenced ridge
 (We are back sitting under those snowcrests
 Above the Jungfrau Valley). I had started
 To write poetry. They didn't stop
 Talking. I believe they are going
 To invent plastic that destructs . . .
 O wayward world!



"A MYSTERY AT THE CORE OF LIFE"

Margaret Laurence & Women's Spirituality

Elisabeth Potvin

MOST CRITICS OF MARGARET LAURENCE who have focussed on the spiritual quest in her fiction have stressed the Biblical references which support an orthodox religious interpretation of her search for transcendence, in an attempt to reconcile her writing with the Judeo-Christian vision. One states the case like this: "How can [Laurence's] pejorative view of the institutional church be made to tally with a clearly Christian pattern of providential action which marks her novels?"¹ But *is* it clearly Christian? Laurence refused to be pigeonholed on her religious beliefs, stating, "I don't have a traditional religion, but I believe there's a mystery at the core of life."² "I don't think we can define God, but if there is a conscious will aside from man, I think it leaves us a free will. It is up to us to save the planet."³ The "us" she refers to here is, I would suggest, women. In response to one query made toward the end of her life about whether her work implied that we should look toward a female principle for spiritual guidance, Laurence responded very emotionally that she had long hoped this trend would be observed in her work.⁴ She called *The Diviners* her spiritual autobiography, and it represents the apotheosis of her quest. To Margaret Atwood she confessed, "I don't think I'll ever write another novel."⁵

The female spiritual quest assumes a different form than the male heroic quest, which is generally linear and involves separation, achievement, and the conquest of culture over nature. The pattern for women is, by contrast, usually based on relating, nurturing and assuming responsibility for others, as theorists like Carol Gilligan⁶ and Nancy Chodorow⁷ have recently demonstrated. Unlike the male artist or seeker in fiction, the female artist faces major internal conflicts between the selfless role of the heroine and the self-expressive role of the artist.⁸ Estelle Jelenik claims that female autobiographies tend to be less goal-oriented than those of men,

concentrating more on inner reveries and social contexts than on external accomplishments.⁹ Heroism and spiritual salvation must then be redefined in the context of gender. Margaret Laurence is well aware of this, and in many respects her writing intuitively foreshadows the concerns outlined by contemporary feminist theories. She claims that her initial impulse in writing “seemed to be human freedom,” and adds that in later life, “in a profound sense it still is human freedom. . . . [which is] linked with some kind of growth and I would express this in terms of an inner freedom.”¹⁰ For her characters, the development of this inner freedom generally requires defiance of male authority figures, secular and divine. The challenge to the male heroic quest is most clearly, if humorously, outlined in her 1970 children’s work called *Jason’s Quest*. The hero Jason, a young mole, sets out on a quest for a cure for the “invisible sickness” which is destroying the city Molanium, accompanied by two cats and an owl — typical witches’ familiars. Molanium is culturally endangered because its inhabitants are afraid to grow and change, unable to relate to one another. Accordingly, the hero’s theme song mocks the static quality of Calvinism in the popular Protestant hymn:

Ride on, ride on in majesty!
Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry:
O Saviour meek, pursue thy road
With palms and scattered garments strowed.

In Jason’s story, the lyrics he sings are a parody of this hymn:

Bash on! bash on in majesty!
And thwart the fowling churls!
We will not be sedate and slow!
We’ll live in swoops and swirls.¹¹

In terms of a spiritual quest, Laurence also challenges gender-based definitions of sin and grace. Feminist theologian Valerie Saiving Goldstein contends that only men, whose sense of self is well-developed and separate, perceive pride as sin, and that women sin through

triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center of focus; dependence on others for one’s own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossip sociability, and mistrust of reason — in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self.¹²

These are faults which Laurence’s heroines struggle to overcome. They also typically follow the spiritual quest pattern outlined by another feminist theologian, Carol Christ, who describes a period of awakening followed by a descent and ascent, in imitation of the Demeter-Persephone myth.¹³ This descent pattern differs from the male heroic descent (evident in the work of writers such as Robert Kroetsch or Rudy Wiebe) by the fact that women remain symbiotically connected

to each other, whereas the male quest involves complete separation and the need to develop and prove a detached self-identity. An increased awareness of the mother-daughter affinity accompanies the female journey. Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi's concept of "motherhood" also corroborates the idea that women's search for autonomy is unique; she contends that mothering is a mystical experience because a pregnant woman is both one and two persons simultaneously. The spiritual hero can never have the dimensions of experience open to women, and compensates for this by individuation and striving.¹⁴

In tracing Laurence's shift in consciousness from androcentric orthodox religion to "gynolatric,"¹⁵ or "woman-reverencing," spirituality in the Manawaka novels, I want to stress the predominance of fat goddess and grotesque mother images. Laurence also emphasizes the themes of birth, pregnancy, and mortality. Each novel represents the four elements central to ancient goddess worship: earth, air, fire, and water. Where she does use Biblical imagery, it is generally subverted, in an attempt to break away from the dualistic philosophy which has characterized Western theology, or to give precedence to the immanent which has historically been denigrated at the expense of the transcendent. Laurence wants us to see that spiritual freedom is not a question of either/or, but instead an acceptance of the possibilities of both/and.

The iconoclastic nature of each heroine's rebellion as she struggles against orthodox religious structures is marked by confrontation with such issues as motherhood, suffering, fate, generational conflict, and social withdrawal, all seen from a woman's perspective. Each woman embarks on her own journey involving a "dark night of the soul" and finds herself an outcast. Marginalization thus becomes a position of power, a way of knowing, a way of seeing differently. On one hand, Laurence regrets the tragic loss of community when strong individuals are alienated by stratified institutions which create the loss of genuine spiritual vitality and lead to the polarization of the individual and society. On the other hand, it is clear that Laurence herself was becoming increasingly disillusioned with and losing faith in patriarchal monotheism. And so I want to discuss how each of the Manawaka novels represents a progressive break with the god of patriarchy, and a journey towards female autonomy.

IN THE FIRST OF THE NOVELS, *The Stone Angel*, Hagar's pride resembles that of her Biblical namesake; it is what allows us to both admire her for her moral insight and condemn her for her moral blindness. Hagar is identified with the downtrodden and the weak, yet her courage and her strength prevent her from becoming pathetic or victimized. She is the forebear of Laurence's heroines, the first to resist Calvinism, while the final break is not made until it is created

by Morag in *The Diviners*. Hagar, whose name means “flight,” is the archetypal woman of Old Testament theology: the outcast Egyptian, the last survivor of the ancient fertility cults destroyed by the Hebrews, the slave of Abraham, the mother of the disinherited Ishmael.

The novel opens with a description of the stone angel: its eyes are uncarved, without even the pretense of sight, so it is “doubly blind,” like Hagar.¹⁶ Made of hard marble, it represents the inaccessibility of Hagar’s dead mother, and stands as a tribute to the father’s authority in silencing and blinding women. The flowers surrounding the grave are overgrown and untended, suggesting the decay of nature. Hagar’s childhood is one of separation and cruelty: her only female influence is an aunt who favours Hagar’s brother Dan; her father despises the “feminine” gentleness of Matt and the sickly weakness of Dan and beats the two boys, who in turn beat Hagar; it is natural that she becomes hardened against the traditionally female traits. Forced to identify with her father, Hagar attributes her strength to masculine sternness. His legacy to her is a puritanical and functional religion; his first catechism is about weights and measures, symbolizing that his sense of justice is quantitative rather than qualitative. Jason Currie is opposed to the flesh, as is suggested by the fence separating him from No-Name Lottie’s mother and the birch cane he uses to punish Hagar. For Hagar, he is God the Father:

Auntie Doll was always telling me that Father was a God-fearing man. I never believed it of course. I couldn’t imagine Father fearing anyone, God included, especially when he didn’t even owe his existence to the Almighty God. God might have created heaven and earth, but Father was a self-made man. (SA, 16-17)

Striving to imitate her father, Hagar is also expected to conform to standards of femininity, and is sent to the ladies’ academy to learn to cook and embroider. Despite her refusal to play the role of dutiful daughter, and her insistence upon marrying the man her father despises, Hagar remains like her father. Her attraction to Bram is sexual; he represents the opposite of her repressive father, and so she elevates his crudeness and earthiness until they acquire romantic dimensions. “His banner over me was love,” she confesses of Bram (SA, 80). But Bram also wishes to oppress her: “I saw with amazement that he wanted a dynasty no less than my father had” (SA, 101). In a parody of the apostle Peter, Hagar denies her faith in patriarchy three times, fleeing first her father, then Bram, and then her son Marvin. Yet she remains enslaved to the pride afforded her through patriarchal privilege, having borne Bram only the necessary heirs, like the Biblical handmaiden to Abraham. Except that there is no real saint to comfort this Hagar, only a stone one; only a rusty bucket instead of deep well (SA, 187). She has sacrificed her life for “my lost men” (SA, 6), thinking women “flimsy, gutless” (SA, 4), furthering Abraham’s dynasty by remaining a servant, but ignoring her own destiny. She sees herself as a man, dressed entirely in Bram’s clothing and recogniz-

ing only a woman's eyes when she stares at herself in the mirror (*SA*, 133). Even when she leaves Bram, she ends only by serving another man in her capacity as housekeeper to Mr. Oatley, as later she must serve the wishes of her son. Although maleness is privileged under Calvinism, the fate of men is hardly desirable: John says he has no real father, and neither of Hagar's sons can claim Jason's love or respect. A father's love is like a "honeyed butcher knife rammed" into a child's mouth (*SA*, 125). Both Jason and Bram deny the force of Eros; they are "different sides of the same coin" (*SA*, 184) and are buried alongside one another. Justice and love are irreconcilable according to the harsh Calvinist doctrine; like Joyce's god who sits paring his fingernails, this god has neither mercy nor compassion, and heaven is only an ersatz goal, according to Hagar:

Even if heaven were real, and measured as Revelations says, so many cubits this way and that, how gimcrack a place it would be, crammed with its pavements of gold, its gates of pearl and topaz, like a gigantic chunk of costume jewellery. Saint John of Patmos can keep his sequined heaven, or share it with Mr. Troy, for all I care, and spend eternity in fingering the gems and telling each other gleefully, they're worth a fortune. (*SA*, 120)

By the end of the novel, after the parodic communion feast with Mr. Lees, Hagar has returned to nature and the female. He too has lived according to the code of masculine pride, which has also victimized his child. Hagar descends from the Apollonian light into the dark cannery near the water, following the search pattern of Demeter looking for a lost child. For the first time, she cries — about how she has hurt her son John. After her epiphany, Hagar learns to value her femaleness. In spite of her isolation and pride, she has remained connected to her children from whom she continues to learn. Now life is seen as a cyclical process, described in distinctly female terms, as Mrs. Steiner suggests:

"It all comes as a surprise. You get your first period, and you're amazed — *I can have babies now* — such a thing! When the children come, you think — *Is it mine? Did it come out of me? Who could believe it?* When you can't have them any more, what a shock — *It's finished — so soon?*" (*SA*, 104)

Hagar compares herself to the Ancient Mariner, who frees himself after he blesses the creatures of the sea; yet she rejects the Coleridgean notion of divine intervention in achieving grace. She bestows her own blessings, first to her rejected son, and later to her hospital roommate Sandra, to whom she offers a bedpan — Hagar's notion of grace is very earthy. She is self-motivated in both of these actions, refusing to appeal to "Our Father": "I may as well hold out a while longer," she says to her minister Mr. Troy (*SA*, 290). She recognizes the strength of older women, who are rooted like old trees, and pass on their knowledge to virgin women like Sandra, who is "green and slender, a sapling of a girl," and Doris, the mother figure. Hagar is a crone in the sense that feminist theologian Mary Daly defines her: "A Woman

becomes a Crone as a result of Surviving early stages of the Otherworld Journey and therefore having discovered depth of courage, strength, and wisdom in herself."¹⁷

What Hagar affirms is a vision of herself as a "holy terror" (*SA*, 304), combining within herself the alienated dualities of Old Testament faith. Mr. Lees, the inverted Christ figure who has lost his faith, reveals to her that the spirit is inseparable from the flesh (*SA*, 227). It is to the flesh that Hagar turns her attention now. Repeated references to pigs, cows, and other sacrificial animals once seen as sacred because of their breeding ability, link many of the characters with Hagar, who is described as "calm as a stout madonna" (*SA*, 122). Bram is described as "lazy as a pet pig," and Hagar compares her mound of flesh to the land itself (*SA*, 169, 190). She is an obese and bloated woman, a "Job in reverse" (*SA*, 40). She is like a mother goddess figure, an exaggerated example of maternity gone out of control.¹⁸ The demonic aspect of motherhood replicating itself is shown in grotesque insect imagery as well.¹⁹ Other references to female fertility and autonomy include calves, held sacred to the goddess (*SA*, 94) and the mother cat who gives birth to her young in a corner, "licking herself clean afterward, with no one to ask who the tom had been" — this is the ideal way Hagar wishes to give birth (*SA*, 99). Perhaps the most dramatic animal image of fertility which evokes the ambivalence of maternity is the group of chicks which Lottie steps on, foreshadowing how she and Hagar will crush the sexual passion of their two children Arlene and John; Hagar admires this act as cruel but merciful (*SA*, 28). Repeatedly motherhood is portrayed as distorted or commercialized by contemporary culture, as in the advertisement for the nursing home Silverthreads which ironically claims that "only the best will do for mother" (*SA*, 53). Hagar cannot initially play the role of comforting mother to her brother, her husband, her father, or her sons, but gradually rejects her patriarchal upbringing and learns compassion for others for, as her nurse remarks, "Haven't you ever given a hand to anyone in your time? It's your turn now. Try to look at it that way. It's your due" (*SA*, 276). Accepting her maternalness and her place in this cycle, Hagar reclaims her son's love. Hagar initially despises "that vat of a woman," Clara (*SA*, 46), as the Biblical Clara despised Sarah, if only for the reason that Clara bore Bram only daughters, and Hagar has learned to denigrate femaleness, not having been selected as the mother of the chosen race. Her final reconciliation with herself as a woman is represented by her acceptance of a glass of water from Doris, whom she previously despised as "a broody hen" (*SA*, 29), a "calving cow" (*SA*, 31), and a "sow in labour" (*SA*, 55). The water symbolizes a kind of baptism into a new faith, an acceptance of the woman who has done the most to nurture and sustain Hagar, who finally permits herself to be mothered: "I only defeat myself by not accepting her." (*SA*, 308). This is what she claims she has most desired in her life, to be accepted, and "simply to rejoice" (*SA*, 292).

A *Jest of God* takes up theological issues where *The Stone Angel* leaves off: here we have the same fear of the flesh and the feminine, and again the spiritual transformation is through Eros and water. God is a “joker” whose Old Testament harshness is juxtaposed with maternal love;²⁰ what Rachel’s father most fears is contact with any living thing. As Rachel says, “If I believed, the last kind of Creator I could imagine would be a human-type being who could be reached by tears or bribed with words.” (*JG*, 95) Rachel’s view of God is “bifocal”: she inherits both the harshness of institutional religion and develops her own definition of a life force which affords her some joy (Russell, 441). She rejects the “pretty and clean-cut Jesus” (*JG*, 41). Where Hagar felt she failed in motherhood, Rachel’s dissatisfaction stems from not being pregnant. She is the stereotype of the seduced and abandoned woman, yet she is not waiting to be rescued by a male savior, as one critic contends:

One simply gets tired of listening to Rachel take pot-shots at herself. The reader, instead of identifying, finds himself (herself, too, I should think) silently shouting at her to get some eyeliner, save for a mink, strong-arm a man, kill her mother, and stop bitching.²¹

If Rachel has any inner conflict, it is regarding maternity, not her need to “strong-arm a man,” except as an instrument in becoming pregnant. Like the Biblical Rachel, who is envious of her sister’s fertility, Rachel is jealous of her sister Stacey and of James Doherty’s mother Grace (*JG*, 50) and seeks to mother her students; yet she can also contemplate the dark, destructive aspect of mothering in considering both suicide and abortion seriously. All of the jests of God in the novel involve the rejection of love: Calla’s for Rachel, Rachel’s for her sister, Mrs. Cameron’s for Rachel, Rachel’s for Nick, and Rachel’s love for her “unborn child.” The acceptance of an orthodox God is complicated for Rachel by her fear of rejecting her mother whose alliance to conventional religion is strong:

I always go [to church] though. When I came back to teach in Manawaka, I told Mother the first Sunday that I didn’t think I’d go. She said, “Why not?” I didn’t say God died recently, within the last few years, but a long time ago; longer than I could remember, for I could not actually recall a time when He was alive. (*JG*, 39)

The “alive” aspect of Christianity is represented by the Evangelical Temple attended by Calla, where ecstatic religion and speaking in tongues is confused for Rachel by her sexually ambivalent feelings toward Calla, the “mother of canaries and budgeriars” (*JG*, 137). Calla offers to take care of Rachel and her unborn child, but Rachel is afraid of what Calla represents and equates her with the caged birds. Neither extreme of maternal love, as a form of domination, will do, nor will Nick’s love bring satisfaction: “I am not God,” he tells her. Nick, associated with Apollo and the sun (*JG*, 176), most desires separateness — “He is so apart”

(*JG*, 85) — and Rachel, who is associated with Eve and with water (*JG*, 86, 141), wants closeness.

Rachel must learn to overcome her fear of mortality, and, while the first four chapters focus on death and the repression of nature, even the introduction of Nick in the fifth chapter and his resurrection of her physical nature cannot help her overcome this completely. As Carol Christ's model proposes, heroines on a spiritual search must make an independent descent into the landscape of their fears. Breaking an old taboo, Rachel literally descends into the bowels of the funeral parlour and gets drunk with Hector, the "comic prophet, dwarf seer," as she calls him (*JG*, 124), who allows her positive insights into death so that she may re-emerge whole. Like Mrs. Kazlik, the old woman whom Nick admires for being "inner-directed," Rachel learns defiance and can say "No" to her mother three times, and assert, "I am the mother now" (*JG*, 184). She also rejects the stifling mother love of Calla, who insists on calling her "child" and desires to help Rachel raise her baby. Her longing is "to be borne," a pun which refers to herself and to her future maternity: "Give me my children," she demands, as did her Biblical namesake (*JG*, 181). Like Hagar, she rejects the "faith of the fathers" — "God's pity on God," she concludes (*JG*, 202) — in favour of an acceptance of living in the present, and a strengthened view of womanhood. Rachel acknowledges the ambivalence of motherhood; she listens to neither "my mother's archaic simper voice" (*JG*, 90), nor Calla's voice, the "pillar of tabernacles, speaker in tongues" (*JG*, 198), but relies on her own inner voices: "My speaking voice, and then only that other voice, wordless and terrible, the voice of some woman mourning for her children" (*JG*, 181).

With *The Fire-Dwellers*, we move from the Old Testament God of wrath to the New Testament God of love, but his love offers nothing to redeem women, nor is modern religion much different from urban consumerism: it devours women. Laurence claimed that her protagonist, t Stacey, who "mourns [her] disbelief," is Hagar's spiritual granddaughter.²² The choppy, nonlinear style of the novel reflects a rebellion against conformity and conventionality. The plot of the novel is exceedingly mundane: a Vancouver suburban housewife seeks liberation and has an extra-marital affair; one could be describing a Harlequin romance. Yet the important point is that Laurence inverts the mundane and the sacred: hairdressers become priestesses, supermarkets become temples, and Stacey communing with the birds is described as a prophetess. "God has a sick sense of humour, if you ask me," she retorts.²³ The sacredness of consumerism in modern society is reflected in the mass rally held by the Richalife company, which sells

Not Just Vitamins — A New Concept — A New Way of Life with testimonials. *Both Spirit and Flesh Altered. Richness is a Quality of Living.* Singing ads on local stations, blond angelic trilling. Rallies. Gimmicks falling like the golden shower of stars from fireworks. Oh Jesus lover of my soul. (*FD*, 34)

Richalife is headed by the silver-haired god of thunder (*FD*, 45), Thor, who drinks sacrificial blood (tomato juice) to prove he is a reformed alcoholic and proclaims “we’re not just selling vitamin pills — we’re selling ourselves” (*FD*, 40). He is also strongly critical of Stacey’s mothering abilities, which immediately puts her on the defensive (*FD*, 42). Stacey chooses this occasion to become drunk in a mockery of Thor, playing the role of the Nietzschean clown who announces that God is dead. Secular religion is a cheap substitute for old-fashioned salvation; for women, particularly, it offers only celluloid distractions like magazines, diets, vitamin pills, drugs, cosmetics, extramarital affairs, and the occasional night course which, instead of being a “rich cultural experience,” reinforces the emptiness of male culture, as is suggested by the gender exclusivity of their content: “Mythology of Modern Man” (*FD*, 4), “Man and His Gods” (*FD*, 53), and “Varying Views of Urban Life” (*FD*, 72). Women are ritually sacrificed to perpetuate male dominance, as Stacey recognizes in her Ancient Greek course, where the professor chastises her for identifying with Clytemnestra, to which she responds:

The king sacrificed their youngest daughter for success in war — what was the queen supposed to do, shout for joy? *That’s not quite the point we’re discussing, is it? She murdered her husband, Mrs. MacAindra.* Yeh well I guess you must know, Dr. Thorne. Sorry. *Oh, that’s fine — I always try to encourage people to express themselves.* — Young twerp. Let somebody try killing one of his daughters. But still, he had his Ph.D. (*FD*, 32)

This sense of alienation can be traced back to the patriarchal myth of the Garden of Eden:

Where did it start? Everything goes too far back to be traced. The roots vanish, because they don’t end with Matthew [her father-in-law], even if it were possible to trace them that far. They go back and back forever. Our father Adam. (*FD*, 167)

Death also permeates this novel: various characters are killed or attempt to kill themselves, and media images of Viet Nam continue to haunt Stacey. Society’s mass death wish is the antithesis of Stacey’s yearning for purity: the two polarities are represented by the violence-obsessed Buckle and the gentle fisherman-artist Luke. Luke refers to Stacey as “Mer-woman,” half land and half sea. The image of the sea-whale (*FD*, 233) recalls the mother goddess figure, the sea representing the primal womb; it is echoed again in the description of the enormous figure of Buckle’s mother, the “undersea giant woman” (*FD*, 159), found blindly crawling around on her hands and knees with her “big tits bumping on the floor” (*FD*, 262). Stacey is linked to these images by her size and by the fact that, as Buckle’s mother survives his death, so she survives the fate of Tess. Juxtaposed with the transformative water symbols are those of fire, suggesting passion, escape, and destruction. “Better to marry than to burn, St. Paul said, but he didn’t say what to do if you married *and* burned,” remarks Stacey (*FD*, 211). Although she longs for escape

to the water-filled country of her dreams, she cannot leave her family. Her decision to remain at home may not appear to be the choice of a truly liberated woman, but in many respects it is more courageous than fleeing responsibility for patriarchal tokenism in the work force or the nostalgic escapism offered by Luke. It is a woman's choice; one which cannot be understood by a male deity: "Listen here, God, don't talk to me like that. You have no right. *You* try bringing up four kids. Don't tell me you've brought up countless millions because I don't buy that. We've brought up our own selves and precious little help we've had from you" (*FD*, 168). Like Rachel, Stacey makes her journey of descent into the basement, where she dances drunkenly in her golden slippers, and now God is only a spectator. Her quest is to become more self-reliant and she proclaims, "Give me another forty years, Lord, and I may mutate into a matriarch" (*FD*, 308).

A fully-developed matriarch, a woman unafraid to go deep into her past or forward into her future, is what we meet in *The Diviners*. Thus far Laurence has presented us with the three phases of a woman's life: the virgin Rachel, the mother Stacey, and the crone Hagar. In this final novel, we have a woman who encompasses all three. Morag is not just a seeker, but also a creative artist, shaper of her own destiny. Recognizing that socially institutionalized oppression relies upon the spiritual legitimation of God the Father, she discovers the sublime in the lower, more banal realms, along with the socially marginalized — in Christie's role as trash collector, in Jules' as an outcast Metis, and in herself as an adopted misfit. Like many postmodern protagonists, she questions the dominant definition of reality and prescriptive belief system. There is no final truth, she writes to her friend Ella, only the interweaving of history and myth. When she was a child, Morag claimed it was possible to love Jesus but not God.²⁴ But as an adult, Morag questions her belief in God as well, and doubts that institutional religion holds much significance in her life. As the reviewer of her first novel states, "Miss Gunn obviously has it in for the Church" (*D*, 214). As God decreases in status, the fat goddess increases in stature. In the first "snapshot" we have of her, Morag appears as "buried alive" in the flesh of her mother. Prin is also a grotesque mother figure, and Mrs. Gerson is portrayed as the ideal matriarch. Catherine Parr Traill represents Morag's spiritual mother and replaces God in the heroine's interior monologues. But even this model is eventually abandoned because it is too unrealistic and abstract (*D*, 332). Motherhood inspires ambivalence: Pique denies her mother repeatedly and Morag is as envious of her daughter's sexual freedom as Stacey was of Katie's. Pique, fruit of the *hieros gamos* of Morag and Jules, marks the beginning of a new matriarchal lineage, blending the Highland and Metis myths with her own, and inheriting the strengths of her mother and Catherine Parr Traill after all the fathers are buried. Her iconoclasm is what ensures her future survival.

If women are the key to salvation, men, on the other hand, appear rather negatively, particularly when controlling female sexuality and birth processes. The

doctor who interferes with Pique's birth is depicted as extraneous, and Brooke's censure of Morag for writing about abortion is clearly condemned; she publishes her novel under her maiden name to avoid association with him. Brooke wants Morag to remain his bride-child: fresh, dependent, having no past, and childless — he describes children as “accidents,” and refers to Morag as his “little one.” But Morag does not want a daddy. Brooke's frustration as a failed creator (and Morag's frustration at the academic institution which has failed her) is reflected in what Laurence portrays as Brooke's desire to usurp Morag's ability to give birth — to her novel, to her child, to her self. Except for Jules, who is described as a shaman helping her do magic (*D*, 223), all of Morag's sexual encounters are with hostile or insensitive men like Chas or Harold. Even her adulterous relationship with Dan MacRaith, which she initially rationalizes to herself as healthy, gradually becomes unacceptable to Morag once she begins to empathize too much with his wife Birdie and to wonder about the welfare of his children.

In this novel, nature is again associated with femaleness, but it acquires more mystical dimensions, as in Wordsworth's sense of nature embodying “wise passiveness.” The river, like time, flows both ways, metaphorically evoking both birth and death. Morag's fertility is associated with her foray into the ravine with Jules. The forest is her true element (*D*, 41), and she is described as a pagan witch, a “lonely watcher of the waters.” Morag's epiphany of the “here and now” is represented by the flight of the blue heron, which is “ancient-seeming,” an “angel,” “something out of the world's dawn. . . . [as she watches] the soaring and measured certainty of its flight” (*D*, 292). The New Jerusalem is a failure, according to Morag, and her return to nature is paralleled by an increasing awareness of the bond with her daughter. Morag combines the phallic instruments of power: spear, knife, and divining rod, with her symbols of herself as moon and water in the mythic figure of the Black Celt Morag, the Celtic triple goddess of Morrighan, protectress of the land. Like Royland, who says he gave up preaching his hellfire and brimstone doctrine because it “[s]eemed better to find water than to. . . . Raise fire” (*D*, 197), Morag finds her rebirth in water. Likewise Pique, whom Morag refers to as “harbinger of my death, continuer of life,” is named after her ancestress Piquette, who also survives trial by fire.

IN SUGGESTING THAT LAURENCE'S FICTION was evolving toward a female-identified spirituality, I am really claiming that it reaches back to its beginnings, for her African writings celebrate the joy of female sexuality, pregnancy, and religion. This detached, but not disinterested, exuberance exists because, in her African works, Laurence can view her characters from a cultural distance, not yet recognizing her personal complicity in the colonization of Africa

or her own involvement in authoritarian regimes, both secular and religious. Her real concern with the psychosocial dimensions of feminism are muted and undeveloped in this early work, because her liberalism is still male-identified. Yet in her evocation of the fertility goddess Nyame in *The Tomorrow Tamer* (TT, 128), or in *This Side Jordan*, women are seen as the ultimate source of life, power, and compassion: "If men had to bear the children, the world would die of your fear."²⁵ Water and fire are again the essential elements of spiritual wholeness in these works, and acquire special significance in an African context, where women's oppression is equated with colonization and freedom is again asserted through an emphasis on the body and nature. In *This Side Jordan*, England is personified as an aging crone: "Britannia's no longer a buxom wench who can give or withhold her favours. She's a matriarch, and an emaciated one at that" (TSJ, 170). The river which Nathaniel must cross in order to "come over into salvation . . . was the warm slimy womb of all" (TSJ, 247); and the ebony Madonna, another central symbol in the novel, becomes for him "the Mother of all men" and a metaphor for black emancipation (TSJ, 274). And Johnnie Kestoe ends by recognizing his abuse of the young black girl and embracing the feminine, naming his new daughter after his mother Mary. *The Prophet's Camel Bell* marks Laurence's recognition of the political implications of her position in Africa, and she begins to identify with the poor women who come to her begging for relief from the pain caused by clitoridectomies:

What should I do? give them a couple of five-grain aspirin? lunatic audacity of shoving a mild pill at their total situation was more than I could stomach. . . . They had not really believed I would give them anything. Women had always lived with pain. Why should it ever be any different?²⁶

When Laurence realizes that it can be different, that it is women who participate in the exploitation of their own sex and perpetuate patriarchal values, at the bidding of their men, her outrage becomes palpable. The notion that women's resistance is limited because of their relationships with men was something that Laurence could recognize in a culture other than her own, but eventually it hit home. When she finally acknowledges her inadvertent alliance with male privilege, a theme she explores in the Manawaka novels, her faith in the world as it exists is badly shaken. Looking increasingly toward a definition of "inner freedom" that was true to her instincts as a woman, Laurence challenged the parameters of conventional wisdom and traditional faith. Who knows what kind of spiritual heroine she might have envisioned had she dared to continue writing along the same path? It is perhaps no wonder that Laurence's own community banned her final novel as "obscene" — no doubt it disturbed the prevailing sense of morality, and the promotion of its ideas logically extended might lead the reader into dangerous territories.

The spiritually free woman depicted in the Manawaka novels is not unique to Margaret Laurence. Other Canadian women writers — Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, Adele Wiseman, and Isabel Huggan, to name but a few — have given us heroines whose courage and defiance have allowed them to resist surrendering to the dominant patriarchal ethos. Northrop Frye claims that Canadian consciousness rests on an image of the land as an “unsievable virginity.”²⁷ I can only assume he meant this as a challenge to the Canadian male psyche: to penetrate the secret, to conquer nature, and to overcome that tenacious and amorphous mystery which confronts him. Perhaps Canadian women have developed a different approach — one which does not involve violation, but is receptive to natural mystery, divining an unvanquished spirit. Throughout all her writing, Laurence’s spirituality is based upon a revival of the primal, the sensual, and the mundane. In these terms, she envisioned an ancient but paradoxically very new *mythos* which established her as one of the spiritual foremothers in the development of the Canadian consciousness.

NOTES

- ⁴ See Gwen Cranfill Curry, “Introduction,” *Journeys toward Freedom* (Ph.D. thesis,
- ¹ Kenneth Russell, “God and church in the fiction of Margaret Laurence,” *Studies in Religion*, 7 (Fall 1978), 435.
- ² Valerie Miner, “The matriarch of Manawaka,” *Saturday Night*, 89, 5 (May 1974), 18.
- ³ Donna Wigmore, “Margaret Laurence: The Woman Behind the Writing,” *Chate-laine* (Feb. 1971), 54.
- ⁴ See Gwen Cranfill Curry, “Introduction,” *Journeys toward Freedom* (Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1980).
- ⁵ Margaret Atwood, “Face to Face,” *A Place to Stand On: Essays by and about Margaret Laurence*, ed. George Woodcock (Edmonton: NeWest, 1983), 27.
- ⁶ *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982).
- ⁷ *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978).
- ⁸ Carole Pearson, “The Artist,” *Who am I? Female Portraits in British and American Fiction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 199.
- ⁹ *Women’s Autobiographies* (Bloomington & London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980).
- ¹⁰ Clara Thomas, “A Conversation about Literature: An Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton,” *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 1.1 (Winter 1972), 67.
- ¹¹ *Jason’s Quest* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), 115.
- ¹² “The Human Situation: A Feminine Viewpoint,” *The Nature of Man in Theological and Psychological Perspective*, ed. Simon Doniger (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 165.
- ¹³ *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon, 1980).
- ¹⁴ *Motherself: A Mythic Analysis of Motherhood* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988).

- ¹⁵ The term was coined by Edward C. Whitmont, *The Return of the Goddess* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).
- ¹⁶ *The Stone Angel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964), 3.
- ¹⁷ *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), 16.
- ¹⁸ See *SA*, 46, 56, 92, 133, 170, 259, 261, 307 for examples.
- ¹⁹ See *SA*, 118, 170, 178, 216.
- ²⁰ *A Jest of God* (London, Melbourne: Macmillan, 1966), 95.
- ²¹ Robert Harlow, "Lack of Distance," *Canadian Literature* 31 (Winter 1967), 74.
- ²² George Woodcock, *The Sixties: Canadian Writers and Writing of the Decade* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Publications Center, 1969), 10-16.
- ²³ *The Fire-Dwellers* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), 75.
- ²⁴ *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), 63.
- ²⁵ *This Side Jordan* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960), 264.
- ²⁶ *The Prophet Camel's Bell* (1963; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965), 64.
- ²⁷ *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), 826.

G17024

Fred Cogswell

In 1940 the lottery was war,
 My ticket number G17024,
 And then it was I staked my puny claim
 With a cipher more meaningful than name.
 The prize was peace and freedom for us all,
 The odds that favoured victory were small,
 But yet when 1945 came around
 The unexpected happened and I found
 Myself secure in new civilian dress
 And had at last for very own, no less,
 What I had lacked for many years, a will
 With which to steer my life. I have it still.
 And when that happened, G17024,
 As if it had not been, was then no more.
 But now, after years of being free,
 In age I find that number haunting me.

FAITH AND FICTION

Hugh MacLennan's

"The Watch That Ends the Night"

Barbara Pell

THERE IS AN INHERENT TENSION, even conflict, between faith and fiction. The modern realistic novel has a professed mimetic relationship to the post-Christian era we live in that is artistically inimical to acts of grace and expressions of faith. This conflict is somewhat analogous to the crisis in modern theology which has attempted to respond to people's spiritual need in an age bereft of God. Neo-orthodox and liberal theologians have struggled, from opposite directions, to provide a "theology of mediation" between the religious tradition and the modern mind. Neo-orthodoxy, led by Karl Barth, has emphasized revelation and the Word of God as the timeless and timely answer to man's quest, while liberal theologians, such as Paul Tillich, repudiate past dogma and redefine God in terms of man's "existential experience."

Similarly, modern religious writers who find their vision and vocation no longer coincide with the spirit of the age are, like modern theologians, attempting to communicate a vision of God to a godless world. And, like the theologians', the novelists' dilemma resolves itself into two possibilities: do they offer a dogmatic, theological answer imposed from outside onto their characters' struggles, or can they realize a spiritual solution arising out of the existential experience of their characters?

Paradoxically, this godless age could be extremely propitious for religious fiction. In this century, society has been stripped of religious complacency and materialistic security; many people are asking the basic questions of existence for which Christians have always claimed to have The Answer. But dramatizing a religious vision within the creative logic of realistic fiction can cause almost insurmountable tensions and problems for the artist. And communicating this vision to a sceptical world requires infinite talent and tact.

Religious novelists therefore, *as novelists*, must have as strong a commitment to their *art* as to their faith. Traditionally, the novel has been seen as a reflector of reality. Therefore writers of realistic fiction, though their convictions of a Higher

Reality will influence their themes and form, cannot falsify life. They must admit evil, suffering, disbelief and temptation — in other words “sin” — into their world along with righteousness and belief. They must honestly portray the agonies of doubt along with the fervour of faith. Above all, they cannot impose an ultimate solution on the existential struggles of the characters *deus ex machina*, nor miraculously transpose their finite quests into an infinite realm. These artistic problems must be worked out with great care within the novel itself. The struggle for religious meaning against doubt and sin cannot be expounded as abstract dogma. It must be integrated into the fabric of the plot, presented as dramatic conflict arising out of the convictions of the characters, and resolved with fidelity to the artistic logic of the fiction and the finite complexities of life.

In other words, Christian novelists who wish to communicate their religious vision through realistic fiction to a post-Christian society must portray realistically and dramatically the action of God's grace in fallen nature. And all serious religious novelists have found a tremendous struggle between the demands of their art and their faith, their fidelity to fallen nature and their commitment to divine grace. As François Mauriac asked: “How can I reconcile so distorted a view of the human animal with the faith I claim to have in his vocation to sanctity?” And in the end he could not, and he ceased to write novels.¹

LET ME EXPLAIN how one of the founding fathers of modern Canadian fiction, and the self-appointed spokesman for Canada in the twentieth century, attempted to resolve this artistic tension in his works, and more particularly in his finest novel. In four books of essays and seven novels, Hugh MacLennan chronicled the historical maturation of Canada from colonialism to atomic *angst* and paralleled it with his own personal spiritual journey from Calvinism to Christian Existentialism. In a sociological oversimplification, he generalized his personal experience of the joyless and inhibiting Cape Breton Calvinism into a national identity crisis, and his own religious quest for a theology for the modern age, “a new vision of God,” into the spiritual pilgrimage of the twentieth century.

In two of his essays, “Help Thou Mine Unbelief” and “A Second Look,”² MacLennan warns: “History reveals clearly that no civilization has long survived after that civilization has lost its religion” (140). But, if “the state of mind resulting from our loss of the sense of God's nearness constitutes the greatest crisis of our time” (143), this loss of faith is due to the dominance of science and rationalism in our society. And the *apparent* incompatibility of science and religion within the modern mind he ascribes to the evils of a “puritan education” that exchanges mysticism for materialism:

So the end-product of puritanism has been enthroned, science unreconciled with religion, and by what seem to be logical steps we have been led into the solitude of a purposeless universe. This is what I believe to be the essence of the spiritual crisis we face. We are alone and we are purposeless. (154)

However, MacLennan feels that now "with the churches all but empty shells, the hunger for a believable religion may well be stronger than at any time in world history since the reign of Caracalla." And he does not believe that traditional Christian doctrine contains "a countervailing idea great enough and sustaining enough to save society from totalitarianism and our own souls from the materialistic desert in which they now wander" (141). He calls for a "reconstruction of Christian theology" to forge "new symbols" for a "new vision of God" (145, 140). Scientists must develop "a genuine synthesis of knowledge" and from it formulate new "concepts of God" compatible with "modern scientific discoveries" and intelligible to a scientific, industrial society (153-56). It is, perhaps, the refusal of science to undertake this commission that led MacLennan to search for a theology of mediation, a redefinition of God for modern man, in the world of his fiction.

MacLennan's greatest assets as a novelist, most critics agree, are the traditional virtues of interesting plots, narrative action pieces, well-realized characters, and vivid settings that were his professed aim in order to "entertain" his readers.³ Unfortunately his greatest defect, and this also often over-rides his virtues, is that MacLennan was first and foremost an essayist. The conflict between his desire to instruct — and we have seen that this most often had a religious motivation — and his responsibilities as a novelist to "entertain" is constantly felt in his works. Although this dual commitment results in technical weaknesses, it also gives his books the universal layers of meaning that "if they do not make them great, at least make them much more than ordinary romantic-idealist novels intended for well-meaning members of the Book-of-the-Month Club."⁴ But the tension between faith and fiction may account for the fact that MacLennan's novel writing grew increasingly slower and more difficult over the years.⁵

The essential pattern that emerges from MacLennan's fiction is remarkably similar to that which Gordon Roper describes as characteristic of those "spiritual biographies" written in Canada between 1880 and 1920:

The novel traces his [the central character's] doubts, loss of faith, and his search for a new religious position, unorthodox and undogmatic, or for some substitute "religion." The chief problems are the inspiration of the Bible, the presence of pain and evil in the universe, and the divinity of Christ; solutions are found in Pantheism, universalism, and a belief in "Brotherhood," "true Christianity," the "living Jesus of the Gospels."⁶

For in many ways MacLennan's very traditional novels are fighting the theological battles of the nineteenth century. His heroes repudiate the doctrines of Calvinism but cannot free themselves from its psychological legacy of guilt; they deny the

reality of God in the world and then desperately search for alternative "religions" to console their emptiness and anxiety. But all humanist solutions — social, political, materialistic, even personal relationships — ultimately fail them, and they must eventually find a spiritual Absolute to give their lives meaning and purpose.

This general pattern is developed in progressive stages, and with growing disillusionment, through MacLennan's novels. In *Barometer Rising* (1941) Neil Macrae and Penny Wain triumph over the repressive forces of Calvinism and colonialism to enter an optimistic future. While there is still confidence that politically Canada can forge a "new order" that will unite the old and new worlds, the lovers can find personal salvation in integrity, self-knowledge and human love. The idea that individual lives might be part of "a pattern possessing a wider meaning" is only a peripheral theme.⁷ In *Two Solitudes* (1945), although the struggle for Canadian unity is dramatized in all its tragic, and religious, complexity in the first part, MacLennan imposes a symbolic solution on the second half. Paul Tallard and Heather Methuen in their marriage represent an end to the puritan tyranny of the past (both Catholic and Protestant) and to racial enmity. Their "personal religion" is founded on self-knowledge and love and humanistic optimism, but again there is a wise old man in the background hinting at a larger "pattern" which sanctifies the whole of life.⁸

The Precipice (1948) is an overly-schematized analysis of the legacies of puritanism without God in Canada and the United States. Having escaped the sexual hypocrisy of Calvinist Canada, Lucy Cameron finds that the American inheritance is compulsive materialism. MacLennan, however, never clearly defines either the problem ("the precipice") or the solution. This is a transitional novel. Since humanist, political answers are now seen to have failed MacLennan's "well-meaning generation,"⁹ he turns to the personal, religious vision which has only been hinted at in the previous novels, expressing it in didactic rhetoric. Marcia converts to Roman Catholicism, and Lucy becomes the personification of "grace" in her acceptance and forgiveness of her husband's sins, but neither answer is a convincing outcome of the plot. *Each Man's Son* (1951) recapitulates most of MacLennan's previous religious themes. Daniel Ainslie, too, suffering "the ancient curse"¹⁰ of Calvin, attempts to justify himself through hard work and to achieve immortality through a son. Repudiating God, he faces existential meaninglessness. But in a melodramatic and moving conclusion he comes to see that only selfless love can conquer sin and guilt. The dramatization of human conflict, doubt, despair and love in this novel gives it a vitality that overcomes the occasional thematic rhetoric.

MACLENNAN EMBODIES THE WHOLE PATTERN of this spiritual pilgrimage in his finest novel, *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1959), and

finally arrives at his twentieth century “shrine”: a radical redefinition of God to answer the existential dilemma of modern man, a redefinition with suggestive affinities to the liberal Protestant theology of Paul Tillich. An analysis of this novel reveals MacLennan’s theology for a post-Christian culture, and his solution for the modern Christian novelist’s problem of writing a religious novel for a secular society. However, while *The Watch That Ends the Night* is autobiographically sincere and didactically powerful, its theological thesis ultimately compromises its fictional form and undermines its narrative resolution.

MacLennan said that during the writing of *The Watch That Ends the Night* he shed “the intellectual skin” that his generation had worn:

So long as I wore it myself, my novels had been essentially optimistic. I had believed the barometer was really rising; I had believed . . . that the two solitudes were bound to come together in Canada. But my last two novels [*The Watch That Ends the Night* and *Return of The Sphinx*] have been tragic. My original title for *The Watch* was a dead give-away; it was *Requiem*. Requiem for one I had loved who had died, but also for more: requiem for the idealists of the Thirties who had meant so well, tried so hard and gone so wrong. Requiem also for their courage and a lament for their failure on a world-wide scale. . . . What *The Watch* was trying to say in the atmosphere of its story was that the decade of the 1950’s was the visible proof of my generation’s moral and intellectual bankruptcy.¹¹

Since the “basic human conflict” is spiritual, MacLennan decided to “write a book which would not depend on character-in-action but on spirit-in-action. The conflict here, the essential one, was between the human spirit of Everyman and Everyman’s human condition.”¹² Although the theme is the spiritual dilemma of the modern world, and the setting spans the century and the globe in its allusions, this novel is focused on the personal religious quest of Hugh MacLennan in the character of George Stewart.

The narrator, George Stewart, has many obvious similarities to MacLennan: he is a writer and university professor, living in Montreal with his wife, who is dying of a rheumatic heart condition. But George is also the Everyman of his generation, “a generation which yearned to belong, so unsuccessfully, to something larger than themselves.”¹³ This articulation of the religious theme of the book recalls William James’ definition of “religious experience”: “that we can experience union with *something* larger than ourselves and in that union find our greatest peace.”¹⁴ The search for religious peace — a truce between man’s spirit and his fate — is the premise and substance of *The Watch That Ends the Night* as we can see in a theological exegesis of the novel.

Beginning in Montreal in February 1951, George leads the reader gently into a series of flashbacks which span four decades before returning to the present. And, in a pattern repeated throughout the novel, he prepares us theologically for the events he then dramatizes. He tells us that as a boy he had been religious and

believed in a personal, living God. Unlike MacLennan's other heroes, George did not suffer the repressions of a strict Calvinist upbringing. Nevertheless, in the disillusionments of the Thirties, like millions of others, he lost his faith in religion, in himself, and in the integrity of human society (107). And the manifest injustices of the world, symbolized for him in his wife's illness, have increased his rejection of any divine Power (6). So, in the hubristic, self-centred Fifties he finds his religion, his "rock" and his "salvation" in the palpably moral life and love of Catherine. As Goetsch has pointed out, "George belongs to the stock type of naive narrator," and MacLennan is deftly preparing us to see his rash confidence (covering a basically insecure nature) corrected by the passage of time and new religious insights.¹⁵

Catherine Carey-Martell-Stewart represents a quasi-divine "spiritual force" in George's life. She is primarily characterized by the "spirit" or "Life-Force" which has developed in her in response to her life-long struggle against her "fate" — her rheumatic heart. Therefore, in words which MacLennan later borrowed for "The Story of a Novel," George says that this spirit has become for him "the ultimate reality": "I think of this story not as one conditioned by character, as the dramatists understand it, but by the spirit and the human condition" (25). And this spirit is the "sole force which equals the merciless fate which binds a human being to his mortality" (26). It is her strength and her knowledge that "all loving is a living of life in the midst of death" (69) that George leans on for years until he is forced to develop his own spiritual resources.

Among George's generation, in which "so many of the successful ones, after trying desperately to hitch their wagons to some great belief, ended up believing in nothing but their own cleverness" (101), towers the mythological figure of Jerome Martell, Catherine's first husband and George's spiritual father. He too is larger than life, "more like a force of nature than a man" (150), and for the narrator he epitomizes the anguished decade of the Thirties. In Part v of the novel MacLennan recreates Jerome's heroic story. An illegitimate orphan who escapes from his mother's murderer in a New Brunswick logging camp, he is finally adopted by a devoutly religious clergyman and his wife in Halifax. His life has the symbolic dimension of a modern *Pilgrim's Progress*; we are told that during his youth "he had really thought of himself as a soldier of God. He believed the Gospels literally, and they meant far more to him than they could mean to most people, because he had such a desperate need to belong" (215-16). But the horror and guilt of World War I had destroyed his religion, forcing him to seek absolution in medicine and politics for the senseless killing.

Of the mid-thirties, George says:

This was a time in which you were always meeting people who caught politics just as a person catches religion. It was probably the last time in this century when politics in our country will be evangelical, and if a man was once intensely religious, he was bound to be wide open to a mood like that of the Thirties. (223-24)

Jerome is one of many who divert the passions that no longer serve a traditional God into this neo-religious faith. Having failed to fill "the vacuum left by his lost religion" with Catherine's human love (239), he seeks salvation through humanistic works:

I used to dream of a city on top of a hill — Athens perhaps. It was a great privilege to enter it. I used to dream that if I worked hard all my life, and tried hard all my life, maybe some day I'd be allowed within its gates. And now I see the fascists besieging that city. . . . (244-45)

Confronted by the spectre of Original Sin in capitalist exploitation and fascist evil, Jerome embarks on a crusade to save mankind in the Spanish Civil War. But he is all too aware that his City of Civilization is a substitute for Bunyan's Celestial City, the City of God, as he articulates half of the theme of this novel:

A man must belong to something larger than himself. He must surrender to it. God was so convenient for that purpose when people could believe in Him. He was so safe and so remote. . . . Now there is nothing but people. . . . The only immortality is mankind. (270-72)

When the political gods of the Thirties are discredited, however, George and his generation sell out their ideals in exchange for personal peace and affluence:

In the Thirties all of us who were young had been united by anger and the obviousness of our plight; in the war we had been united by fear and the obviousness of the danger. But now, prosperous under the bomb, we all seemed to have become atomized. . . . The gods, false or true, had vanished. The bell which only a few years ago had tolled for us all, now tolled for each family in its prosperous solitude. (323)

It is at this point that Jerome Martell returns from the dead, in the manner of Christ, to witness to the second half of the theme: what every man "requires to know and feel if he is to live with a sense of how utterly tremendous is the mystery our ancestors confidently called "God" (324). He has had an unorthodox and existentialist vision of Jesus in his prison cell: "He wasn't the Jesus of the churches. He wasn't the Jesus who died for our sins. He was simply a man who had died and risen again. Who had died outwardly as I had died inwardly" (330). It is this vision that has given him the courage to affirm the value of life in the face of death.

Part VII, the end of the novel, illustrates most clearly the difficulty of expressing and dramatizing a religious vision within the dynamics of a realistic narrative. Faced with his wife's imminent death, George reacts as Everyman, subconsciously revolting against the emptiness of existence: "For to be equal to fate is to be equal to the knowledge that everything we have done, achieved, endured and been proud and ashamed of is nothing" (340). MacLennan resorts to a theological interlude in Chapter IV, in which George explains man's need for a god and the insufficiency of all the various substitutes: reason, success, wife and family, political systems and

the state. When they fail, he is prey to the "Great Fear," the existential anxiety that God is indifferent and life is meaningless; this *angst* threatens to obliterate his identity. Then, using analogies of music — the melodies of Bach and Beethoven — he attempts to describe the spiritual experience that finally resolves "the final human struggle" between the "light and dark within the soul" into an ultimate harmony (paraphrasing 1 Corinthians 13:7):

... which is a will to live, love, grow and be grateful, the determination to endure all things, suffer all things, hope all things, believe all things necessary for what our ancestors called the glory of God. (343-44)

This union of the spirit of Everyman with the "Unknowable which at that instant makes available His power, and for that instant existing, becomes known" (344) is, in theological terms, mysticism. It is this "mystical approach to a vision of God" which MacLennan has invoked in his essays as a new theology of mediation for the twentieth century.¹⁶ This vision defeats the modern death wish, vindicates God to scientific man, justifies the human plight and celebrates life: "it is of no importance that God appears indifferent to justice as men understand it. He gave life. He gave it. Life for a year, a month, a day or an hour is still a gift" (344).

In the final chapters of the novel, MacLennan attempts to dramatize this theology in his fiction. But the mystical encounter of the anguished George with the revenant Jerome, who teaches him to confront death by dying to self (365-66), is neither dramatically compelling nor realistically convincing. The characters have become puppets "wired for sound"¹⁷ by the didactic commentator offstage. And in the Epilogue, the world of the realistic novel has been completely transposed into a metaphysical abstraction:

All our lives we had wanted to belong to something larger than ourselves. We belonged consciously to nothing now except to the pattern of our lives and fates. To God, possibly. I am chary of using that much-misused word, but I say honestly that at least I was conscious of His power. Whatever the spirit might be I did not know, but I know it was there. (327)

AS I SUGGESTED in my introduction, MacLennan's analysis of the modern spiritual dilemma and his "theology of mediation" have suggestive similarities (though no documented debt) to Paul Tillich's doctrine of "the courage to be." According to Tillich (and MacLennan dramatizes this failure in the experiences of Jerome Martell and George Stewart), as popular faiths for the twentieth century, "the courage to be as a part" and "the courage to be as oneself" are ultimately disappointing: "the former, if carried through radically, leads to the loss of the self in collectivism and the latter to the loss of the world in Existentialism."¹⁸

However, Tillich offers an alternative. This is the "courage to be" which "is the courage to accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable," and which also takes into itself death and meaninglessness. The source of this courage is "absolute faith . . . which has been deprived by doubt of any concrete content." But this act of the courage to be is a manifestation of "the ground of being" which is God, and "the content of absolute faith is the God above God." This new vision of God transcends the old doctrines of theism: God as a vague symbol, God as a Person in the divine-human encounter, and "the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made a mere object of absolute control" — MacLennan's Calvinist God. Rather, "the courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt."¹⁹

In *The Watch That Ends the Night*, George Stewart's religious quest may be illuminated by reference to Tillich's ideas. The inner harmony and death to self which George finally arrives at is an experience of "mysticism," defined by Tillich as "the striving for union with ultimate reality, and the corresponding courage to take the non-being which is implied in finitude upon oneself."²⁰ And George's final affirmation of life is what Tillich calls "the self-affirmation of being-itself":

There are no valid arguments for the "existence" of God, but there are acts of courage in which we affirm the power of being. . . . Courage has revealing power, the courage to be is the key to being-itself.²¹

In this novel MacLennan has attempted to translate this existential theology into dramatic action. Most critics agree on the importance and clarity of the theme of this novel, and on the sincerity and intensity of feeling which give it persuasive power. However, the problem for MacLennan, as for all modern religious novelists, is to dramatize his faith in terms of realistic fiction. And the critics have also noted that this, his best novel, nevertheless suffers from a non-dramatic ending, a transposition of character conflict from physical reality into metaphysical abstraction.

The parallels which I have noted with liberal Protestant theology may help to explain some of the problems which critics have had with the ending of *The Watch That Ends the Night* and also with MacLennan's later novels. MacLennan's solution to the problem of writing a religious novel in a godless society, as I have suggested, is a redefinition of God to answer the modern questions about meaning and purpose within the existential situations of his characters. His emphasis is on natural and liberal theology, as opposed to revealed and neo-orthodox theology. As a result, MacLennan's view of God, like that of most liberal theologians, is philosophical, hypothetical, and subjective. Tillich, for example, has repudiated "those elements in the Jewish-Christian tradition which emphasize the person-to-person relationship with God": the personalistic image of God, the personal nature of human faith and divine forgiveness, the idea of divine purpose, and the person-to-person character of prayer and practical devotion.²² These qualities, traditionally por-

trayed by religious writers to dramatize God's interaction with this world (for example, in the works of Graham Greene), seem also to be absent from MacLennan's concept of God. His "new vision of God" is that synthesis of science and mysticism which modern man can accept, but God is no longer a Person with an objective reality independent of man's perception of Him. A relationship with this transcendent, impersonal Deity is difficult to portray dramatically. This is one of the reasons why, when MacLennan does portray the existential questions with great realism and complexity and conviction, his theological answer often seems arbitrary and artificial. As a result, George Stewart's ultimate encounter with the divine is distinguished by didactic sincerity and rhetorical intensity — but metaphysical unreality.

Furthermore, MacLennan has been unable to sustain this optimistic "new vision of God" in his later novels. *Return of The Sphinx* (1967) replays the conflict between the races and the generations of *Two Solitudes*, but because this novel is MacLennan's elegy for lost idealism, there is no attempt at an optimistic fictional resolution. The lesson here is that every generation must repeat the universal religious quest — from the death of God, through false ideologies, to spiritual grace — but now in a world of moral, spiritual and humanistic disintegration. In the Epilogue, therefore, MacLennan is forced to offer his larger vision of the grace operating in nature that he has not honestly been able to dramatize in his plot. Alan Ainslie's vague, pantheistic optimism lacks even the theological content of the resolution of *The Watch That Ends the Night*. And, more seriously, it is in rhetorical opposition to the atmosphere and implications of the entire novel. Finally, in the ambitious scope of *Voices in Time* (1981) MacLennan portrays a civilization destroyed by man's ignorance and evil, offering only a feeble spiritual hope in the mysterious "God of evolution."²³ The religious pilgrimage of the twentieth century seems to have ended, for MacLennan, back in the wilderness of man's self-destruction.

MacLennan was a didactic writer, and his religious perspective was a dominant part of that larger world view of history and sociology — particularly regarding the development of the Canadian identity — that determined all of his novels. He often repeated the D. H. Lawrence dictum: "the novel 'treats the point where the soul meets history' " and he admired the evangelical fervor of writers who have "made the novel a mighty instrument for human understanding,"²⁴ feeling that he too must offer his solutions to the spiritual dilemmas of our world. Since he believed that "in any novel, content should be more essential than form,"²⁵ there is always the danger in MacLennan's art that his faith will distort his fiction. Since his religious concerns predisposed him toward thesis novels, his greatest weakness was the tendency to manipulate plot and character development toward a theological solution. Therefore, his structures often appear schematically contrived; the endings do not grow naturally out of character or action but are conceived thematically and

invoked externally. His major characters are inevitably vehicles for his ideas and spokespeople for his rhetorical interludes, which are not well assimilated into either plot or characterization.

If MacLennan is obviously more of an essayist than a stylist in his novels, this, too, is partly a result of his faith. For he scorned the modern technical experimenters who, he feels, all seem to denigrate life: the famous contemporary writers of America and Europe who have devoted "their immense technical abilities to the dissection of cowards, drunkards, weaklings, criminals, psychotics, imbeciles, deviates, and people whose sole common denominator seems to be a hatred of life and a terror of living."²⁶ This was not MacLennan's vision. In an era of spiritual disintegration his artistic vocation was not so much to seek "to forge the uncreated conscience of his race as to reforge a conscience that has been fragmented."²⁷

This is an admirable, if unfashionable, theological enterprise. But can it be realized within the artistic form of the realistic novel, a form which is equally unfashionable in the context of postmodernism? While affirming that "there are no religious novels *per se*," Charles Glicksberg nevertheless acknowledges the accomplishments of religious novelists such as Mauriac and Greene in whose words "religion is presented as experience, as spiritual conflict, as vision and aspiration, struggle and search and suffering, not as codified theology."²⁸ In the tradition of the great religious novelists, Hugh MacLennan also dramatically portrayed the spiritual conflicts of modern man and, particularly in *The Watch That Ends the Night*, attempted to narrate a spiritual resolution which arises out of existential experience. That his fictional narrative tends to become "codified theology" in the conclusion is, I believe, partly a result of his didactic, thesis-centred style and partly a product of the abstract liberal theological model which he invokes as his solution, but which could not sustain his fiction.

NOTES

¹ Qtd. in Philip Stratford, *Faith and Fiction: Creative Process in Greene and Mauriac* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 304.

² Hugh MacLennan, "Help Thou Mine Unbelief" and "A Second Look," in *Cross Country* (1949; rpt. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972), 139-48, 151-56. Further references appear parenthetically in my text.

³ Hugh MacLennan, *Scotchman's Return and Other Essays* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), 146-47.

⁴ George Woodcock, *Hugh MacLennan* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), 51.

⁵ Hugh MacLennan, "The Story of a Novel," *Canadian Literature*, 3 (Winter 1960), 35-39.

⁶ Gordon Roper, Rupert Schieder, and S. Ross Beharriell, "The Kinds of Fiction 1880-1920," in *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), 306.

- ⁷ Hugh MacLennan, *Barometer Rising* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), 309, 325.
- ⁸ Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: Collins, 1945), 312, 317.
- ⁹ Hugh MacLennan, *The Precipice* (Toronto: Collins, 1948), 217.
- ¹⁰ Hugh MacLennan, *Each Man's Son* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1951), xi.
- ¹¹ Hugh MacLennan, "Reflections on Two Decades," *Canadian Literature*, 41 (Summer 1969), 31.
- ¹² MacLennan, "Story," 43.
- ¹³ Hugh MacLennan, *The Watch That Ends the Night* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1959), 4. Further references appear parenthetically in my text.
- ¹⁴ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; rpt. London: Fontana-Collins, 1960), 499.
- ¹⁵ Paul Goetsch, "Too Long to the Courtly Muses: Hugh MacLennan as a Contemporary Writer," *Canadian Literature*, 10 (Autumn 1961), 27-28.
- ¹⁶ MacLennan, *Cross Country*, 153-56.
- ¹⁷ Robert H. Cockburn, *The Novels of Hugh MacLennan* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1969), 145.
- ¹⁸ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (1952; rpt. London: Fontana-Collins, 1962), 150-51.
- ¹⁹ Tillich, 160-83.
- ²⁰ Tillich, 156.
- ²¹ Tillich, 175-76.
- ²² Tillich, 177.
- ²³ Elspeth Cameron, *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), 348.
- ²⁴ Hugh MacLennan, *The Other Side of Hugh MacLennan*, ed. Elspeth Cameron (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), 270-71.
- ²⁵ Donald Cameron, "Hugh MacLennan: The Tennis Racket is an Antelope Bone," in *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), Vol. 1, 140.
- ²⁶ MacLennan, *Other Side*, 183.
- ²⁷ MacLennan, *Other Side*, 246.
- ²⁸ Charles I. Glicksberg, *Modern Literature and the Death of God* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 71-73.



SARGO, TALKING

John Marshall

Falling back of Bute Inlet then
you should have seen the trees ten twelve foot through
and straight
it made you stop and think sometimes
they went side by side as far as you could see
it was beautiful timber.
Them days you'd work with a partner

and we'd got along good over the years
never no problems
worked hard worked fast
made sure we got our money.
The part of it is

he was just bucking ends at the landing
helping out
giving them a hand at the end of the day
when the pile shifts
and a log crushed him
just like that.
He didn't even die right then

but by the time I crawled through to him
I could see he couldn't live.
So there he is

hung up
the log pressing all the blood back up
to his heart.
I mean the first aid had to tell him

more or less he was dead
all that was keeping him alive
was the log.
Wasn't much to say

asked him does he want me to say something
you know to the wife and kids
but there wasn't nothing to say.
I rolled him a smoke

POEM

but he couldn't really draw on it.
All he says is what the hell

cut it.
We knew what happened when it went cut through
and me I'm the one did it.
He died like that

that's how he was killed
it all sort of just went out of him.
I took that smoke from his lips

finished the goddamned thing myself.
I don't think a week's gone by thirty years

I don't think of it.
I tell you John
he was a good man.
Don't you never do no work

where you need a partner.



SOUTHEND

John Marshall

In the woods and mills then
somebody's old man was always coming home
all busted up or maybe just short something.

For us kids
making our way from school
it was a kind of competition
and it was certainly our end of town.

Outsiders had to
exhume grandfathers who went into the mines
or come up with an uncle
who fell in to the circles of water
did he did he really he did so

rich with bloody accidents
we fought ourselves over.

But it is no subject
and writing about it
a cruelty to all
who rushed those fears
safely home to her

and the stories we told
themselves
finally silencing us

what we simply lived with
become too much to follow.



IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

Tribal Literature

Basil H. Johnston

IN THE EARLY 60's Kahn-Tineta Horn, a young Mohawk model, got the attention of the Canadian press (media) not only by her beauty but by her articulation of Indian grievances and her demands for justice. Soon after Red Power was organized threatening to use force. Academics and scholars, anxious and curious to know what provoked the Indians, organized a series of conferences and teach-ins to explore the issues. Even children wanted to know. So for their enlightenment experts wrote dozens of books. Universities and colleges began native studies courses. Ministries of Education, advised by a battery of consultants, adjusted their Curriculum Guidelines to allow units of study on the native peoples of this continent. And school projects were conducted for the benefit of children between ten and thirteen years of age.

One such project at the Churchill Avenue Public School in North York, Ontario lasted six weeks and the staff and students who had taken part mounted a display as a grand finale to their studies. And a fine display it was in the school's library.

In front of a canvas tent that looked like a teepee stood a grim chief, face painted in war-like colours and arms folded. On his head he wore a headdress made of construction paper. A label pinned to his vest bore the name, Blackfoot. I made straight for the chief.

"How!" I greeted the chief, holding up my hand at the same time as a gesture of friendship.

Instead of returning the greeting, the chief looked at me quizzically.

"How come you look so unhappy?" I asked him.

"Sir! I'm bored," the chief replied.

"How so, chief?"

"Sir, don't tell anybody, but I'm bored. I'm tired of Indians. That's all we've studied for six weeks. I thought they'd be interesting when we started, because I always thought that Indians were neat. At the start of the course we had to choose to do a special project from food preparation, transportation, dwellings, social organization, clothing, and hunting and fishing. I chose dwellings" and here the chief exhaled in exasperation ". . . and that's all me and my team studied for six weeks; teepees, wigwams, longhouses, igloos. We read books, encyclopedias, went

to the library to do research, looked at pictures, drew pictures. Then we had to make one. Sir, I'm bored."

"Didn't you learn anything else about Indians, chief?"

"No sir, there was nothing else . . . Sir? . . . Is that all there is to Indians?"

Little has changed since that evening in 1973. Books still present native peoples in terms of their physical existence as if Indians were incapable of meditating upon or grasping the abstract. Courses of study in the public school system, without other sources of information, had to adhere to the format, pattern, and content set down in books. Students studied Kaw-lijas, wooden Indians, who were incapable of love or laughter; or Tontos, if you will, whose sole skill was to make fires and to perform other servile duties for the Lone Ranger; an inarticulate Tonto, his speech limited to "Ugh!" Kimo Sabi; and How."

Despite all the research and the field work conducted by anthropologists, ethnologists and linguists, Indians remain "The Unknown Peoples" as Professor George E. Tait of the University of Toronto so aptly titled his book written in 1973.

Not even Indians Affairs of Canada, with its more than two centuries of experience with natives, with its array of experts and consultants, with its unlimited funds, seems to have learned anything about its constituents, if we are to assess their latest publication titled "The Canadian Indian." One would think that the Honourable William McKnight, then Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, under whose authority the book was published in 1986 should know by now the Indians who often come to Ottawa, do not arrive on horseback, do not slay one of the R.C.M.P. mounts and cook it on the steps of the Parliament Buildings. Moreover, most Indians he has seen and met were not dressed in loincloths, nor did they sleep in teepees. Yet he authorized the publication of a book bereft of any originality or imagination, a book that perpetuated the notion and the image that the Indians had not advanced one step since contact, but are still living as they had one hundred and fifty, even three hundred years ago. There was not a word about native thought, literature, institutions, contributions in music, art, theatre. But that's to be expected of Indian Affairs; to know next to nothing of their constituents.

Where did the author or authors of this latest publication by Indian Affairs get their information? The selected readings listed at the back of the book provide a clue; Frances Densmore, Harold Driver, Philip Drucker, Frederick W. Hodge, Diamond Jenness, Reginald and Gladys Laubin, Frank G. Speck, Bruce G. Trigger, George Woodcock, Harold A. Innis, Calvin Martin, E. Palmer Patterson, eminent scholars, none of whom spoke or attempted to learn the language of any of the Indian nations about whom they were writing. Modern scholars because they are not required by their universities to learn, are no more proficient in a native language than were their predecessors.

Herein, I submit, is the nub and the rub. Without the benefit of knowing the language of the Indian nation that they are investigating, scholars can never get

into their mind, the heart and soul and the spirit and still understand the native's perceptions and interpretations. The scholar must confine his research and studies to the material, physical culture, subsistence patterns and family relationships.

Without knowing the spiritual and the intellectual, aesthetic side of Indian culture, the scholar cannot furnish what that little grade five youngster and others like him wanted to know about Indians.

Admitting his boredom was that grade five youngster's way of expressing his disappointment with the substance of the course that he and his colleagues had been made to endure. In another sense, it was a plea for other knowledge that would quench his curiosity and challenge his intellect.

Students such as he, as well as adults, are interested in the character, intellect, soul, spirit, heart of people of other races and cultures. They want to know what other people believe in, what they understand, what they expect and hope for in this life and in the next, how they keep law and order and harmony within the family and community, how and why they celebrated ceremonies, what made them proud, ashamed, what made them happy, what sad. Whether the young understand what they want to know and learn does not matter much, they still want to know in order to enrich their own insights and broaden their outlooks.

But unless scholars and writers know the literature of the peoples that they are studying or writing about they cannot provide what their students and readers are seeking and deserving of.

There is, fortunately, enough literature, both oral and written, available for scholarly study, but it has for the most part been neglected. Myths, legends, and songs have not been regenerated and set in modern terms to earn immortalization in poetry, dramatization in plays, or romanticization in novels.

What has prevented the acceptance of Indian literature as a serious and legitimate expression of native thought and experience has been indifferent and inferior translation, a lack of understanding and interest in the culture and a notion that it has little of importance to offer to the larger white culture.

IN OFFERING YOU A BRIEF SKETCH, no more than a glimpse, as it were, of my tribe's culture, I am doing no more than what anyone of you would do were you to be asked "What is your culture? Would you explain it?" I would expect you to reply, "Read my literature, and you will get to know something of my thoughts, my convictions, my aspirations, my feelings, sentiments, expectations, whatever I cherish or abominate."

First, let me offer you an observation about my language for the simple reason that language and literature are inseparable, though they are too often taught as separate entities. They belong together.

In my tribal language, all words have three levels of meaning; there is the surface meaning that everyone instantly understands. Beneath this meaning is a more fundamental meaning derived from the prefixes and their combinations with other terms. Underlying both is the philosophical meaning.

Take the word "Anishinaubae." That is what the members of the nation, now known as Chippewa in the United States or Ojibway in Canada, called themselves. It referred to a member of the tribe. It was given to the question "What are you?" But it was more than just a term of identification. It meant, "I am a person of good intent, a person of worth" and it reflected what the people thought of themselves, and of human nature; that all humans are essentially, fundamentally good. Let's separate that one word into its two terms. The first, "Onishishih" meaning good, fine, beautiful, excellent; and the second "naubae" meaning being, male, human species. Even together they do not yield the meaning "good intention." It is only by examining the stories of Nanabush, the tribes' central and principal mythical figure who represents all men and all women, that the term Anishinaubae begins to make sense. Nanabush was always full of good intentions, ergo the people of the tribe. The Anishinaubae perceive themselves as people who intended good and therefore of merit and worth. From this perception they drew a strong sense of pride as well as a firm sense of place in the community. This influenced their notion of independence.

Let's take another word, the word for truth. When we say "w'daeb-awae" we mean he or she is telling the truth, is correct, is right. But the expression is not merely an affirmation of a speaker's veracity. It is as well a philosophical proposition that in saying a speaker casts his words and his voice as far as his perception and his vocabulary will enable him or her, it is a denial that there is such a thing as absolute truth; that the best and most the speaker can achieve and a listener expect is the highest degree of accuracy. Somehow that one expression, "w'daeb-awae," sets the limits to a single statement as well as setting limits to truth and the scope and exercise of speech.

One other word "to know." We say "w'kikaendaun" to convey the idea that he or she "knows." Without going into the etymological derivations, suffice it to say that when the speaker assures someone that he knows it, that person is saying that the notion, image, idea, fact that that person has in mind corresponds and is similar to what he or she has already seen, heard, touched, tasted or smelled. That person's knowledge may not be exact, but similar to that which has been instilled and impressed in his or her mind and recalled from memory.

The stories that make up our tribal literature are no different from the words in our language. Both have many meanings and applications, as well as bearing tribal perceptions, values and outlooks.

Let us begin at the beginning with the tribe's story of creation which precedes all other stories in the natural order. Creation stories provide insights into what

racess and nations understand of human nature; ours is no different in this respect.

This is our creation story. Kitchi-manitou beheld a vision. From this vision The Great Mystery, for that is the essential and fundamental meaning of Kitchi-manitou and not spirit as is often understood, created the sun and the stars, the land and the waters, and all the creatures and beings, seen and unseen, that inhabit the earth, the seas and the skies. The creation was desolated by a flood. Only the manitous, creatures and beings who dwelt in the waters were spared. All others perished.

In the heavens dwelt a manitou, Geezhigo-quae (Sky-woman). During the cataclysm upon the earth, Geezhigo-quae became pregnant. The creatures adrift upon the seas prevailed upon the giant turtle to offer his back as a haven for Geezhigo-quae. They then invited her to come down.

Resting on the giant turtle's back Geezhigo-quae asked for soil.

One after another water creatures dove into the depths to retrieve a morsel of soil. Not one returned with a particle of soil. They all offered an excuse; too deep, too dark, too cold, there are evil manitous keeping watch. Last to descend was the muskrat. He returned with a small knot of earth.

With the particle of mud retrieved by the muskrat Geezhigo-quae recreated an island and the world as we know it. On the island she created over the giant turtle's shell, Geezhigo-quae gave birth to twins who begot the tribe called the Anishinaubaeg.

Millenia later the tribe dreamed Nanabush into being. Nanabush represented themselves and what they understood of human nature. One day his world too was flooded. Like Geezhigo-quae, Nanabush recreated his world from a morsel of soil retrieved from the depths of the sea.

As a factual account of the origin of the world and of being, the story has no more basis than the biblical story of creation and the flood. But the story represents a belief in God, the creator, a Kitchi-manitou, the Great Mystery. It also represents a belief that Kitchi-manitou sought within himself, his own being, a vision. Or perhaps it came from within his being and that Kitchi-manitou created what was beheld and set it into motion. Even the lesser manitous, such as Geezhigo-quae and Nanabush, must seek a morsel of soil with which to create and recreate their world, their spheres. So men and women must seek within themselves the talent or the potential and afterward create their own worlds and their own spheres and a purpose to give meaning to their lives.

The people begotten by Geezhigo-quae on that mythological island called themselves Anishinaubaeg, the good beings who meant well and were human beings, therefore fundamentally good. But they also knew that men and women were often deflected from fulfilling their good intentions and prevented from living up to their dreams and visions, not out of any inherent evil, but rather from something outside of themselves. Nanabush also represented this aspect of human nature.

Many times Nanabush or the Anishinaubaeg fail to carry out a noble purpose. Despite this, he is not rendered evil or wicked but remains fundamentally and essentially good.

MEN AND WOMEN intend what is good, but they forget. The story called "The Man, The Snake and The Fox" exemplifies this aspect of human nature.

In its abbreviated form the story is as follows. The hunter leaves his lodge and his family at daybreak to go in search of game to feed his wife and his children. As he proceeds through the forest, the hunter sees deer, but each time they are out of range of his weapon.

Late in the afternoon, discouraged and weary, he hears faint cries in the distance. Forgetting his low spirits and fatigue he sets out with renewed optimism and vigour in the direction of the cries. Yet the nearer he draws to the source of the cries, the more daunted is the hunter by the dreadful screams. Only the thought of his family's needs drove him forward, otherwise he might have turned away.

At last he came to a glade. The screams came from a thicket on the opposite side. The hunter, bow and arrow drawn and ready, made his way forward cautiously.

To his horror, the hunter saw an immense serpent tangled fast in a thicket as a fish is caught in the webbing of a net. The monster writhed and roared and twisted. He struggled to break free.

The man recoiled in horror. Before he could back away, the snake saw him. "Friend!" the snake addressed the man.

The man fell in a heap on the ground the moment that the snake spoke. When he came to much later the snake pleaded with the man to set him free. For some time the man refused but eventually he relented. He was persuaded by the monster's plea that he too, though a serpent, had no less right to life than did the man. And the serpent promised not to injure the man on his release. The hunter was convinced.

The snake sprang on his deliverer the moment the last vine was cut away.

It was like thunder as the man and the snake struggled. Nearby a little fox heard the uproar. Never having seen such a spectacle the fox settled down to watch. Immediately he realized that the man was about to be killed.

Why were the snake and the man locked in mortal struggle? The little fox shouted for an explanation. The man and the snake stopped.

The hunter gasped out his story, then the snake gave his version. Pretending not to understand the snake's explanation the fox beguiled the aggressor into returning to the thicket to act out his side of the story.

The snake entangled himself once more.

Realizing that he had been delivered from the edge of death by the fox, the man was greatly moved. He felt bound to show his gratitude in some tangible way. The fox assured him that no requital was required. Nevertheless the hunter persisted. How might he, the hunter, perform some favour on behalf of the fox?

Not only was there no need, the fox explained, there was nothing that the man could do for the fox; there was not a thing that the fox needed or desired of human beings. However, if it would make the man happier, the fox suggested that the man might feed him should he ever have need.

Nothing would please the man more than to perform some good for his deliverer; it was the least that he could do for a friend who had done so much.

Some years later the hunter shot a little fox who had been helping himself to the family storage. As the man drew his knife to finish off the thief, the little fox gasped, "Don't you remember?"

That no snakes as monstrous as the one in the story are to be found on this continent makes no difference to the youngsters' sense of outrage over the treachery of the snake and the forgetfulness of the man; nor does the exercise of speech which enables the snake and the fox to communicate with the hunter and each other prevent the young from being moved to compassion for the fox. Their sense of justice and fairness bears them over the anomalies in the story.

Before the last words "Don't you remember?" have echoed away, the young begin to ask questions. "Why? Why did the man not recognize the fox? Why did he forget? How did the man feel afterwards? Why did the snake attack the man? Why did the snake break his promise? Why didn't the man leave the snake where he was? Do animals really have as much right to live as human beings do?"

Indians cared, loved as passionately as other people.

The story called "The Weeping Pine" raises the same questions about love and marriage and the span of either that have been asked by philosophers, poets, and lovers of every race and generation. It does not pretend to give answers to these age old questions beyond suggesting that love may bloom even in circumstances where it is least expected to flower and endure. But owing to shoddy translation, the story has been presented as an explanation for the origin of pine trees.

According to the story, the elders of a village came to a certain young woman's home where she lived with her parents, brothers and sisters. They had come to let her family know that they had chosen her to be the new wife to an old man. This particular man had been without a friend since the death of his first wife some years before. The old man was described as good-natured and kind. As one who had done much to benefit the tribe in his youth, the old man deserved something in return from his neighbours. In the opinion of the elders the most fitting reward the old man could have was a wife. In their judgement the young woman they had chosen would be a suitable companion for the old man.

They assured her that the tribe would see to it that they never had need.

Because this sort of marriage was a matter that the young woman had not considered, it was unexpected. The delegation understood this. They did not demand an immediate answer but allowed the young woman a few days in which to make up her mind.

The young woman cried when the delegation left. She didn't want to marry that man. That old man whose days were all but over and who could never look after her. She had, like every young girl her age, hoped to marry someone young, full of promise, someone she would love and who would love her in return. Besides, it was too soon. How could she, not yet eighteen, be a companion to an old man of seventy or more. The disparity was too great.

At first her parents too were aggrieved. But soon after they prevailed upon her to defer to the wishes of the elders, and her father delivered word of their daughter's consent to the elders.

But neither the disparity in age nor the disposition of the young girl to enter into a loveless marriage were too great; in the years that followed she came to love this old man. And they had many children.

Thirty years later the old man died.

On the final day of the four day watch, the mourners went home but the widow made no move to rise. She continued to keen and rock back and forth in great sorrow.

"Come mother, let us go home," her children urged, offering to assist her to her feet and to support her on their way home.

"No! No! Leave me. Go," she said.

"Mother! Please. Come home with us," her children pleaded. Nothing they said could persuade their mother to leave.

"No. You go home. This is where I belong. Leave me."

Her children prayed she would relent; give in to the cold and hunger. They went home, but they did not leave their mother alone. During the next few days a son or daughter was always at her side, watching with her and entreating her to come home. They tried to comfort her with their own love and care, assuring her that her wound would pass and heal. They even brought her food and drink to sustain her. She refused everything.

As their mother grew weaker with each passing day, the children besought the elders to intercede on their behalf. Perhaps the elders could prevail on their mother.

But the elders shook their heads and said, "If that is what she wants, there is nothing that you can do to change her mind. Leave her be. She wants to be with him. Leave her. It's better that way."

And so the family ceased to press their mother to come home, though they still kept watch with her. They watched until she too died by the graveside of her husband, their father.

Using the term "grandchild" that all elders used in referring to the young, the elder who presided over the woman's wake said, "Our granddaughter's love did not cease with death, but continues into the next life."

The next spring a small plant grew out of the grave of the woman. Many years later, as the sons, daughters and grandchildren gathered at the graveside of their parents, they felt a mist fall upon their faces and their arms. "It is mother shedding tears of love for dad," cried her daughter.

And it is so. On certain days, spruces and pines shed a mist of tears of love.

By remaining at her husband's graveside until she too died, the woman fulfilled the implied promise, "whither thou goest, there too will I go" contained in the term "weedjeewaugin," companion in life, our word for spouse.

As she wept for her love she must have wept for the love of her children. Their love threatened to break that bond that held her to her husband. No! She would not let even death part her from the man to whom she had given her heart, her soul, her spirit forever.

It is unlikely that the woman ever uttered more than "K'zaugin" (I love you) during her marriage. In this respect she was no different from most other women, or men for that matter, who are not endowed with the poetic gift, though they feel and love with equal passion and depth. K'zaugin said everything. I love you, today, tomorrow, forever. It expressed everything that the finest poets ever wrote and everything that the unpoetic ever thought and felt but could not put into rhyme or rhythm.

THE GRAVE OF LITERARY AMBITION

Tom Wayman

I was planting bulbs on the grave
 where literary ambition
 is buried. Why not, I reasoned,
 honor with beauty
 the final resting place
 of the friend/enemy
 who sustained me for years?
 I dug a shallow trench
 and placed clusters of daffodils
 and then tulips: each of these bulbs
 the size and feel of a cooking onion.

Next I sowed crocuses, to provide a contrasting
 purple shade
 below the higher-stemmed, brighter flowers.
 Then I sifted soil
 to cover what I planted
 and as the instructions on the bulb packages advised
 watered thoroughly
 and spread a coating of leaves for mulch.

But as I gathered
 my shovel and rake and hoses
 and was putting them in the wheelbarrow
 I noticed a green shoot
 poking through the brown layer of leaves.
 "Must be the unseasonal weather,
 warm for November,"
 I thought, "or else my old ambition
 is a powerful fertilizer.
 Of course, maybe one bulb
 is a hyperactive mutant."
 Before I could trundle the barrow away,
 however, another shoot appeared. And a third.
 Suddenly dozens were springing up
 everywhere on the low mound.
 And the first one
 already was producing
 a tightly-furled growth at its tip.
 Within about a minute,
 as more green spear-points
 stabbed upward amid the leaves,
 it unfolded a gorgeous,
 multi-hued,
 petal-soft
 letter A.
 Seconds later, more flower-letters
 opened — not in any particular order —
 to the autumn breeze
 until the grave was transformed into a swaying,
 iridescent
 alphabet soup
 lifted atop thick stalks.

Then the growth ended.
 The letters waited
 under a grey sky.
 I picked a number of consonants and vowels
 at random
 and after I returned my gardening tools to the shed
 I stuck the letters in a vase on my desk.

When I look up from my pen
 or keyboard
 here they are. Yet at idle moments
 I catch myself starting a list
 of all possible words
 that can be formed from these flowers.

SLOCAN NORTH

Tom Wayman

Rolling through the valley in the last light
 my tires follow the curving, uneven asphalt
 between treed embankments and slopes,
 cuts that reveal the rocky soil.
 In the dim sky, First Star.
 At the highway's edge, a deer
 lifts its head to stare. It turns
 and begins to trot into the forest,
 then breaks into improbable bouncing leaps
 and vanishes. A half hour later
 a small herd of deer in my high beams
 are grazing or licking at something on the road.
 I slow and stop. They resume eating.
 I touch the horn
 and they scatter, some to each side of the pavement.
 I coast by them, then gear up to speed again,
 journeying farther
 into night's core.

Structure in “The Honorary Patron”

IN HIS FIRST TWO NOVELS, Jack Hodgins experimented with structure, using a past/present, interwoven dual storyline in *The Invention of the World*, and an almost cinematic, fast-cut technique in *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*. Hodgins' third novel, *The Honorary Patron*, appears more structurally conventional; however, its apparent linearity is somewhat deceptive.

Jeffrey Crane's story did not require a dual plot structure connecting past and present as did *The Invention of the World*, because, Hodgins says, he saw the cause-effect chain of *The Honorary Patron* as quite chronological, whereas causes and effects in the first novel were more complex psychologically, mythologically, and geographically.¹ Neither is there the gossipy narrative voice mimicking the responses of a dozen characters as in *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*. Though the community itself plays an important role in the tale, the focus is on the transformation of Jeffrey Crane himself, and the novel is seen through his consciousness alone. Alberto Manguel has observed that, though the story is told in the third person, it is "a third person that barely disguises the voice of Crane" and that, though the author's voice is evident, "we, the readers, know that it is Crane's version we are hearing."²

65

Though *Death in Venice* provided the original framework for *The Honorary Patron*, Hodgins found his early drafts unsatisfying. To this former high school math teacher, the geometrical shape of the work seemed wrong, possibly because the tragic tradition is one which conflicts with Hodgins' positive view of life: "If I'm using the pattern of the tragedy, I'm always discontented with the inevitability of it" (PI, 12), he says. Thus, once again, he found it necessary to adapt a traditional structure, in this case the tragic pattern, to suit his own aesthetic and personal vision:

I'm subverting it somehow and having always to find new ways of organizing the material to suit the way I see the world instead of the way literature has tried to teach me to see the world (PI, 12).

In this respect, the connection drawn by Ronald Hatch³ between this novel and Graham Greene's *The Honorary Consul* is a useful one. Both examine obsessive love and the vacuity of "honorary" status in life, but more important, both subvert the tragic pattern of, say, *Death in Venice* or *Under the Volcano*. Both undercut the notion that those who attempt to stand outside of life are vulnerable to obsessions which lead inexorably to doom. In the ironic reversal which characterizes Greene's fiction, the condemned man is rescued while his rescuer is killed. In Hodgins' hands, it is the husband who dies and the (would-be) lover who survives, but in both cases, the survivor is the "honorary" personage (whereas in Lowry's treatment of the theme, the inevitable death sentence of honorary status is carried out with chilling finality).

Thus Hodgins takes the inevitable downward diagonal line of the tragic pattern, and *bends* it — through the use of his familiar "bookends"⁴ and through narrative forms and motifs which imply circularity. The "circular and doubling structures"⁵ noted by Linda Hutcheon in *The Invention of the World* are very much in evidence here.

HODGINS HAS DESCRIBED the structure of *The Honorary Patron* as "quite conventional. At least it begins in a conventional European style that gradually breaks down as the protagonist becomes more and more involved in Vancouver Island life, that is, in the chaos and disorder of life itself."⁶

Thus, the linear, realistic structure breaks down when the action shifts to the New World, or revisits the past. The first such disruption coincides with Crane's arrival on the Island. The first section of Chapter Two describes the opening ceremonies of the festival; the second flashes back to "the sky over Vienna" (40) three days earlier; the third details Crane's journey itself; and the fourth returns to the opening ceremonies, thus creating a bookend structure within a single chapter, a circle within the larger circle enclosed by the scenes in the Lindenhof.

Another structural "breakdown" occurs in the opening section of the next chapter, which is given in the form of a letter to Franz. Hodgins confesses that, at one point, he attempted to impose the letter format upon Crane's entire relationship with Anna-marie, but found that it did not work. (However, Crane carries on an imagined conversation with his friend throughout, as in "A good wallow was what it had become, Franz." [265]) Hodgins kept that early letter as a signpost of what he calls "the quirky disorientation of the narrative position" (PI, 27) which occurs in the last chapter, that is, the metafictional aspect which causes the reader to "ask himself whether everything did not take place in the professor's head" (Delbaere, 89). In the letter, Crane expresses his uneasiness about the "absence of order" (88) in the town, and he resolves to "keep from falling apart" (89). In short, these breakdowns in the "conventional" form are a structural expression of the protagonist's own confusion and disorientation.

The Invention of the World and *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* attempt to reconcile the past and the present, the human and the divine, and the individual and the community. *The Honorary Patron* attempts a similar reconciliation. Crane denies his own past and yet believes in the controlling power of history; he does not acknowledge his own higher aspirations, because he is unable to hurdle the intellectual barriers to that kind of hope. As in his first novel, Hodgins' use of the circle has three levels of meaning, each building on the other. First, the circle is seen as a trap, in the *gemutlichkeit*, the self-satisfied stagnation, of Crane's retirement. Second, the circle is a wheel, in the motion entailed in Crane's overseas journey and in his travels up and down the Island highway with the Shakespearean Hash troupe (while in town, an endless drag race echoes the automotive joust which began the action of *The Invention of the World*). Finally, a sense of reconciliation or wholeness is provided by the circular elements of bookends and characterization.

Past and present are connected in Crane's disastrous relationships with two married women. Both relationships ultimately result in the death by suicide of the wronged husband, though Crane's implication in Bud Blackstone's death is more tenuous than in that of Edward Argent. The suggestion is that as long as Crane refuses to acknowledge the past, he is condemned to repeat his mistakes.

Furthermore, the cycle of life itself is part of the novel's circularity in that the plot centres on an aged man who returns to the town of his birth and boyhood. Just as Maggie returns to Hed, and Keneally (in ash form) returns to the stone circle, Crane must go back to his birthplace in order to achieve self-renewal.

Finally, with the bookend structure, Hodgins expresses the idea that it is necessary to go back before one can move forward. In the first chapter, Crane is unwillingly reclaimed by the past in the person of Elizabeth Argent. In the last, he acknowledges his past, personified by Blackie, and perceives a more positive future,

in which both Elizabeth and Anna-marie may play a part. In short, by confronting his past, the central character is raised from the dead, is made new.

As noted, Hodgins' second imperative in writing this novel was to strive for a higher level of sophistication than was evident in his earlier works — which, he says, "I sometimes think of as hacked out with chain-saws" (PI, 22). An indication of this increased sophistication is the way in which he extends the structural metaphors of lines and circles into the central motifs of the novel: drama and art. Hodgins creates a structure in which Crane redeems his life by re-examining those two areas to which he had aspired in his youth. He will confront the past not only in geographical and human form, but also in symbolic form.

In his previous novels, Hodgins used structural linearity and juxtaposition to express the deconstruction of the old myths which facilitates the rise of the new. He used structural circularity to express the necessary *relationship* between the past and present (the idea that the past can never be totally destroyed) and also the ideal of wholeness and unity. While these elements are certainly present in *The Honorary Patron*, the complexity of the work adds another dimension. The deconstructive impulse — that related to shattering the old myth — is expressed through the motif of drama. The unifying impulse — that related to the concept of grace, harmony or wholeness — is expressed through the motif of visual art.

THE PROCESS BY WHICH Crane renews himself is carefully signposted as a "drama" from the very beginning.⁷ The first chapter moves at a stately pace, painstakingly setting the scene and establishing character. The many references to the "staginess" of the scene make it clear that this is Act 1. The implication is that Crane is being unwillingly drawn back into the drama of his own life. Drama is part of the liberating force which will move him from the sidelines of life back onto centre stage.

The Old World/New World duality provides the context for Crane's personal drama. Not only has he stepped outside of life in a geographical sense, by choosing to live on a politically neutral landlocked island which has "stepped outside" (41) of history and is as fastidiously clean and self-consciously picturesque as a movie set; he has also stepped outside of his own life by "retiring" his dreams, one by one. His personal history is a litany of discarded aspirations, failed relationships, and compromises. His rejection of New World vitality in favour of Old World order has made him a "corpse" (246).

Crane acts out the process of redemption, his revision of the old myth, by stepping out of his prescribed roles as honorary patron and esteemed professor. His obsession with Anna-marie causes him to play the fool; the absurd figure prowling the streets in pursuit of the girl is far more alive than the "sententious bore" (25) of Zurich.

The relationship with Anna-marie unfolds against backdrops of Crane's personal past and the history of the island itself. The first cracks in the foundation of his fantasy begin to appear when they confront Ingrid Eccleston, who says, "If you've come here hoping to find the past still alive, forget it. It isn't" (204). But for Crane, the past *is* alive, in Anna-marie, revealed to be the granddaughter of his rival, Edward Argent. In a way, his obsession with the young actress is an embrace of the past, in the sense of that blood relationship, but it is also a rejection of the past, in terms of her youth and in terms of the way in which his obsession with her allows Crane to avoid confronting his real past, that is, his unresolved relationship with Elizabeth. Fittingly, it is beside the Troilus and Cressida fireplace at the castle that Crane's romantic scenario falters. The love affair is doomed, for Anna-marie is false as Cressid.

Drama provides a process through which Crane deconstructs his Old World self and achieves self-renewal. In *The Honorary Patron*, the line between the Old World and the New World illuminates the relationship between the old myth and the new myth, between the past and present. The vitality of the New World is the liberating force which drags Crane out of his cocoon to declaim Shakespeare in a parking lot, to roll up his trousers and effect the sea-rescue of Madame, to participate in a nude protest march, and to fall heedlessly, foolishly, in love. For Hodgins, the Island *is* the edge, the extremity, of the New World; it is a place where magical transformations can occur, where the self can be made new: he remarks that "Vancouver Island seems to attract the kind of people who want to believe there is more than one kind of reality."⁸ However, this vitality has its negative aspects as well. Hodgins has a great deal of fun with the excesses of North American culture in this novel: the shopping malls, the cultural pretensions of the literati — "An experiment with spinach and blue cheese!" (93) — and Blackie's lakeside spread with its five-acre lawn studded with plastic lions, ceramic gnomes, and Bambis. A more serious negative aspect is raised when a terrorist bomb in an Old World airport is discovered to be the product of the New World entrepreneurial spirit.

The motif of drama expresses the deconstructive impulse not only in terms of Crane's personal situation, but also in terms of this New World community as a whole. The performance of an avant-garde theatre troupe in a Vienna square challenges Crane's preconceptions about what is real and not real, just as his forthcoming journey will challenge his ideas about real history and false.

A historical drama based on local history sets off an argument at the architect's dinner party, in which Crane questions the way history has been rewritten for the stage. He remembers George Dunbar as a villain, an exploiter, with different rates of pay for "men," Chinese and Indian: "poor, worse and almost slavery" (105). Elizabeth counters that "He was interesting, dammit . . . He was good *drama*! What more could anyone want?" What Crane wants, apparently, is the truth, not "History . . . replaced by fiction" (106). "History was never anything else," Eliza-

beth replies, "You ought to know that. People choose the history they want. More to the point, they choose the history they need" (106). Crane believes in the past; for him, mere acknowledgement is not good enough. Elizabeth, on the other hand, understands the need to find a seed of truth in the inherited past, and to acknowledge it in order to enrich the present: "We've nearly forgotten how to tell what to believe. What about those old stories filled with pioneer giants — the wonderful romances and dreams and magical changes?" (107). To her, the need to create a new mythology for the New World overrides any compulsion to historical accuracy. She, at least, understands that myths do not necessarily have to be "true." Like the Ojibwa elder in Robert Bringham's article who is asked by an anthropologist whether *all* stones are alive, Elizabeth answers, "No. But some of them are."⁹

A short story by Jorge Luis Borges, titled "The Other Death,"¹⁰ sets up the idea that two equally true versions of history may co-exist. The central character in the story, who is in the process of discovering this possibility, begins his tale with passing mention of a Ralph Waldo Emerson poem called "The Past" which presents the opposing view. Clearly, Crane holds to Emerson's idea of the past as "eternal fact"¹¹ which not even the gods can change, while Elizabeth, the more flexible post-colonialist, can accommodate the idea of variant versions of reality.

Thus in both personal and regional terms, the motif of drama performs the same function as the structurally linear elements of the novel: it allows expression of the deconstructive impulse, the idea that the myths of the inherited past can be shattered in order to create a liberating new mythology.

THE MOTIF OF VISUAL ART provides the unifying or circular element, expressed in *The Invention of the World* by the idea of "a perfect round" and in *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* by "the ultimate triumph of good." The literary adaptation of a visual art form is one of the hallmarks of Jack Hodgins' fiction. Whereas in his first novel, he made use of the magic realist mode, his second was constructed along cinematic lines. In *The Honorary Patron*, however, the author uses expressionism as emblem in his exploration of the circular relationship between the past and the present and of the human aspiration to perfection or unity. In the novel, Crane struggles to reconcile the bleak world view of Vasily Kandinsky's abstractions with the passionate expressionism of Egon Schiele.

The motif is introduced in the first chapter, when the two main characters visit the Kunsthau. For Crane, Kandinsky's fragmented, chaotic works comprise "some of the most astonishing work done in this century" (23); for Elizabeth, the exhibit is merely "clever." Crane points out that the artist speaks for his time, setting out "to discover what must replace the landscapes and human figures and scenes of family life that earlier painters had used as their subjects without even suspecting that they had no real substance at all" (24).

In the second half of the section describing the reunion in Vienna, Franz and Crane visit another museum, and it is here that Crane betrays a trace of emotional life. He is deeply moved by Egon Schiele's *Die Familie*, partly because of the paradox that "the tension that existed within the work . . . achieved a sense of the collective life that was being celebrated" (46).

The Schiele/Kandinsky duality is a revealing one. While Kandinsky's work appeals to Crane on an intellectual level, Schiele's moves him on the same unexamined plane which leads him to visit churches "for the pleasure of looking into the tranquil faces" (25) of the worshippers. He is only vaguely aware that he is pursuing some ultimate reality, some "created world," which contradicts the death sentence pronounced by Einstein and Kandinsky.

The motif involving a contrast between abstraction and expressionism comes full circle in the final chapter of the novel. While Kandinsky's stark canvases reflect the chaotic universe suggested by Einstein, Egon Schiele's tragic *Die Familie* speaks of human longing for wholeness as an unrealized, perhaps unrealizable dream. Yet, paradoxically, the artist creates something approaching "the enduring, the true, the real" (24) out of the void — through his art. This mixture of starkness and hope comes together in the work of the New World artist Joe Hobson, with whom Crane plays a cat and mouse game of rejection and approach. In the climactic scene at Crane's crumbling childhood home (in which the black hole of the past threatens to swallow the assembled cast), a "parachute angel" drops onto the scene and explicates Hobson's art.

Elizabeth tries to urge Crane to confront his past by reminding him of the adventurer that he once was: "You were a paratrooper once, you were trained to drop in on other people's countries, it shouldn't be this unthinkable thing you seem to want it to be" (28). However, he reminds her that his training had to do with dropping behind *enemy* lines; clearly, he views the past as an enemy. For Crane, paratroop training marked the death of his dreams, when he was injured in a bad landing. When "*Der Engel von himmel*" (313) drops in to the action, Hodgins draws several narrative and thematic threads together — in an open-ended way of course. In a Jack Hodgins novel, nothing can be too neatly resolved — an impossibility, as the young man's t-shirt (which reads "Stop Making Sense") attests.

The angel reveals several things about Joe Hobson, the young artist whom Crane has snubbed. First, the angel says that Hobson was accustomed to exploring the mines (as Crane had done as a child), mines which Crane now describes as "what the world had forgotten or chosen to ignore" (317). Obviously, *this* young man is not afraid of the past. Furthermore, Hobson painted what he saw there, tunnels "Dark and dirty — falling beams and dripping underground creeks" (317), but he always added something unexpected. In fact, in one picture the angel describes, Hobson seems to have imported Schiele's family to the Nanaimo coal mines: "A naked family. Huddled together in the dark like they're waiting for someone to

let them out" (317). Finally, Hobson, like Kandinsky, was fascinated by Einstein. Several of his paintings "have the old guy's face just sort of peeking out, like he's trapped in the tunnel walls. You could miss it if you didn't look real hard" (317). The angel goes on to explain that Hobson did this because, "Seems he heard somewhere that when Einstein died he was working on something new—something that would sort of balance out what he scared everybody with before" (317).

Crane decides that "the resisting force he'd glimpsed and hoped to find proof of . . . depended upon the sort of courage an imagination this young artist seemed to have. Also, perhaps, this boy crouched in the back of the jeep. A supreme intelligence, you might dare to say, manifesting itself in the enterprises of the human soul, to keep things from flying apart" (317-8). The force which keeps things from flying apart is the impulse to unity, structurally expressed by the circle.

AT FIRST READING, it seems an odd authorial choice to present such a key revelation at a double remove: Crane recounts the story to Franz, as it was told to him by the parachutist. One reason why Hodgins chose this indirect revelation instead of allowing his protagonist to see these works for himself is that until Crane confronts his own past — Elizabeth, Tessie, Blackie (and by implication, Edward Argent) — he is not ready to receive this wisdom. When first invited to view the young man's work, Crane resists, for "Of course he had retired from all that" (71). Another reason is that the paratrooper represents the "courage and imagination" which Crane lost or misplaced in his own youth, and is thus a suitable bearer of the message. The third reason is that Hodgins is making a point, familiar from his other work, about the randomness of grace: all of Crane's seeking after absolute truth is vain (as vain as Julius's quests in *The Invention of the World*), but wisdom can and does drop unexpectedly from the sky, and with typical Hodgins irreverence and love of the absurd, it is neither particularly bright nor articulate, and is wearing a Talking Heads t-shirt. The parachute angel adjusts the course of Crane's life by landing in the wrong place, as Crane had set the course of his own life more than forty years earlier.

The circles, the bookends, the clashes and connections of Old World and New, all lead Jeffrey Crane (and thereby the reader) to an epiphany. And it is not Lawrence's world-weary pronouncement that *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*, with its sense of a treadmill, the impossibility of progress. For Hodgins, the full circle structure implies a sense of completeness, of harmony. At the same time, in a manner familiar from the earlier novels, "It also leaves the future open" (Delbaere, 89).

Jack Hodgins concludes his third novel with an ironic comment on his own literary structures: When Franz urges him to go on with his story, Crane observes,

"What you're saying is: not even a life devoted to History has destroyed your persistent hope for the occasional happy ending" (322). This happy ending the honorary patron then provides. Here, the reader can sense a self-conscious poke at the author's own compulsion to discover "what it would take to bring this guy back to life" (PI, 11), to subvert the inevitability of the tragic pattern and tell a tale of redemption, to bend the downward slanting line into a circular structure.

CITICAL DEBATE HAS ARISEN over the question "Is Jack Hodgins a myth-maker or an iconoclast?" The answer to this question appears to be "Yes." In short, he both creates myths and shatters them, and his fictional structures underline the double effect. In his novels, characters search for the ageless truth hidden within the persistent lie (PI, 22) of the old myth, and create a new myth for themselves out of that grain of truth. For the central characters in each of his novels, a confrontation with the past — with the old myth, the "prison of the past," the inherited mythologies — brings new life and growth, a resurrection of sorts. The dual plots of *The Invention of the World* are resolved by full circle journeys; the myth of Keneally is returned to the air where it began and Maggie Kyle finds her new life by returning to her own birthplace. In *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*, the first cataclysm facilitates Bourne's death and resurrection; the second both destroys the community and reaffirms its indestructibility. Jeffrey Crane, in *The Honorary Patron*, is "resurrected" in a sense, by returning to his birthplace and confronting the life he chose not to lead. When asked about the bookends and circles which pervade his work, Hodgins responds:

These patterns you're noticing (I haven't deliberately planned it that way but they obviously recur) simply reflect my feelings about the necessity for renewal and new beginnings. And again for escape from the prison of the past. The past equals for me the inherited mythologies with all the lies that go along with them . . . and the need that each person has, to whatever degree he or she can, to step free from those chains and create himself or herself anew (PI, 10).

The idea of the past as a prison carries through into Hodgins' perception of literary form as well: "I'm trying to invent my own structures that are applicable to the way *I want the story to be read* [my italics] rather than just sort of plugging in to an inherited view" (PI, 12). Thus, Hodgins subverts the inherited mythologies of literature by his own manipulations of literary form. For example, Hodgins refuses to accept that the evil myth of Brother XII is best left unchallenged, or that, as Jacob Weins says, a man should kick off when his number comes up and not make an unseemly fuss about it, or that, like Gustav von Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, Jeffery Crane is doomed. In short, the quests of his characters parallel his own quest to make the novel anew.

But there is a paradox here, for Hodgins also questions certain modern patterns. He challenges the post-nuclear nihilism of the modern novel, in which "believers were always made to look like fools, with empty hands" (RJB, 139). W. J. Keith writes of *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*, "Although 'the sense of an ending' broods over it in characteristic late twentieth century fashion, the sense of a beginning is, refreshingly, more conspicuous."¹² Keith adds that "this positive stance contributes to a sense of rich completeness" (106). This is a description which applies equally to all three of Jack Hodgins' novels. Yet, the positive quality of the works does not reflect a "Pollyanna" view of life; it is instead a deeply felt and consciously implemented stance, as the structural and thematic tensions between duality and unity, fragmentation and order, clearly show.

Doubtless this tension arises out of the antithetical position in which the author finds himself: he is a "twentieth century moral novelist";¹³ he is a post-colonialist who also believes in the teachings of John Gardner;¹⁴ he sees that an important part of his job as a writer is to deconstruct traditional forms, yet he also assumes moral responsibility for his work.

In a recent interview, Hodgins expressed concern that his portrait of Blackie Blackstone, a vibrant but "despicable" and "unscrupulous" character who considers himself the embodiment of "West Coast spirit" (HP, 72), might be seen by the reader as more attractive than that of the hero of *The Honorary Patron*, Jeffrey Crane: he says, "I'm worried about the moral confusion that this may cause." When the interviewer airily reminds him, expressing the prevailing modern view of the writer's role, that he is an artist not a preacher, Hodgins retorts "You think it's none of my business? No, it *is* my business, to be responsible for what I do" (Delbaere 88).

It is apparent in this response, and in the tensions between lines and circles, duality and unity, in the structure of his fiction, that Jack Hodgins is grappling with the post-modern dilemma: what is left after we have destroyed the temple? If we subvert the forms, shatter the myths, refute the lie of history, and dispense with the old-fashioned concept of meaning, what is left?

Clearly, Jack Hodgins feels that some sense of hope for the future must be left, and thus has made a conscious decision never to leave his readers empty-handed.

NOTES

¹ Jack Hodgins, personal interview (27 June 1988), 23. My discussion of this manuscript relies primarily on this interview and various published articles and interviews. The papers for *The Honorary Patron* have not yet been accessed by the National Library. Subsequent references to the personal interview will be made in the text, using the abbreviations PI.

² Alberto Manguel, "Too little, too late," *Books in Canada*, 16.6 (August-September 1987), 14.

³ Ronald Hatch, "The Power of Love," *Canadian Forum*, 67.772 (October 1987), 39.

- ⁴ See Eleanor Wachtel, "The Invention of Jack Hodgins," *Books in Canada*, 16.6 (August-September 1987), 9.
- ⁵ Linda Hutcheon, "The 'Post-modernist' Scribe: The Dynamic Stasis of Canadian Writing," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 53.3 (Spring 1984), 292.
- ⁶ Jeanne Delbaere, "Jack Hodgins: Interview," *Kunapipi*, 9.2 (1987), 89.
- ⁷ E.g., pp. 10, 11, 13, 15, and 17.
- ⁸ Stephen Godfrey, "Hodgins brings his island into the literary limelight," *Globe and Mail* (19 September 1987), C1.
- ⁹ Robert Bringham, "Myths Create a World of Meaning," *Globe and Mail* (7 May 1987), C1.
- ¹⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, "The Other Death," *The Eye of the Heart*, ed. Barbara Howes (New York: Bard Books, 1973), 173-81.
- ¹¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Past," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ix (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904).
- ¹² W. J. Keith, Rev. of *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne*, *Fiddlehead* 124 (September 1980), 105.
- ¹³ David L. Jeffrey, "A Crust for the Critics," *Canadian Literature*, 84 (Spring 1980), 76.
- ¹⁴ In his 1979 interview of Geoff Hancock, Hodgins said, "Like John Gardner, I feel strongly that a writer has a responsibility to be aware of the moral implications of what he's doing" (49). Hodgins doubtless refers here to Gardner's *On Moral Fiction*.

UNDER KIHEI

Sonja A. Skarstedt

Tradewinds are prophecies:
 the widemouthed Pacific
 sends scallops of sound
 in and out of our ears
 pages of cocopalm
 flapping, my hair
 a trail of salty flags
 blowing over this paradigm
 of paradise:
 hotplate gorges

landscapes of orchids
 tearoses tiny as infant fists
 & miniature opals of lime to tame
 the sickly sweet air, the taste
 of lilacs faraway

*as Captain Cook, the sun
 setting over his resolute spine, wiping
 the brine from his lips he listens
 for his sailors' laughter, watches
 their breeches loosen as
 they dig for bits of wampum
 torn from the planks of sleeping
 ships to trade for Polynesian
 smiles traced by the brief
 moon.*

We follow under
 the whispering waves
 and once
 inside the sea our lungs
 grow gluey with salt
 the trace of lilacs washed
 from our systems, we are magnetized
 impossible to pull away from these watery
 persistent arms, warm as a giant's womb
 its intensity draws us deeper
 we are unshelled as snails
 our only tool a white and fluttery foot
 to grip the moving sand, ignoring
 the warnings of oysters crushed into grains on the distant shore
 too late we become aware
 the monster's
 throttle:
 the kraken eye of the sea
 consumes, smashing boisterously
 over our memory.



THE POST-COLONIAL AS DECONSTRUCTION

Land & Language in Kroetsch's "Badlands"

Dorothy Seaton

IT IS COMMONLY ARGUED that early imperial discourses of the New World inscribe an effort to make strange new lands familiar to Eurocentric systems of meaning and understanding.¹ However, conceptualised from the start as the site of the strange, the new lands continued to resist European epistemological appropriation and whatever the imperial's claims to control and knowledge, the sign of the land continued to enter the discourse as a site of the unknown and the resistant.² Now, current criticism often characterises post-colonial writing as constructing *counter-discourses* to the once-dominant imperial discourse, writing against the imperial's inappropriately Eurocentric systems of understanding, and instead writing the land as an element within *local* constructs of meaning and value. But the counter-discursive strategy still shares with the imperial certain basic assumptions about the relations among humans, discourse, and land: both discursive strategies still inscribe a belief that the land, though conceptualised initially as a site of the strange and the resistant, can somehow be controlled and familiarised by discourse, contained within the epistemological system of one discourse or another.³

However, a second, far more radically subversive possibility is available to the post-colonial effort of re-writing the strange land: that of the *deconstructive*. Unlike the counter-discursive, the deconstructive entirely rejects the possibility of achieving a "correct" or "appropriate" rendering of the land in *any* discourse, whether imperial or post-colonial, and it embraces instead the endless strangeness of both land and discourse, interrogating the very capacity of discourse to constitute the land. The sign of the land is conceptualised from the start as the site of resistance to discursive containment, this resistance understood within a larger system by which discourse in general, like the specific discourse of the land, depends upon an initial, irrevocable, and all-affecting assumption of difference, deferral, resistance. Any of the systems of understanding and containing the land, whether in the dominant discourse of the imperial, or in the post-colonial's newer, presumably more appropriate counter-discourses of the land, are based upon an initial experi-

ence of displacement and otherness, and it is this radical strangeness that such contemporary novels as Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands* seem to address in the writing of New World lands. Land and discourse are by definition signs ultimately of strangeness, of the undecidable and the resistant.⁴

In *Badlands*, the dominant image by which this deconstructive impulse works, in connection with the land, is that of *archaeology*. The image works to site the deconstruction of language in the land itself, in that the practice of archaeological excavation, entering the ground, deconstructs the New World myths of identity which have thus far created meaning in the intertextual tradition of post-colonial writing. Because of the nature of this breakdown of myth, language itself comes under scrutiny. Individual myths, along with the larger mythological systems of nation and identity, are broken down so that they can no longer express their appropriate values, even within the limits which they themselves set. The binary oppositions which the myths propose, in order to define their own values, are subverted.⁵ Archaeology, then — the act of entering the land — becomes the practice both by which myths are proposed, and by which these myths are subverted. The archaeological expedition as the reconstruction and retrieval of history, as an act of male heroic self-construction, as a journey in search of sources and origins (and so on), is also a journey of the loss and deconstruction of history, of the subversion of such male heroic myths as Dawe is entered upon, and of a movement away from sources. The land becomes the place where such oppositions, rather than being arranged hierarchically in order to structure meaning and value, are instead brought together and made at once to interact endlessly and undecidably, and eventually to collapse entirely into one another.

What is finally deconstructed are not only the myths of the land, but also the myth, perhaps, of language itself: if the basic structure of binary oppositions — in terms of which the elements of language are defined in relation to each other — are subverted, language itself becomes a problematic medium and practice. The land, as the object of archaeological examination, is written as itself a text, so that its treatment can be read as a discussion about the nature of language and discourse in general. This groundwork of language — groundwork for all the other discourses the novel examines — is itself the site being investigated, excavated, and contaminated.⁶ The archaeological expedition, then, becomes at once a search for and the loss of language. Discourse itself, in spite of all the words of the novel, begins to break down; and within this breakdown, the discursive constructs of land and language must become equally unstable — at the same time as they perform within the discourse as the agent and site of such a breakdown of the Western systems of meaning which they construct.

The archaeological expedition, of course, takes the form of a river trip, flowing downstream on the Red Deer, through the layers of time deposited over millennia of the land's changes. The notion of the river trip as a journey of discovery is a

familiar mythological construction in Canadian self-definition: as told in the proto-texts of Canadian history and identity, the exploration and fur trade narratives, it is largely through river voyages, of course, that Canada was explored, named, and defined. Dawe's journey draws upon the ideologies inherent in these earlier journeys of national self-definition, in this case the defining given the particular form of the search for history and origins. Here, however, such a quest involves the search for dinosaur bones, the remains of dead and extinct creatures: the search for origins, on the basis of which to define the young nation, is the search for the bones of death. The binary oppositions of birth and death, of origins and endings, begin already to be brought into disrupting interaction, so that origins are to be discovered in death, and beginnings are positioned in relation to endings: the myth, for example, whereby national identity was seen to begin with river journeys of exploration, is rewritten as a journey as much into death as into birth.

YET THE PARADOXES of the search for "bones" do not end with this scrambling of the basic life/death opposition. Web participates, however reluctantly, in Dawe's search for dinosaur bones, but his real interest in bones is in the "bone-ons" he is perpetually developing throughout the novel, whether when contemplating Anna Yellowbird's uncertain presence somewhere along the shore they are journeying past,⁷ or discussing the finer points of relationships between humans and snakes (16) or bears (155) or gopher holes (204). His "bone" is generally a central figure, one way or another, in his wild tales of physical and sexual prowess: the "*western yarn[s]*," the exaggerated stories of strength and achievement, which are another element of Western Canadian myth-making (45, Kroetsch's italics). The stories deny in their simple volubility and vigour the death which the dinosaur bones suggests: speaking of his hypothetical death and the coffin he would be buried in, Web protests, "'Bone-on I'm developing now, it'll take them a week to get the lid down'" (16).

Web's exaggerated and endlessly voluble discourse of the "bones" of masculine self-definition — and by connection, of Western Canadian self-definition — opposes Dawe's alternative text of self-definition, of the dinosaur bonebeds, as is most graphically evoked in Tune's dying in the effort to recover the bones of history. Though Tune has thus far not entered fully into the realms of masculine discourse which Web exemplifies, having failed to lose his virginity in the Drumheller whorehouse, his simultaneous admiration for and skepticism about Web's tall tales (his tall tales about tail), suggest that he is coming to understand and appreciate the discourse. As the summer progresses, he is losing his boyish fat and growing into his adult body, in preparation for heading off to that other testing ground for discourses of male self-definition: war. But not having had a chance to experience

fully the pleasures of Web's discourse of "bones," he is subsumed by Dawe's alternative discourse of bones, sacrificed to Dawe's fanatical desire for fame and fortune as a paleontologist:

From seventy million years deep in the black matrix of the past, the bones must leap to light. Must loose themselves from the bentonite. Must make their finders rich and famous. The bones that must satisfy their finders. (31)

However, Dawe's quest for self-definition, through the search for origins in the bones of dead dinosaurs, is not so different from Web's constant self-definition through his repeated, endlessly elaborated adventures with his "bones" — as the reference to satisfaction suggests, in the above quotation. Both searches demand that the bones — the discourses — satisfy their readers'/writer's needs.⁸ And both quests take size as the measure of their achievement: the bigger the bone the better — the bigger and more ambitious the myth-making, the more totalising the discursive system, the better. The final, largest dinosaur, *Daweosaurus*, is found when Web falls out of the sky while having sex with Anna Yellowbird in the middle of a twister, landing so that he straddles the fossil, "bone" and bone meeting painfully for Web, but fruitfully for Dawe (207).

But if this meeting of bones here favours Dawe's notion of self-definition through the recovery of the text of the land's past, equally strong is Web's opposing view of self-construction through the rejection of the past, endlessly starting anew. Web has burnt down his father's house, and possibly his father with it, before departing on the life that leads him, ironically, to Dawe's expedition in search of the past (4). But though he participates, however reluctantly, in the river journey of Dawe's effort to construct meaning from the text of the past, Web's fear of water continues to signal his fear and rejection of this past. The muddy water of the river, perhaps even more than the bones of the dinosaurs, comes to suggest the connection between the past, as inscribed in the text of the land, and the men currently excavating that past — a connection particularly suggested in the events following McBride's falling overboard. McBride finally reappears miles downriver, paddling his pig trough shaped like a coffin, and landing on the farmer's shore, his emergence from the water becomes the emergence of the first land creature from the depths:

the . . . woman [the farmer's wife] . . . saw . . . the man caked in mud from his feet to his hair, his body like an alligator's; she saw him step from his trough and into the willows. And it was not the smell that came with him that made her hesitate; she knew the smell of skunk. It was the man himself, coming formless out of the mud. Onto the land. The mud, the grey mud, cold, reptilian, come sliding into the yellow-green flame of the shore's willows. (42-43)

McBride is the one man on the expedition who has "*the ability to become a hero*," but "*the wisdom not to*" (45, Kroetsch's italics): he is the one man who might actually live the heroism of Dawe's and Web's mythologising discourses, but he

rejects such discourse entirely and abandons Dawe's expedition into death, in favour of his life on the land with his family. Similarly, he is the one who lives the past, slathering himself with the mud from which he came, and emerging into human life, moving away from the bone-signs of the deadly discourses.

Web's fear of this seminal water, contrarily, and his simultaneous self-creation through his myth-making, reiterate his fear of the past. But his fear, perhaps precisely because it is still accompanied by his own discourses of self-construction, does not allow him to escape the past — the river — as seen when he follows McBride to the ferry crossing. McBride's escape from the journey into death and discourse takes the form of this ferry trip across the river, the irony being that the trip is precisely not the journey across the Styx into Hades, under the guidance of the other-worldly ferryman. Rather, as above, it is the journey of his return to life — a journey which the ferryman, associating Web with the expedition in search of bones, will not allow Web to make. "‘Dead is dead,’" the ferryman shouts at Web. "‘We don't need none of you damned graverobbers down here’" (54). Web's active rejection of the past — of the dinosaur bones of self-constructing discourse — nevertheless implies a continued connection with the past, as it allows or prevents self-constitution in discourse.

DAWE'S CONSTRUCTION OF THE MYTH of the land's history, then, is one way of defining self and nation, perhaps a notably staid and stodgy method associated with the established practices of the East — Dawe, after all, is only plundering the bone beds in Western Canada in order to take the bones back East and there to catalogue them into the accepted discourses of history and nation. Web's myth-construction, on the other hand, enters as an alternative possible way of defining nation, as frontier, as the locus of heroic acts of self-definition, as the land of tall tales — a Western construction depending upon the myth that constructs the West as the place to start again, to escape the bonds of the past. Web's tall tales are set against the long tails of the dinosaurs Dawe is excavating — against the never-recovered long tail of the *Daweosaurus* which was the intended object of the dynamite that instead killed Tune.

Both Web's and Dawe's discourses fail to fulfill their mythical agenda, however, of the construction of self and nation. Dawe's exercise of recovering history is at best only fragmentary:⁹ the fossil of his *Daweosaurus*, as above, is missing its tail, which he must construct by guess-work in a museum back East. And his general practice, of searching only for the largest bones, blinds him to many of the other elements of the text deposited by time: he misses all the smaller and less spectacular signs of the land's past. While Dawe is in Drumheller, for example, down in the coal mine searching for someone to replace McBride on the expedition, he is suddenly struck with

the truth of what he already knew: here, once, there were green branches of fig trees. Sycamores. Magnolias. A delta and a swamp. On this spot: *Ornithomimus* snapping fruit from the high branches, digging for the eggs of other dinosaurs. Carnivorous *Tyrannosaurus rex* stalking *Saurolophus*; dinosaur stalking dinosaur; the quiet, day-long hunt, the sudden murderous lunge, the huge and bone-cracking jaws finding at last the solid-crested skull, the long tails flailing the water a frothed red. (81)

Yet he will still not stop more than momentarily to examine the leaf patterns in the piece of coal Grimlich shows him — the smaller signs in time's text — and he heads immediately for the bonebeds again, the moment a new crew member has been recruited. The past he is constructing for Eastern notions of national identity is in fact only bits and pieces of the past, parts of it based upon the specimens found in the Badlands — specimens which are themselves already mineral substitutes for the actual dinosaur bones (56) — parts of it sheer guesswork, and much of it just plain absent.

Web's alternative constructions, which speak of a more Western Canadian construction of identity, also fail actually to define such identity, in that they work far more to deconstruct the concept of nation than to define it. His stories invariably suggest a barely contained chaos of radical, directionless energy, far from the value-laden order and encompassing system which usually characterise national myths. Lies, he discovers, are far more interesting than the ostensible truth, in any case: speaking of his effort to trace the departed McBride and bring him back to the boat, he protests untruthfully that he saw neither

"Hide nor hair," . . . elaborating his lie, delighting in the ambiguity of his discovery, the skeleton that was not the beast, not even the bones of the sought beast but the chemical replacement of what had been the bones: "Didn't find hide nor hair —" (56)

Neither his discourse of "bones," nor Dawe's dinosaur-bone discourse, answers the desire for wholeness and satisfaction that both discourses create,¹⁰ and the closest they come to constructing such individual or national identity as the myth-making might aim at, is through the ambiguous practice of lies — of endless substitution. The signs never speak directly of the reality or the truth, but only make gestures at it, offering uncertain dis-/re-placements which connect only with other such implacements. Thus, whether constructing or deconstructing ideas of nationality and identity, both of the discourses, as discourses, result in the same failure of language. In the much-quoted words of Anna Dawe, "*there are no truths, only correspondences*" (45, Kroetsch's italics).

There is one moment of satisfaction for both Web's and Dawe's discourses — the one orgasm that Web actually has in the entire novel, while having sex with Anna Yellowbird in the storm — the incident ending when Web lands crotch first on the *Daweosaurus*. But the moment of satisfaction, as we have seen already, is

the moment of reconnection with the dead, with Dawe's dinosaur bones, which, bearing Dawe's name, will be shipped back East to be incorporated into its stultifying systems of decided meaning. Web's own description of his encounter with Anna Yellowbird — particularly, of course, the moment of orgasm — is couched in terms of destruction and death:

"we were locked together up there like two howling dogs.... And just goddamned then the lightning struck us. . . . the bolt came streaking straight at us, the ball of fire came WHAM — and sweet mother of Christ the blue flames shot out of our ears, off our fingertips, our glowing hair stood on end, my prick was like an exploding torpedo. . . ." Web trying to capture his spouting words. "And the crack of thunder deafened us. The inverted universe and undescended testicles of the divine, the refucking-union with the dead —" (206-7)

The lightning storm might replicate the first galvanising lightning that is theorised to have catalysed life from the mud on the edge of the primeval water, but in Web's use of it in his discourse of self-creation, it also links him back with the death of history. Web may try to escape the past by burning down his father's hut with his father still inside, but as long as he is controlled by his "spouting" discourse, constructing himself through the endless substitutions of language, he can never escape the death and the bones of the past. As Anna Dawe comments of Web:

Total and absurd male that he was, he assumed, like a male author, an omniscience that was not ever his, a scheme that was not ever there. Holding the past in contempt, he dared foretell for himself not so much a future as an orgasm.

But we women take our time. (76, Kroetsch's italics)

Web foretells the orgasm, which reconnects him with the death of the past, the death of discourse.

BUT AS THE LAST WORDS of the quotation suggest, outside the oppositions which establish the differences—and ultimate similarities—between the male discourses, is a third possibility entirely: the female and the a-discursive: silence. Breaking into the interplay of life and death in the male discourses, then, is a radically alternative possibility, which, because it has thus far been so completely proscribed from the myth-making discourses of men — myths that construct meaning through the establishment and stabilising of such oppositions — breaks entirely away from all such oppositions, and heads into undefinable, unidentifiable, realms outside language. Archaeology in the novel has worked to excavate the various discourses of the land, whether the text of the land itself in its layers of time's inscription, Dawe's discourse of Eastern ideas of national and individual male identity, or Web's "yarns" constructing a Western identity of wild action and superhuman performance. At the same time as the act of excavation reveals and

orders the signs of such discourses, it demonstrates the incompleteness of discourses — of such falsely totalising systems of substitution — and thereby problematises the very notion of language itself. Having reached such a point, then, it is possible to speculate — only speculate, of course, in an area by definition of radical uncertainty and strangeness — about what might lie outside of the endlessly self-constituting, endlessly unravelling construct of language.

As I begin to suggest already, this speculation takes place in the novel principally under the sign of the women (and the native), especially of Anna Dawe and her namesake, Anna Yellowbird. Within the main discourse of the novel — that describing the actual archaeological expedition of 1916, interspersed with Dawe's field notes — Anna Yellowbird represents one possible way of constructing the a-discursivity that surrounds the field of language. This is perhaps seen most clearly in the description of Dawe's having sex with her, where Dawe tries repeatedly to construct her as the sign against which he is defining himself in his male myth of his self, but where she repeatedly fades away from his discursive grasp, always evading definition or focus:

at that split second of penetration he must, he would, raise up with him into that underworld of his rampaging need the knowledge of all his life: into that sought darkness, that exquisite inundation, he would carry in his mind, in his head, the memory of wife and home, his driving ambitions that had swept him into this canyon, the furious desire and dream that had brought him here to these badlands, to these burnt prairies and scalded buttes; conquer, he told himself, conquer; and out of that blasting sun, into the darkness of her body he must, rising, plunge:

and found instead that at each moment of entry into the dark, wet heat of her body the outside world was lost, and he, in a new paroxysm that erased the past, spent each night's accumulated recollection in that little time of going in; the motion that erased the ticking clock, the wide earth:

. . . Until he began to believe that only his humped back might save him from some absolute surrender. . . . Dawe, not moving at first, wanting not to move, yielding to her passion, her violence, her tenderness; his male sense of surrender surprised and violated and fulfilled:

She made him lose the past. He began to hate her for that. (195-96)

Dawe, trying to use Anna Yellowbird as the vessel, female and Indian, in which he can construct and thereby contain his personal history — his identity — finds in the moment of fulfillment that his discourse has failed, and that he has not made a monument of his history, but has lost it entirely. Her yielding to him becomes a kind of endless yielding of the discourse which he has tried to embody in her, with the result that the discourse falls apart entirely.

The land has appeared in the novel as the site and agent of the various discourses' fragmentation — the storm rejoining Web to "the inverted universe and undescended testicles of the divine, the refucking-union with the dead" (207), and depositing him on the dead bones of Dawe's satisfaction. Parallel to and extension

upon this fragmentation is the female (and/or native) realm, not just of fragmented discourse, but also of complete departure from it. In the darkness of the coal mine, Dawe is presented, in the fossilised leaf, with evidence of the incompleteness of his falsely totalising discourse; in the darkness of Anna Yellowbird's body, his discourse is completely subsumed, and during the time of his relations with her, he becomes vague and indifferent, and has great difficulty keeping up the field notes in which, thus far, he has been recording his journey to fame as a paleontologist.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH to speculation about the a-discursive in the novel occurs in the use of the second level of narrative, of Anna Dawe's framing narrative. At its simplest, the construct works to place a female voice outside of and surrounding the male discourses which appear in the framed narrative of the expedition. Then, the action which Anna Dawe's narrative tells is precisely that of reading the male discourses and of destroying them. The reading she performs on the discourses is what is written in the first level of narrative: the level I have principally been examining. This reading is precisely one that deconstructs the discourses and that problematises the entire concept of discourse. Her framing narrative supports this process of deconstruction partly in the continuing comment on the specific incidents of the first narrative — such as those in italics — which encourage a reading of the first text involving the sort of discourse analysis I have attempted above.¹¹

The texts of male discourse are thus subsumed by the discourse of a narrative which, at the same time as constructing them, has deconstructed them. Then, in the concluding pages of the novel, the destruction of the actual artifacts of Dawe's discourse — his field notes — can take place. Significantly, this act of destruction takes the form of an alternative journey which writes over the older journey, reversing its direction, and heading for different sources, different points of beginning again, than Web's or Dawe's journeys did. Anna Dawe collects an aged Anna Yellowbird from the bar of a prairie hotel and heads West, back up the Red Deer river into the mountains — and towards the river's source in a glacial lake. The journey is Westward, away from the suffocation of Eastern Canadian constructs of meaning; it is a journey to purge Anna Dawe of her father's words: his dead dinosaur bones, his dead bones at the bottom of Lake Superior, his death-bringing "bone" that penetrated Anna Yellowbird and that fathered Anna Dawe. Unlike Dawe's search for origins in the dead layers of history, the Annas' quest for origins takes them to the brand new waters of the lake, untouched by history, untouched by discourse.

By the lake, laughing at the ridiculous figure of the male grizzly, his balls hanging from the net, they are at last freed from the weight of all the discourse they have

been fleeing, and throw the photographs and field notes into the lake to drown as Dawe himself did.¹² Leaving the lake under the light of the stars, in Anna Dawe's description, they

looked at those billions of years of light, and Anna [Yellowbird] looked at the stars, and Anna looked at the stars and then at me, and she did not mention dinosaurs or men or their discipline or their courage or their goddamned honour or their goddamned fucking fame or their goddamned fucking death-fucking death. . . . And we did not once look back, not once, ever. (270, Kroetsch's italics)

The lake absorbs the deadly discourse, the death inscribed in constructions of history and identity, and the sight of the stars, while their very light refers to ages gone past, also suggests the possibility of endless renewal. While the land can be seen, as in the layers of the badlands, to be itself a text, a language, it also represents that which might be beyond the constructions and constraints of language.

In the imposition of their desires on the land — in their discourses — the men create the land as a linguistic construct, contained within and controlled by the encompassing effort of their discourses. But the very fact of the land's being created as a language means that it must also cause the subversion and eventual deconstruction of the very constructs which rendered it as such a language in the first place. Then, the notion of language thus so radically destabilised, the land can be reintroduced as possible site of that which is outside of language entirely. The inescapable irony, that such speculation must take place within the very medium which it works to deconstruct — that Anna Dawe's position as a possible representative of the a-discursive must be communicated by her in discourse — does not negate the deconstruction of history, identity and discourse that has been performed. Rather, it represents an opening into the endlessly circling argument that is language itself, in which the effort to define land and language — even to define them as sites of the radical undecidability and resistance to definition that characterises language — must precisely occur within this ceaselessly shifting and deferring medium of language itself. Anna Dawe's discourse becomes an opening into a sort of impossible Möbius strip,¹³ that turns again and again back on itself at the same time as it twists to a new level of speculation and thought. Such an opening, by virtue of being an opening, also suggests the possibility of escape, at the same time as it implies here the entrance into an endlessly deferring, endlessly deferred en/closure. The land as discourse becomes such a Möbius strip, referring always to language at the same time as it perpetually suggests an alternative possibility of that which is never touched by language.

The result, then, is a post-colonial discourse that engages very clearly with all the activities of myth-making and history-writing that have been used to construct post-colonial belonging and identity here in these lands. The novel helps to inscribe the land, both as sign and as actual physical territory, as the authorising site of the values and meanings upon which the post-colonial counter-discourse bases its

subversion of the once-dominant imperial discourses. But at the same time, the land, precisely because it is the object of this discursive and territorial contention between the imperial and the local, ultimately enters the discourse as the site of the radical uncertainty which suffuses all the junctures between the signs of a discourse: the land, as the endlessly unsatisfactory and fragmented object of Dawe's discourses about meaning and identity, comes to represent precisely the fragmentations, replacements, and substitutions which characterise discourse in general, whether dominant imperial or post-colonial counter-discourse. This deconstructive post-colonial discourse, rather than merely replacing one system of meaning with another, instead destabilises the notion of any meaning, and locates the source of this instability in that very object which, in both imperial and counter-discursive epistemologies, has been constructed as *the* most stable and unchanging of ideologically-loaded signs: the sign of the land. In the deconstructive enterprise, the new land, like language itself, is still used to construct meaning; but at the same time, it must re-enter the discourse as precisely that which, endlessly and inevitably, *subverts* meaning, again and again.

NOTES

- ¹ See, for example, Kateryna Arthur, "Pioneering Perceptions: Australia and Canada," in *Regionalism and National Identity: Essays on Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Topics*, ed. James Acheson and Reginald Berry (Christchurch: Association of Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand, 1985), 202; I. S. MacLaren, "The Aesthetic Map of the North, 1845-1859," *Arctic*, 38 (1985), 89; MacLaren, "Retaining Captivity of the Soul: Response to Nature in the First Franklin Expedition," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 28 (1984), 57-58; D. E. S. Maxwell, "Landscape and Theme," in *Commonwealth Literature: Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture* (London: Heinemann, 1965), 83-84.
- ² See, for example, my argument in "Colonising Discourses: The Land in Australian and Western Canadian Exploration Narratives," *Australian-Canadian Studies*, forthcoming 1989. Arthur develops a similar notion, in her use of the image of *ostraneniye* to discuss early discursive responses to Australian and Canadian landscapes. The aesthetic strategy of *ostraneniye* (making strange), translated here into the aesthetic dilemma of artists and writers encountering an already-strange landscape, "[impedes] habitual reception, interferes with transmission, and so enforces a dynamic, constructive (or deconstructive) vision of the object [of the strange landscape]" (207). "Visions of the two countries are constantly altered. . . . Pioneering in the realm of perception is not just a thing of the past" (209). See also MacLaren, "The Aesthetic Map of the North," 101-2; and MacLaren, "'... where nothing moves and nothing changes': The Second Arctic Expedition of John Ross (1829-1833)," *Dalhousie Review*, 62 (1982), 485-94.
- ³ Helen Tiffin argues the correlation of the post-colonial with the counter-discursive in her "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourses" (*Kunapipi*, 9.3 [1987], 17-34), drawing upon Richard Terdman's discussion of "the potential and limitations of counter-discursive literary revolution within a dominant discourse" (Tiffin, n. 3, p. 33), in his *Discourse/Counter-discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985). Terdman notes that counter-discourses "implicitly evoke a principle of

order just as systematic as that which sustains the discourses they seek to subvert. Ultimately, in the image of the counterhegemonic . . . the counter-discourse always projects, just over its own horizon, the dream of victoriously replacing its antagonist" (56-57). In the context of post-colonial counter-discursive contention, Tiffin similarly quotes J. M. Coetzee's expression of discomfort with a subversive, relativising reading he performs on several novels, when he says that "it is a mode of reading which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn" (Tiffin, 32). The post-colonial counter-discourse of the land, then, may subvert the once-dominant imperial discourse, but it also inscribes an equally tyrannical version of writing the land, as part of local, post-colonial identity and meaning. There's still a sense of a need to "get it right," to see and thereby to write the land as it "really is," rather than a movement, such as Homi K. Bhabha discusses, to go beyond the imperialism of this European-grown notion of an (ideal) unmediated text evoking a transcendental reality ("Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism," in *The Theory of Reading*, Frank Gloversmith, ed. [Brighton: Harvester, 1984], 96-99).

⁴ Finally, however, it ought to be noted that my distinction between counter-discursive and deconstructive efforts is somewhat artificial, each movement sharing strategies and effects with the other. Many of the subversive strategies to be found in Kroetsch's novel could be shown to work within either general strategy of subversion. I note that Tiffin's article suggests a different way of viewing the post-colonial's subversive strategies, in that a division between counter-discursive and deconstructive practices and effects is not made at all. She says that the danger that the counter-discursive might become dominant in turn is not a problem in "post-colonial inversions of imperial formations," because in the post-colonial context, these subversions are "deliberately provisional; they do not overturn or invert the dominant in order to become dominant in their turn, but to question the foundations of the ontologies and epistemological systems which would see such binary structures as inescapable" (32). However, this latter description seems to me to be a workable definition precisely of how the more generally subversive strategy of deconstruction differs from the counter-discursive as Terdiman describes it. In the context of my discussion, some distinction can be made, I think, between whether a novel works to replace the imperialist formulations of the land, which it works to subvert, with some other system by which to organize understanding of the land; or whether it seems to aim at a more general subversion of Western thought and of the constructs which constitute the thought, thus preventing the proposal of any alternate systems. As my argument runs, I see *Badlands* as primarily performing the latter action.

⁵ Stephen Slemon similarly discusses the (eventual) breakdown of binary oppositions in another of Kroetsch's novels, *What the Crow Said*, as a movement towards — or gesture at — a post-colonial discourse "beyond binary constriction." ("Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse," *Canadian Literature*, 116 [1988], 15.)

⁶ Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson, *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1982), 14-15. The discussion here of contamination of the archaeological site is in reference to a model of the text as object of *intertextual* excavation, tracing the influences, repetitions and subversions of precedent works; but I think the image can be applied to discourse in the way I attempt above, given the ubiquity of the structure, and the resulting multiplicity of its possible applications, in *Badlands*. (See also Brian Edwards, "Alberta and the Bush: The Deconstruction of National Identity in Post-modernist Canadian and Australian Fiction," *World Literature Written in English*, 25 [1985], 164.) In the context of my argument, the site of discourse, in a sense, is contaminated by discourse itself — by the desire which informs its very evistence.

- ⁷ Robert Kroetsch, *Badlands* (Toronto: General, 1982), 16. Further references are to this edition.
- ⁸ Neuman and Wilson, pp. 19-21ff.; Brian Edwards, "Textual Erotics, the Meta-Perspective and Reading Instruction in Robert Kroetsch's Later Fiction," *Australian-Canadian Studies* 5.2 (1987), 69-72.
- ⁹ Neuman and Wilson, 9-11.
- ¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *Literature, Politics and Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), 151.
- ¹¹ Note particularly the passage I have quoted, writing Web as a male author arrogating total omniscience to himself (*Badlands*, 76).
- ¹² Paul Duthie, "New Land — Old Culture," Unpublished essay, 1987, 37; Edwards, "Textual Erotics, the Meta-Perspective and Reading Instruction in Robert Kroetsch's Later Fiction," 165.
- ¹³ "A continuous one-sided surface, as formed by half-twisting a strip, as of paper or cloth, and joining the ends" (*The Macquarie Dictionary*, 2nd ed.). The effect is a figure which, as one follows the surface through its turn, brings one both through a twist and thus apparently to a new surface, at the same time as it circles unavoidably back to its starting point. It both changes and doesn't change.

VINNIE

Roger Nash

Vinnie DiSanto aged eight from the Bronx
 visiting a farm for an uncle's funeral
 heard clouds bleat distinctly
 fields strut then crow yellow
 corn at the dawn saw goats
 mow grass while backfiring badly
 from their twostroke tails and skunks mace
 every old lady in sight
 for stealing their huckleberries discovered geese
 clashed gears when anyone tried
 to think tractors gambolled and noon
 fought fields then buried their dead
 coyotes cries pickpocketed
 his dreams each night until he was glad
 to get safely home again and sit
 in the comfort of his favourite burnedout car
 a yellow rain drumming on its crusted
 roof the way rain should

WHAT KROETSCH SAID

The Problem of Meaning and Language in “What the Crow Said”

Kathleen Wall

I think criticism is really a version of story, you see; I think we are telling the story to each other of how we get at story. It is the story of our search for story. That's why criticism is so exciting. Not because it provides answers, but because it is a version of story. (LV 30)¹

WHERE IT NOT FOR ROBERT KROETSCH'S generous attitude toward the critic's role, it would seem an act of hubris to attempt to interpret *What the Crow Said*, the novel that he wrote as his “own personal struggle with the temptation of meaning.” I think the critic can, however, delineate the parameters and expression of that temptation without ignoring his injunction that the temptation to impose meaning “is the reader's struggle too” (LV 15). In this novel, the tendency to impose meaning not only creates a dilemma for the writer and the reader: it is a central issue for the characters as well.

The world of *What the Crow Said* is a world without order — as we conventionally expect it: time warps frequently, and the laws of probable cause and effect do not seem to operate in Big Indian. Winter comes after spring and lasts an entire year, Liebhaber remembers the future, Vera Lang is impregnated by bees, a man missing one leg and his genitals impregnates Rose Lang, a child who sings in the womb is born into silence. The improbabilities in Kroetsch's text go on and on.² The community's response to this chaos is to assign meaning and causality willy-nilly: in fact the book opens with just such an attempt to explain life in Big Indian:

People, years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang, that started everything. How the town came to prosper, and then to decline, and how the road never got built, the highway that would have joined the town and the municipality to the world beyond, and how the sky itself, finally,

took umbrage: it was because one afternoon in April the swarming bees found Vera Lang asleep, there in a patch of wild flowers on the edge of the valley. (7)

Nearly everyone partakes of this strategy: when Skandl loses Martin Lang's body, he blames it on the comatose Liebhaber. Liebhaber's four minutes of coherence in the Lang Household are attributed to Tiddy's statement: "It's snowing" (39). People believe that the first hand of schmier dealt at the Church of the Final Virgin was brought about by Eli Wurtz's comment, "*Du* son of a gun" upon seeing the unwell, diminished Liebhaber. Blame for the "war with the sky" is variously attributed: some "blamed recent developments on the moment when the ice began to form on the wings of the Piper Cub in which John Skandl was flying home to Big Indian" (146). Others believe that Vera's boy is somehow to blame. When the plague of salamanders arrives, "Someone blamed the wind. Someone said it was the departure of the black crow that did it" (150). Vera's decision to take a husband is said to be caused by the cry of Joe Lightning as he falls out of the sky. People also respond to the uncontrollable chaos by trying to assert that they might have or can have some control over events. When, in August, it continues to snow, men aver that things might be different if they found Lang's corpse: "If they had found the corpse, the few men who went on seeking it, then something might have changed. The digging of a grave, attendance at a wake, the ceremony of burial, any one of those events might have made things normal again. The bees were to blame" (44). These myriad efforts to attribute cause and lay blame are a desperate attempt to assert that some kind of order, some kind of definable causality, regardless of how bizarre, operates in Big Indian.

It is appropriately difficult, given Kroetsch's preoccupation with the "temptation of meaning" to decide which causes actually operate meaningfully in Kroetsch's border cosmos, and which are asserted by the inhabitants of Big Indian in an effort to impose a perceived, explicable order on a world that seems to defy one's logical or experiential expectations. This difficulty is attributable to Kroetsch's use of a communal third person narrator, one who has entered the world of Big Indian with the inhabitants, and refrains from making judgements about the characters' behavior. Complicating matters even more is our own distinct sense that Big Indian does indeed have its own laws that do not necessarily have a direct referent in our world.³ It is only with respect to "what the crow said" that we begin to suspect that the attribution of meaning and causality is a desperate and foolish effort. Thus the work deconstructs itself for us, leaving us uncertain about which attributed causes are operative and which are wishful thinking.

It is initially the year-long winter that unhinges the characters' sense that the world they inhabit is predictable and orderly. Certainly, Martin Lang's death illustrates the fate of those who, either on the prairies or in Big Indian, expect to "believe June was June" (18). John Skandl's response is another kind of folly: in opposition to the temporal and spatial blankness of an unending winter, he decides

to construct a tower made from the very materials that winter provides. Needing to fix himself in a now unreliable, floating universe, Skandl will construct “a beacon, a fixed point in the endless winter” (33). His tower will assert meaning in the face of unmeaning (blank) winter, will function as “a center. A beacon. A guide. A warning sign” (41). Pre-deconstructionist man, he believes his phallic signifier is transparent, its meaning utterly clear. As a tower of babble (49), it demonstrates both man’s foolish impertinence in believing he can control and manipulate his world, and the “danger of making everything into one” (L 118), echoing the structuralist belief that language is a transparent medium with a single dimension, a single meaning.

In spite of Robert Lecker’s assertion (99) that the old binaries, which typically cause an interesting tension in Kroetsch’s work, are not present in *What the Crow Said*, I find them functioning in a very lively way. The most common (culturally imposed) binary opposition between men and women becomes obvious in the scene where members of the community evaluate and comment upon Skandl’s tower. It is the “*men* who would dream it in that snow-buried town” (41, emphasis mine). The women, on the other hand, argue against the ice (49). Tiddy Lang, in particular, is concerned about the implications of the tower: “Tiddy now recognized that the men, in their desperate confusion, were trying to get to heaven. They must be stopped. She was trying to find words. Tiddy, who did not argue at all. She was trying to imagine words” (50).

The men have, through their construction of the tower, been attempting to impose order, meaning, even purpose on the year-long (now seemingly endless) winter; in building the tower and in turning ice to profit they are asserting the primacy of culture over nature, and attempting, in Simone de Beauvoir’s words, to “transcend” the limitations or circumstances imposed by nature.⁴ Tiddy’s sense that they are attempting to get to heaven and Skandl’s assertion that they must continue to build the tower higher and higher are both images of transcendence. It is a sterile proceeding, however, this icy preoccupation, one that the earth eventually defies by sending spring thaw.

The women’s general opposition to the tower makes us aware that their response to the untimely and protracted winter has been of an entirely different order than that of the men. As Lecker (98) and Thomas (102) have both pointed out, Kroetsch has gone out of his way to emphasize the chthonic qualities of the Lang women, both through oblique — and often subverted — references to myth and through evocative, concrete details of their involvement in the earthly cycles and farm matters. Vera, Tiddy, and Old Lady Lang are indeed virgin, earth mother, and wise old crone. Vera’s mating of the bees recalls Danae (Lecker 98), who is also the north European triple goddess, Danae (Walker 206-7); floating down the river in the granary, her hand on her pubis, she recalls both Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, and Ceres, goddess of grain. Tiddy, with her perfect breasts, recalls the

earth mother, Cybele the many-breasted. When she turns her mourning for Martin to an effort to heal Liebhaber, she recalls Demeter, who in her grief for Persephone became nursemaid to Demophon and nearly conferred immortality upon the child. This proliferation of goddess imagery allows Kroetsch to avoid being “entrapped in those mythic stories” (L 96), entrapment that might occur if he were to fall into repeating the myths in which the figures play a major part. Instead, the many oblong, oblique references invite the unfolding of many layers which evoke, but do not necessarily *mean* a whole range of feminine archetypes.

ONE OF KROETSCH’S FIRST ENTRIES concerning *What the Crow Said* in his *Crow Journals* concerns his wish to make not only the tall tale and the mythological part of his book, but to maintain at the same time “always the hard core of detail” (CJ 11). This endeavor on Kroetsch’s part has been questioned by Lecker (99), who obviously ignored the rich, evocative detail of daily domestic life on the Lang farm. Perhaps the hard core of detail of women’s lives is invisible in more ways than one; however, the descriptions of the women’s routines illustrate that while the men have been building a tower, the women have gone on with their chores and their lives, not particularly disturbed by the strange weather, except insofar as it is an inconvenience. Vera, for example, knows that spring is inevitable. And descriptions of Tiddy evoke a woman comfortable in time, in life, and in nature:

Sometimes the cows mooed. Sometimes they didn’t. Sometimes the chickens laid. Sometimes they needed oyster shells. Sometimes the thistles or the pigweeds grew faster than the wheat. Sometimes hail fell instead of rain. Sometimes the dust blew through closed windows. Tiddy, with her hardheaded radiance, held together the past and the future. Her daughters went on maturing. Her mother grew older, more wrinkled, forever clutching her ball of sorrow in a pocket of her apron. JG was more work than all the others, all the conundrums of the world, put together. He grew larger. He said nothing. Tiddy accepted his existence as she accepted the stinkweeds, the grasshoppers, the green grass in the spring, the sun. (68-9)

The scene at the tower, the men approving the endeavour, the women opposing it, crystallizes the binary opposition of man and women, culture and nature, the transcendence and entrapment, except that in Kroetsch’s cosmogony, the last element is reversed. By attempting to control and utilize the weather or give a meaningful centre to the blank landscape, the men entrap themselves in their preoccupation. It is the women who transcend by continuing their chthonic life, accepting of the weather and unconcerned about its implications. Vera, knowing spring will inevitably arrive, calmly plans and waits, learning about bees.

Liebhaber, however, doesn’t quite fit in the male category, largely I suspect

because his relationship to language and order (the phallic signifier of the tower of babble) — to meaning — is more problematic. While Tiddy is marrying, Liebhaber is fighting with the double bind of language. On the one hand, words, despite their arbitrariness, remain fixed: no matter how or where he distributes the letters, “out” remains “out.” This culturally-defined fixedness that he recognizes he cannot transcend seems to bind him to death with its over-determinacy. In an attempt to foil the over-determinacy of the letters O U T, Liebhaber attempts “a sequence of illogical sentences; he printed across the linoleum of his living room floor: I’M NOT ALONE. REALLY. He ran out of punctuation. He found his apostrophes and periods, what few he had, in a shoe box under his bed. He concluded his trilogy of sentences with I’M NOT” (55). The problem with Liebhaber’s three sentences is not that they are illogical, but that they have too many meanings. Our immediate reaction is to “naturalize” those three statements,⁴ so that they “mean” something, so that they assert that Liebhaber strongly believes that he is not alone; we see them as a psychological protestation against his loneliness as Tiddy marries. Doing so, we discover another property of language, its ability to express false statements; for Liebhaber, at the moment of Tiddy’s marriage, likely feels more alone than ever. Yet the sentence, “I’m not,” which we take as a reiteration of “I’m not alone,” might also refer to Liebhaber’s ontological status as a character in a book who both exists, as a linguistic phenomenon, and does not exist. These and other possible meanings make us aware that language is not an unbiased medium; it can be used to lie. Nor is it transparent and entirely clear, for it conveys the meaning (or illogical non-meaning) that we expect it to convey.

Liebhaber’s ambivalent relationship to language recognizes the problem of meaning, just as Liebhaber recognizes the ridiculousness of Skandl’s tower. If Skandl is pre-deconstructionist man, innocently able to assert his ability to create a transparent, meaningful, directive phallic signifier (which Tiddy finds attractive, as do some of the French theorists find Lacan’s notion of the phallic signifier), Liebhaber is on the way to becoming a post-structuralist, uneasily aware of language’s problems, in spite of the fact that, like the post-modern writer, he makes his living/meaning through language.

Also like the post-modern writer, Liebhaber believes uneasily in the ability of language to create an ontology. During the dedication of the tower, Liebhaber at first attempts to undermine Skandl’s ascendancy/transcendence by lying about the signs of spring: “I heard a flight of geese heading north”; “‘Cowpie,’ Liebhaber shouted. ‘I found a soft cowpie. Somewhere the grass is green’” (48-9). Part of this strikes us as sheer bravado; part strikes us as truth: for indeed, *somewhere* the grass is green; part strikes us as prophecy. We finally must acknowledge the creative element of language when the narrator comments that “Liebhaber, recklessly, in an endless winter, invented a spring” (49). Even Liebhaber’s use of lan-

guage to evoke, lie about, create a spring, bespeaks of language's multiplicity, its multiple uses.

In spite of Liebhaber's more realistic attitude toward meaning, he nevertheless succumbs to a desire to control, to order the world around him. Because he's relatively useless around the farm, Liebhaber helps Tiddy choose a hired hand: Liebhaber's candidate is Mick O'Halloran, who is missing one leg and his genitals, "and while his disability limited his usefulness on the farm, Liebhaber felt it was more than compensated for by the security he provided in a household made up of a grass widow and six unmarried young women" (66). Yet Liebhaber's judgment proves to be wrong when Mick, against all probability and reason, impregnates Rose.

His second lapse in judgment occurs when he helps Tiddy with cow breeding and ends up perfecting the three-titted cow (70); again a pregnancy results, this time the relationship is between Nick Droniuk, who helps with the artificial insemination, and Anna Marie. Finally, Liebhaber agrees to referee the hockey games, a role in which he exults: "Liebhaber, as referee, removed yet always there, watched the disputes, the hard checking, the high sticking, the errors, the affections and dissatisfactions of the swarming, eager players. The rougher the game became, the clearer his vision. He was some kind of arbitrator, the civilizing man: at the center, and yet uninvolved. The dispassionate man at the passionate core, witnessing both jealousy and desire, separate from either" (72). As referee, Liebhaber is the representative of civilization, culture, order, a patriarch who takes pride in his ability, "single-handedly, to restore order" (73).

But this effort of control, belief in order, patriarchal absolutism, also collapses when we find that Gladys was impregnated on the ice by "everybody" — and perhaps it was even her presence on the ice that limited the dispute. In spite of his judicial pretensions, Liebhaber finds he cannot control the fertility of Tiddy's daughters, as if the female and natural world remains uncontrollably outside his dominion. It is his inability to control, grasp this unfolding, fecund world, as well as his inability to see the world truly, or to see the same truth that others see, or to live in a world where one can identify absolute truth — that accounts for the protracted game of schmier. For in yet another of those questionable attributions of cause, we are told "That was the cause of the schmier game — the inadequacy of truth" (76).

I was interested in the literal use of game in daily life. In a small town, in a rural area where card playing especially is very central, I was influenced by the old women in the community who would read cards. I had two aunts who on occasion would read cards and read them with an ambiguous sense that it was just playing but at the same time that it was serious. That ambiguity intrigued me no end. I think that even in the most elaborate games, like religion, there is that double sense. The notion of necessary fiction really relates to that, doesn't it? (LV 49)

THOMAS HAS COMPLAINED of the sheer volume of human excrement in Kroetsch's novel (115), yet the unappetizing conditions of the schmier game aptly illustrate the lengths to which Liebhaber and his crew will go in order to confine themselves to a microcosm that has definable rules. In both *The Crow Journals* and *Labyrinths of Voice*, Kroetsch discusses his view of the world: that we exist within the godgame. That is, we know some, but by no means all, of life's rules. Games seemingly exist as antidotes to or relief from the godgame. Huizinga, whose book, *Homo Ludens*, influenced Kroetsch, describes those parameters of game that make it a free space, in some way unhampered by the unknown or partly known rules of the godgame: "Here, then, we have the first main characteristic of play: that it is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own" (quoted in LV 66). Playing schmier, the men separate themselves from the world they cannot control, placing themselves in a microcosm where they are capable of "ignoring the weather, ignoring time, family, duty, season; ignoring everything but their one passion" (90). Moreover, the rules of the game structure their lives in a way the rules of the godgame, with its year-long winters and genital-less men who impregnate girls, cannot. In *Labyrinths of Voice* Kroetsch comments: "I take a card game very seriously. For me, a card game is a model of life. . . . Card games are interesting because, on the one hand, there are absolute rules and, on the other, inside those rules there is absolute chance, or at least an indefinite mathematically large number of chances that even to deal yourself the same hand would be a grotesque unlikelihood. There are absolute rules and there is chance" (LV 64-5).

The second use of cards intrudes for a moment as Old Lady Lang "reads" the players' hands. When Old Lady Lang predicts Liebhaber's future, to die, of love, in the Lang house, Liebhaber plays even more ferociously: "That was the first time, really, that he recognized the seriousness of their game" (93). At this point in the novel, the deck of cards has two orders of meaning, one as a referent to the lives of the players, one as the symbols in the abstract order of the game. Although the men give some credence to her interpretation, having "never seen their cards in quite that way before" they would seem, ultimately, to reject the referential possibilities of the deck, concluding that "there was no meaning anywhere in the world" (94).

When they finally move their game from the Lang household to Isadore Heck's shack, they attempt to escape the world of meaning, to leave Old Lady Lang, who believes the cards can have a divinatory function, to move into the shack of Heck, who disbelieves in everything. Only the possibility of love calls them away to the

wedding ceremony at the Church of the Final Virgin, though here Eli Wurtz's chance comment, "*du* son of a gun" — so unfit do they look for real life — "causes" them to deal another hand. It is in the basement of the Church that the game is invested with a referential significance by the entry of Marvin Straw.

The desire, first of Liebhaber, then of the whole crew, to save Jerry Lapanne's life invests the game with a purpose it has previously lacked, changing the rules, making them unusually flexible and fluid, even imposing different rules on different players. It would almost seem that this flexibility, the cracks in the otherwise rigid society, allows the entry of Martin Lang's ghost into their midst, as if to say 'This is what happens when you relax the rules a little: the unpredictable bursts in on you,' leaving the players "totally without hope" (113), except in their belief that Skandl will return. When they are told by Vera that Skandl has disappeared, we see the extent that they have created an isolated world for themselves. Liebhaber does not want to believe in Skandl's death because it will force him to "surrender . . . the world" (123). The creation of insular cosmos of the schmier game has allowed them to ignore what they previously could not control. Playing schmier, their lives structured by other rules and other kinds of chance, they have avoided the unpredictable, natural world, refusing "to give any credence to the weather, especially to the idea of seasons" (123).

The schmier players have, in a parodic way, created a culture, an organization of human beings governed by shared values and established rules. It is a culture designed to insulate them from the unpredictability of the natural world and the domestic hegemony of women.⁶ Their culture, however, in its exclusivity and insularity is not, in the long run, "civilized." Ignoring the needs of their bodies and the impact of the weather upon their health, developing a "technology" solely devoted to making moonshine and eating without being involved in the production of their food, ceasing to use tools altogether, their lives are a parody of civilization. When Tiddy comes to seduce them with food, we find Liebhaber "ahead in the game, about to win a few nails and some pieces of broken glass and a pile of round stones they'd dug up from the frozen riverbed with their bare hands" (126). Even the medium of exchange, while still governing their insular culture, has no intrinsic value.

Yet the offerings made by Tiddy suggest that, unpredictable as nature is, it has continued: she has butter, jam, preserves, honey in the comb. It is the women who, as a productive, patient part of the natural world, have transcended, the men who have remained static, imprisoned within the card game that provided the structure of their microcosm.

The schmier game intensifies the binary polarization. At first, it is a time that is pleasant; the women in the kitchen watch over sleeping babies, talk of gardening and sewing, enjoy having the "men in the dining room, out of the way, playing cards" (81). By doing the men's chores, the women allow the players to remain

apart from the more demanding “real world”; they allow the separateness of the world of the schmier game and the world of the godgame. Eventually, Tiddy realizes the benefits of the system: “the women were running the world better than had the men; she was content to let them go on with their game of schmier” (85). That the schmier game is meant partly to protect the men from the women is revealed when the men discuss whether or not to attend the wedding of Cathy and Joe Lightning; they consider not going because it will mean “surrendering to the women” (101). Unlike Lecker (104), who believes that the female characters are parodies, I am inclined to see the male characters as parodic. Obviously Kroetsch is “questioning precisely those binary male/female divisions” (Lecker 104), but while the women may seem almost static in their chthonic associations and habits, at least they persist, without damage to themselves or to others; nor do we see their sensuous persistence as quite so ridiculous as the frantic efforts of men to escape what they cannot control or control what they cannot escape. At times I am inclined to see one tension of the novel in terms of two distinct plot types: the plot of the male quest to tame the universe vs the plot of the chthonic woman who is content to “ing.” Perhaps Lecker’s (male) reading which views the women as “a joke” and my (female) reading which views the men’s various ferocious struggles as ridiculous illustrate how the tension of two different types of possible plots deconstruct the novel.

Back last night from Castlegar, B.C. Flew in there from Calgary. The plane goes down a river valley, with mountains on both sides, makes a sharp left turn around a jump, a shoulder of mountain, a cliff. We turned. A small plane crossed the landing field when we were almost down. Great surge of engine power. Great surge of adrenaline. Got down next try, and I lectured myself on loving the earth, not the sky. Came time to drive to Fred Wah’s mountainside house — a mud slide had closed the road. Had to drive 65 miles to go 15. On the mountain roads. Next day I lectured myself on loving the sky. (CJ 53)

THIS CONFLICT BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE, between quest and persistence, between transcendence and immanence is continued in the war with the sky, which Thomas views as a “parodied ‘metaphysical’ version of [the] conflict of purpose” between the men who are trying to get to heaven and the “closure of female locus” the men are attempting to escape (Thomas 111). But the men’s battle is more than an escape from female closure, it is a war fought against time and death and nature, those laws outside our province but which “culture” seeks nevertheless to control with technology. In this war, the sky, the very symbol of transcendence, turns against them as if to indicate the folly of the undertaking.

The death of Skandl is the first symptom of the war between the earth and the sky, Skandl’s death in the piper cub mocking his effort at transcendence. The

natural world similarly mocks the predictions, already difficult to interpret, of Vera's boy. J.G.'s death indicates the folly of any search for eternity/infinity (symbolized by his figure eights and his agelessness) and escape from time: indeed, J.G.'s seeming physical escape from the kind of time that ages results in the innocent stupidity that allows him to believe he can fly.

The first battle actively fought arises as a result of the men's decision to go hunting rather than to clean up after the salamanders, which they regard as women's work. Yet later they admit that they wanted to avoid, could not face, "the stink of death." In this novel, women deal with death while men attempt to ignore it. Going hunting involves them in another exclusively male society, and another "game," but here nature plays a part and adversely changes the rules: the wind is so high and fierce that the ducks can't get down to the earth, and the ammunition the hunters fire turns on them.

While having a referential tie to the climate of the prairies, the war with the sky illustrates the male characters' second response to the world they cannot control. No war seems to exist as long as the predictions of Vera's boy are accurate, and the farmers believe in a friendly, predictable universe. Once the salamanders remind them of death, as part of the natural cycle of things, once the plague reminds them that nature's overwhelming force is outside the province of their control or prediction, their only response is an aggressive one.

Joe Lightning is one of the few male characters whose attitude toward the war seems sensible: "being the descendent of warriors, he knew when not to fight" (154). Playing, perhaps, with the stereotype of the native as "natural man," Kroetsch creates a character who believes "in the union of elements," and who, rather than antagonistically battling with the sky, seeks to learn its secrets. As a shuffleboard champion, Joe is invested with the obsessive horizontality of the prairie dweller, though unlike the other characters, he brings some skill and purpose to his obsession. His flight with the eagle is all the more heroic because he allows the new, vertical perspective to challenge his expectations and perspectives: "He was surprised at how small the town looked, the once immense town where he'd been ignored, insulted; perhaps the recognition occasioned his first laugh" (157). His fall has the character of ecstasy about it. Although he does not master the sky, he learns something of the truth that Heck glimpsed from his canon, something of the perspective and awe that generates "a version of a prayer, a kind of holy laugh" (159). As one of the first people, it is ironically appropriate that he experiences the Adamic fall into the church outhouse hole. His adventure in the sky does not kill him, however: he is one of the few who takes on the sky without dying — because he does so in a non-adversarial frame of mind. What does kill him is society's unwillingness to rescue him lest they get shit on their Sunday clothes: implying that those who do not war with the sky are outside community, outside society, outside the false "transcendence" of the male characters in the book.

In contrast, Nick Droniuk's accidental death is caused by his raging at the sky for not conforming to Vera's boy's predictions; Eli Wurtz is killed by a train while he hopes the thundershowers predicted by Vera's boy have finally arrived. The train arrives instead. Mick O'Halloran dies of a loss of faith when he finds his oil well is dry: he puts his weight on his missing leg and it fails to support him. Such deaths are caused, however, not so much by the sky's determination to do battle, to be hostile, as by the victims' foolish beliefs that nature is predictable. Their folly is highlighted by their choice of oracles. Nick and Eli, along with the rest of the community, place great faith in the predictions of Vera's boy, in spite of the fact that the narrator makes a point to remark on the unintelligibility of his pronouncements: "The only minor difficulty was that he spoke, always, a language that no one quite understood" (139). One is tempted to recall the Oracle at Delphi, which required expert (and even suspect) interpreters. Even his last "prediction," "The ercilessmay unsay shall urnbay us," (144), is a description only of the present, not of the future. It is, in short, the community's need to believe that the natural world is predictable, thereby giving them some mode of control or controlled response, that causes the deaths attributed to the sky. Meanwhile, the prairies are simply going on as the prairies, predictable only in their unpredictability and their harshness.

Their other oracle, the crow, is no more reliable. Our narrative experience of the crow is of a rather filthy-mouthed bird whose most common oracular pronouncement is "total asshole." He does, indeed, curse the people with abnormal deaths — which come true (with the notable exception of Liebhaber). He understands Vera Lang's relationship to the natural world; when Liebhaber does not, the crow suggests that Liebhaber kill himself. In short, the crow curses and belittles: he is not oracular. Yet in the midst of the first battle with the sky, "the black crow was first quoted as an authority. Men asked each other, what did the crow say about the flight of birds in a high wind? What did it say about salamanders? They wished the crow hadn't left them; they wanted to ask all the questions they'd neglected to ask while the crow was in their midst. And even while the crow had been talking, meditative and wise, they'd neglected to listen, they realized. Now and then someone claimed to quote the black crow on the subject of women or guns" (152).

In short, is it the same quest for meaning, known causality, predictability — for truth — that catapulted them into the schmier game that now launches the battle with the sky. If manly separation into a more predictable, ordered world of cards and drink is no longer possible, then aggression, downright war is a second-best alternative. They want the world to have a coherent meaning, and in typical patriarchal fashion think of beating it into submission.

Liebhaber's quest for immortality, which he believes capturing the truth will bestow on him, is present at the outset. It hinges upon his ability to fix truth with

a certainty that he attributes to Heck toward the novel's close, when Heck so officiously proclaims that someone left his canon out in the rain, ruining it: "Liebhaber was indignant: no man could be certain of anything on this lunatic, spun and dying planet. Heck was unyielding; he had guessed the way to heaven" (206-7). For Liebhaber, language is one of the possible vehicles of truth: in an earlier endeavor he had tried to reach truth by composing "absolutely true accounts of events; he would print only one copy before distributing the eight-point type back to its comforting chaos" (67-8). For some reason, this habit of Liebhaber's makes me recall the old "if a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it" question. Certainly, this approach to truth does not satisfy Liebhaber, for it is made in isolation from community; he is soon back on Tiddy's farm, perfecting the three-titted cow. Yet while language is here presented as an agency of truth, and hence immortality, Liebhaber also views it as part of what binds him to death (54); Kroetsch's text suggests, however, that Liebhaber comes closer to the truth when he claims that Gutenberg is the evil agent of language's death-like grasp.

Print fixes: by recording a symbolic representation of the past, it makes memory irrelevant (116); it organizes, through the alphabet, much of our life, subjecting us to the "tyranny of rote" (68). Once again, the male/female binary is evoked with respect to this ambivalent fascination with print: "It is his *men* who are print-oriented, who are therefore maimed and destroyed by their need to imprint themselves in a visual manner on their place and time. His women, earthy and fecund, exist in another world, one closer to the natural yet ritualized continuity of folk traditions" (Hutcheon 54). For the female characters, language has a fluidity, a flexibility that it does not possess for men, indicated by their use of the expression "It's snowing." These words have a metonymic as well as literal meaning, given that they signalled Tiddy's first moments of desire after her husband's death, and her subsequent impregnation by Skandl/Liebhaber. Thereafter, they indicate her daughter's pregnancies.

Only fear of death frees Liebhaber from Gutenberg's curse, without which "he would have lived another life" (163). Yet, under his boat, believing that he is about to drown, believing that he's free of Gutenberg and movable (or immovable?) type, he makes an effort to "write his own story, at last. He tried again, working with furious intent: *Enough would be enough*. He liked that. He could account for events, announce the presence of design, under the apparent chaos. *Enough*. That one, sufficient word, so neatly balanced against itself. He had no idea how long he'd been under the hull. Perhaps it was night now. Surely someone would miss him. All night he would type; everything set, everything forgotten. But now he had escaped; he had recovered the night, a dream, and memory. He would compose a novel one sentence long, a novel anyone could memorize. *You in my arms*. Yes, that would do it. He tested for revision, recited the four words . . ." (163-4).

The scene strongly suggests that it is not language that is problematic, for it is to language, to story, that Liebhaber turns in the moment he believes to be a prelude to his death. What he is free of is not language, but the tyranny of convention, here symbolized by the fixedness of type and its immutable record of the "past," and overcome by Liebhaber's evocative, suggestive texts that swell with but do not limit meaning. At the outset of the novel, he remembers the future, and he could then and there have typeset Martin Lang's death, except that he feels the possibilities to snatch Lang out of his own story seem lessened if the record already exists. Yet the experiences of Lang and Lapanne suggest that people cannot be snatched from their stories; that their life-narrative continues regardless of Liebhaber's attempt to avert Lang's freezing and Lapanne's hanging. Like the post-modern writer, Liebhaber is trapped by the self-generated direction of narration, in spite of his efforts either to subvert or follow the conventions.

Liebhaber's ambivalent approach to linguistic meaning echoes or influences (one is not sure of the causal relationship here) his approach to the war with the sky, which expresses love as well as war. The canon used to shoot the fertilising bees is certainly as phallic as it is martial. The rain-coated and hail-encased bees suggest a kind of literal "seeding" of the clouds that gives the water vapor a centre to cluster around until it becomes heavy enough to produce rain. On a second level, however, the canonade of bees is symbolic of the sexual act, almost partaking of the conventional in its symbolism. It is the expression of paradoxical war and truce, rage and love. By articulating the paradox of Liebhaber's response to nature, the canonade symbolizes acceptance of nature's own, indifferent, paradoxical role in life and death, in time and timelessness.

The acceptance of death at the novel's close frees Liebhaber from the tyrannies that have so preoccupied him: he admits that Gutenberg is only a scribe and that the agent of tyranny is not print or language, but the way they are inscribed, with believed absolutism, by humans. He cannot quite understand what the crow says (217), now not needing to attribute meaning wherever possible.

Emphasizing this acceptance, he lies in Tiddy's bed, contented, knowing "after all, he is only dying" (217) — evoking the Renaissance pun on dying — and thereby language's exuberant refusal to be fixed by Gutenberg or anyone else. Finally, time itself seems free from absolutes: Gladys's daughter bounces her ball off the housewall and Grandma Lang is breaking the sprouts off the potatoes, as she is at the novel's outset, evoking the cyclicity of time, its crafty ability to turn back on and repeat itself. At the same time, however, human memory allows for the collapse of time so that, lying in bed with Liebhaber, "Tiddy remembered everything. She could hardly tell her memory from the moment; all her life she'd meant to write something down" (214). But because she has not succumbed to the conventions of chronology by fixing her story, her experience is endowed with a spontaneous richness:

Tiddy, then, taking every man who had ever loved her. It was dark outside. The tower of ice, in the depths of her present mind, flared a crystal white. The white tower was almost blue. He had been so huge, John Skandl; he smelled of horses. Her husband was plowing the snow. His arms upraised against the night, against the held and invisible horses, his hair alive in the combing wind. Those same men who had loved her. Liebhaber: 'Whoa.' . . . She is living for the moment. She kisses Liebhaber, hard. And hard. He, the having lover, thirty-three minutes in one best trial. Tiddy was proud of him. "Now," she said. "Now. No. Now. Child. Husband. Son. Brother. Old man. Friend. Helper. Enemy Lover. (215-6)

I deconstruct even after I've come to the end of deconstruction: (CJ 67)

KROETSCH'S TEXT ultimately *means* not to expect/impose/attribute meaning (carelessly?). To do so is to trust unworthy oracles, to depend on the undependable, finally to be part of one's own wounding or demise in one's war with a world that does not operate according to "human" rules. To accept the ambiguities of life, to accept, for instance, that one is only dying, or to "live for the moment" frees one from the fruitless quest for meaning, locates one in a rich present that contains within itself the past and the future.

The novel does, as it were, deconstruct itself as the conclusions that we draw about the text — beware of expecting/imposing meaning — must ultimately be turned loose on the text itself. What the crow actually said was not particularly important or insightful: what about what Kroetsch said? The novel might indeed be said to express the post-modern angst of writing against the sense what one creates has no (fixed) meaning. It might equally well be said that the novel expresses the playfulness released when one is freed from the "temptation of meaning." Or, like Liebhaber's three "illogical" sentences composed as an attempt to escape the fixedness of print, *What the Crow Said* might also be said to express the exuberance of language, narrative, and myth that results not in meaninglessness, but in manymeaning. In his *Crow Journals*, Kroetsch writes "I am sick of the tyranny of narrative. And fascinated by the narrative that I'm creating. And that's the whole story" (67). In a very real way, that ambivalence is the whole story behind both the writing of *What the Crow Said* and Kroetsch's own struggle with his postmodern view.

NOTES

¹ Robert Kroetsch's non-fiction will be cited parenthetically in the text, using the following abbreviations: LV for *Labyrinths of Voice*, and CJ for *Crow Journals*. References to *What the Crow Said* will appear with page numbers alone.

² I speak here of improbabilities in the logical sense, in the sense that in order to avoid committing the causal fallacy one must be able explain the way in which the cause

produced the effect. We cannot, for example, determine how Eli Wurtz's comment *caused* the game of schmier. Yet within the context of the novel, the causal sequences do not always seem improbable.

³ Kroetsch has commented on the problematic relationship between art and world in *Labyrinths of Voice*: "Yet we do draw from the world: the great novels, in some way, are drawn from the world. Now *how* they are drawn from the world is the question? It isn't just a question of illusion or mimesis or anything like that. It is a question of axioms. . . . Finally, I don't believe that art is completely removed from nature, but I don't know what the hell nature becomes in art. . . . One thing that used to trouble me was the way in which so many readers and writers didn't see the game dimension at all. They made a simple equation between literature and reality. I argued for game theory in order to correct that over-simplification. Yet at this point I am somewhat worried about my own sense of divorce from that equation, from mimesis. One is always moving back and forth between positions." Kroetsch's final comment upon this dilemma is that "I would suggest that the fascinating place is right between the two" — between, that is, game and mimesis" (72-3).

⁴ The following passage from *The Second Sex* aptly describes the culturally determined roles of immanence and transcendence Simone de Beauvoir attributes to women and men, roles which are echoed in Kroetsch's novel: "[Woman's] role was only nourishing, never creative. In no domain did she create; she maintained the life of the tribe by giving it children and bread, nothing more. She remained doomed to immanence, incarnating only the static aspect of society, closed in upon itself. Whereas man went on monopolizing the functions which threw open that society toward nature and toward the rest of humanity. The only employments worthy of him were war, hunting, fishing; he made conquest of foreign booty and bestowed it on the tribe; war, hunting, and fishing represented an expansion of existence, its projection toward the world. The male remained alone the incarnation of transcendence. He did not as yet have the practical means for wholly dominating Woman-Earth; as yet he did not dare to stand up against her — but already he desired to break away from her." (83)

⁵ See the concept of naturalization in Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*.

⁶ Kroetsch himself identifies the quest as a flight from women and from their social and erotic hegemony. See *The Crow Journals*, 20.

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A PELICAN IN THE WILDERNESS

Ricardo Sternberg

When the woman with the mapa mundi
tattooed on her behind said boys
the world is yours for the taking, I
for one, remained a skeptic. I knew

the rich got to the table first
and once done, started on seconds.
The rest wait their turn, blue
with hunger, sucking on empty spoons.

Two occupations broke my father
and I don't mean jobs. Then he fled
to the promised land but leashed
to his bruised, immigrant's heart.

In America he lives for Christ, work,
the bottle: half-plastered he slouches
on the sofa, Sunday mass on the tube
in a vernacular only half understood.

I walked into the room once to see
the old man kneeling on the carpet.
He bowed his head to a flickering
on the screen and then keeled over.

The old geezers gather every month
to lick wounds from skirmishes
no history book will ever register.
After a joint, sometimes I join them:

the intelligentsia of the old country
sweating in the greaseshops of Oakland
alongside blacks and chicanos
they, too quickly, learned to hate.

Before the night is done, as if by cue
they will raise a silent toast
to Petras' letter framed on the wall.
Written just before he was neutralized

by the NKVD, it brims with cheery news
but ends in a biblical non-sequitur,
"We particularly like Psalm 102."
You might call it their drinking song:

*I am like the pelican in the wilderness.
I am like an owl of the desert.
My days are like a shadow that declineth
and I am withered like grass.*

I remember the morning he came
into my room; I knew something was wrong.
"Today is a sad day. Day of shame.
The Americans have published a map

no longer showing our beloved Lithuania
as disputed territory." And then he wept.
Our beloved Lithuania? It means nothing
to me except some names, photographs

and a territory staked in his memory
that stands between us and I cannot traverse.
That drunken woman offering us her bum:
what else has history been this century?



DOUBLE ENTENDRE

Rebel Angels & Beautiful Losers in John Richardson's "The Monk Knight of St. John"

Michael Hurley

VARIOUSLY DESCRIBED as lurid, sensational, grotesque, and bizarre, John Richardson's complex and intriguing novel *The Monk Knight of St. John. A Tale of The Crusades* (1850) was the *Beautiful Losers* of its day. Response to the work evokes comparison with the reception of novels like Cohen's, Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*, Symons' *Place d'Armes*, Davies' *The Rebel Angels*, or Engel's *Bear* (at the end of which, we recall, the female narrator who has just reclaimed her body and her sexuality enthusiastically praises Richardson and *Wacousta*). Modern commentary on the black sheep of Richardson's *oeuvre* is still divided. It seems to me that a reappraisal is required, one that sets the novel within a literary context rather than one established exclusively by the particular social or sexual reality inhabited by the critic.

"The St. Simonist objective of equal rights for women," which Richardson unlike many of his contemporaries (male, certainly) subscribed to, is germane to our reading of Richardson's most censured text.¹ Though by no means overcoming the stereotypical literary view of women, *The Monk Knight* vehemently protests the subordinate position of women in the repressive, male-dominated society of the West: "As it is, what are women? Slaves, literally the slaves of men, and regarded principally because they are necessary to their own selfish ends," protests one character. The double standard of a sexist culture is satirized, and the narrator recommends "more liberality on the part of him who arrogantly, but falsely, deems himself the first of creation. . . ."² The novel's early readers may have taken offence at such views and how they are woven into a chillingly prophetic vision of an insectoid consumer society devouring its own citizens and growing "arrogant by the humiliating sale of the most petty articles necessary to human existence" (79).

Writing in 1952, Desmond Pacey indignantly attacks both book and author. "Every kind of sexual aberration is displayed," he protests, without "the clinical seriousness . . . which might make it palatable" and "which makes one suspect that Richardson's brain was affected when he wrote the book."³ Far from con-

vinced of the virulence of Richardson's writing or of any prurient interest, Richardson's biographer David Beasley exonerates the author and lavishly praises the controversial text.

It dealt with sexual love in a frank manner that, as Richardson must have known, was sacrilegious in his Victorian age. It was not pornographic; on the contrary, it was revolutionary . . . Under the guise of Gothic romance, [it] represented a sexual emancipation that . . . could only be accepted after the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960's.⁴

There is, indeed, much in this strange work which is deliberately grotesque and provocative. Richardson's imagination here is at its most garish but, as critics aver with regard to *Wacousta*, that imagination is by no means undisciplined. One tentative step in the direction of a reappraisal may be taken by citing Frye's distinction between the pornographic and the erotic in *The Secular Scripture*: "The fact that sex and violence emerge whenever they get a chance does mean that sexuality and violence are central to romance." Romance, in particular, he informs both us and "the guardians of taste and learning,"

is, we say, "sensational": it likes violent stimulus, and the sources of that stimulus soon become clear to the shuddering censor. The central element of romance is a love story, and the exciting adventures are normally a foreplay leading up to sexual union. Hence romance appears to be designed mainly to encourage irregular or excessive sexual activity . . . Most denunciations of popular romance . . . assume that the pornographic and the erotic are the same thing: this overlooks the important principle that it is the function of pornography to stun and numb the reader, and the function of erotic writing to wake him up.⁵

A *tour de force* of Gothic and Romantic Macabre, when placed beside other works in this genre, *The Monk Knight* can be seen adhering to certain established conventions and flourishing similar shock tactics. Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*, a study of Romantic literature under one of its characteristic aspects, that of erotic sensibility, affords a context within which to view Richardson's work. Written around the same time as *Wuthering Heights*, *The Monk Knight* reveals a similar

Romantic tendency to invent and delight in monsters, the *exaltation du moi*, which has been said to be the secret of the whole Romantic revolt against classical models and restraints; the love of violence in speech and action, the preference for the hideous in character and the abnormal in situation — of all these there are abundant examples in *Wuthering Heights*.⁶

MANY ELEMENTS IN *The Monk Knight* recall Richardson's other fiction, in particular *Wacousta*. Mirror and twin themes again branch out into various *doppelgänger* formulas, giving rise to an eerie sense of reduplication.

There are sacred pledges between friends, psychological metamorphoses, a descent into a cruel night world and the familiar Romantic motif of the demon-lover and vampirism. A Beddoes-like melodramatic tendency shows itself in the creation not of individual but of romantic and stylized characters which expand into psychological archetypes.⁷ Dennis Duffy calls our attention to another lament for "a lost emotional and sexual paradise"; "even when he penned a pornographic romance about the Crusades," remarks Duffy, "he displayed an almost Spenserian power to describe erotic, violent encounters within carefully evoked settings that complement the actions and freeze them into a series of tableaux."⁸ As in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*, there is also a collision of diametrically opposed cultures. Set, like Scott's *The Talisman*, in the eleventh century in the time of the Crusades, the borderlands of Jerusalem separate the antagonistic world of European and Turk, the forces of Christ and the Cross and Mohammed and the Crescent. West and East are fused in a number of doubles and love triangles. The paradigmatic triangle is composed of the dark-skinned Moor, the Monk Knight Abdallah, Alfred the French Baron de Boiscourt and his beautiful wife Ernestina, the Baroness. These larger-than-life figures merge into one another; they belong to the realm of dream (a recurrent word in the last section of the romance) and of myth or legend.

Indeed, we are presented with a story-within-a-story. Wandering the French countryside in 1837, the narrator searches for "an old chateau, connected with which was some wild traditionary tale" (3). He passes the night in the bedroom of the first Baron de Boiscourt perusing a strange manuscript found, not in a copper cylinder, but in a tin case secreted in the leg of the three life-sized statues in the room. The old parchment from the eleventh century tells the history of the three people whose likenesses are to be found in the statutes beside the bed, that "group of three figures — tall as life, beautifully carved, in high relief, and, with clasped hands, grouped round a figure of Cupid, bearing a torch in his right hand" (5). The first words of the scroll offer advice to the reader: "Whoever may condemn, while reading these pages, knows not his own heart. . . . What I have done I repent not of. Be wise also, and make no evil where none exists" (8).

The story of the "mystic triunion" (136) therein related is indebted to Rousseau's *The Confessions* and represents a further development of other such love triangles in Richardson. Beasley even goes so far as to argue that the Baron represents "an idealization of Shelley" while the Monk Knight is "an idealization of the dark and noble warrior about which Byron wrote and with whom he later became identified."⁹ As in all romance, the unwieldy plot involving disguise, mystery, surprise, and violence defies easy summary. At the risk of oversimplification and of rending the intricate web of complex interrelationships, some attempt at conveying the basic patterns informing *The Monk Knight* can be made. As in *Wacousta*, there is a central *doppelgänger* relationship. The Baron and the Monk Knight are doubles-by-division. The former is a young and impetuous French

nobleman; light-hearted and animated, he is a jovial man and even his horse "looks as if a dancing Bacchus were in his veins" (52). "That cold, stern monk" (78) of Herculean build, on the other hand, is older than his companion, calmer and intellectual. He has taken vows of chastity and is engaged in "constant and unflinching war against the flesh" (44). Again, opposition is true friendship; just as Sir Reginald Morton's wild spirit is soothed by the bland amenity of Colonel de Haldimar's manners in *Wacousta*, the Baron's instinctual nature is moderated by the sober Monk's sense of strict duty and religious dedication. At opposite poles of sensuality and asceticism, respectively, they balance each other in an extreme way, and indeed, blend into one another.

Regarding his friend "as something more than human" (40), the Baron declares that "my soul yearns to you, as though you were the first-born of my mother's womb" (9). Out of his love for his "brother," the Baron gets the Monk to promise to wed his beloved wife who has remained in France, should he fall in battle; he overcomes the inhibitions of the chaste Christian ascetic by inflaming his imagination with the glowing ideal of a "superhuman loveliness" (10) as embodied in the "chastely voluptuous" (57) Lady Ernestina. The Baron's imagination also envisions an ideal in which "soul entwines with soul in mystic bonds." His self-sacrificing nature is clarified in the narrator's allusion to the author of *The Confessions* and *The Social Contract*:

What Rousseau has been since, his noble countryman, de Boiscourt, then was: but more frank, more ardent, more generous, more liberal and self-immolating where the happiness of those he loved required the more than human sacrifice of self. And yet, with him it was no sacrifice to have abstained from the tri-union of hearts it had become [his] chief duty . . . to promote. (41)

When it appears that the Baron has, indeed, perished in the battle to preserve Jerusalem from the Moslems, the Monk Knight decides to journey to France to wed the Baroness. But even before the trip has begun, it is apparent that he has become another of Richardson's "altered" characters. The pious Christian monk who was wont "to impose the most severe self-denial upon his feelings" (21) renounces the monastic life of prudence and propriety. He has undergone a "wondrous change" (89) in the arms of the beautiful "Pagan" Zuleima, "an unblessed heretic and unbeliever." (Zuleima's name conjures up that of Zuletta in *The Confessions* and Zuleika in Byron's "The Bride of Abydos: A Turkish Tale," the latter work also featuring a character called Abdallah.) Revelling for the first time in "all the wildness of reciprocated passion" (97), Mars succumbs to Venus in a Rousseauistic swoon:

What God-created charms! . . . It was the triumph of nature over art — of truth over falsehood — of a hallowed and divine sentiment, over the cold and abstract conventionalisms of a world which, childlike, forges its own chains, fetters its own limbs, and glories in the display of its own bondage. (21)

The Houri-like Zuleima is one of the wives of Saladin, the Moslem chieftain who is a mirror-reflection of the Baron. She is a catalyst in effecting his transformation from a woman-hating Christian renunciate into a passionate lover and "a renegade from the purity of the Church" (127). Again, opposites run into one another: just as the Baron is now regarded as a saint and a martyr, the Monk Knight seems to assume his friend's impassioned nature. Freed from the mind-forg'd manacles of conventional Christianity, the Monk Knight "rejoiced that God has blessed him by emancipating his mind from bondage" (130). Zuleima and the Monk Knight resemble one another: both are Moors and orphans, the latter as a child compelled by his Christian captors to forsake the Moslem faith. His Moslem identity as "Abdallah," long repressed, is once again in the ascendant.

Abdallah's fiery spirit can no more be contained within orthodox Christian bounds than that of MacLennan's titanic Jerome Martell, another "oddly pure sensualist" involved in an analogous love triangle who also had been orphaned and brought up by Christians.¹⁰ It is as if Leonard Cohen's Saint Catherine were to shed her Christian identity and become the Mohawk "Kateri" again, a metamorphosis that does, indeed, occur in the mind of the composite figure around which the last section of *Beautiful Losers* revolves. Denying the body and torturing the flesh for the sake of salvation gives way in Abdallah to a recognition — conveyed in similarly heightened language to that in Cohen — of sexual energy as itself a sacrament.

ZULEIMA AND THE MONK KNIGHT are complementary personalities. Yet their relationship can no longer be constituted on a sexual basis, each finding in the other the spiritual brother or sister that each has fervently longed for. As the Baroness later states to Zuleima, "'you are a part of himself'" (166). That forbidden incestuous flavour to their love so dear to Romantics like Byron and Shelley also adds spice to the "mother and son" relationship between Zuleima and Rudolph. The latter, the page of the Baron and now the close friend and more-than-brother of the Monk, is "a beautiful and blooming boy, fair as the Narcissus of old" (9). As in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*, the Narcissus archetype structures these incredibly entangled interrelationships which make those in earlier works seem straightforward by comparison. Here, too, the dynamics of the "break-boundary process" (points of reversal where opposites merge, paradoxical inversions of identity) can be seen working themselves out in East-West terms: once across the line dividing Crusader from Musselman, Rudolph "'must . . . transform [himself] from a Christian page into a Saracen'" (76) even as the once captive Zuleima was disguised as a Christian page in the Baron's camp. Once again, opposites coincide, and love triangles embody the interface of two worlds.

The eastern woman, in turn, mirrors the French woman whom the Monk Knight is to marry. Zuleima is inclined to "wish I were that woman of the West — she taking my likeness and I transformed to hers" (104). When she and Ernestina finally meet, they respond to each other as sisters; their relationship does not possess the quasi-lesbian aspects characterizing that of Ernestina and her attendant Henrietta. Both Zuleima and Ernestina take the Baron and the Monk Knight as lovers at different times in the story, Zuleima asserting that it was the Baron "who first taught her the value of herself" (74).

Zuleima is a female version of *Wacousta's* Narcissus-like Sir Reginald Morton/Wacousta. "I created to myself an image," she tells the Monk Knight, "a beau-ideal, which I invested with every attribute of excellence, and to which, had it been possible to endow it with vitality, I should have surrendered myself body and soul" (105). "Reality could afford no such joy to her as did the ripe paintings of her own glowing imagination" (81) until she encountered the Baron who "realized her soul's identity." Her brief relationship with "the ideal Christian knight, whom I had invested with superhuman beauty" (105), fulfills her "picture of intensely reciprocated passion" (81), of a fusion of sensuality and spirituality.

Like the Byronic Morton/Wacousta, Zuleima is an impulsive idealist who champions the imagination and the rapture that passion can trigger. To do so is to defy "dogmatic authority" and "the fiat of society and the church" (81-2). Murder, rape, incest, "blasphemy, and foul slander, were the only crimes she admitted against God; all the others were of human invention" (84). Her pupil, the Monk Knight, learns to redefine the lawful and the criminal; having reclaimed the body and its energies, he realizes that "Nature recoils not from the passion," the "desire . . . which, in fact, is a divine mystery without a name." "Gifted with great but unobtrusive strength of mind, scorning those prejudices which equally influenced the conquerors and the conquered, and had moistened the land with their mutual blood" (106), Zuleima recalls Poe's *Ligeia* who is similarly endowed with strong intellectual powers and an Eastern voluptuousness.

Zuleima celebrates sexual ecstasy which is "mutually shared" (106); "mutual" is a recurrent word in the text eliciting a whole series of associations. Zuleima glorifies Allah who

had bestowed upon them a part of His own
divinity — delegated to them the
incomprehensible power to create
themselves, and by means of such
transporting joy, as in His great wisdom,
he hallowed with the mystery of his own
all-glorious Godhead. (82)

That a female character in the fiction of the 1850's should harbour such notions of "a dionysiac ontology" — Dennis Lee's phrase for a similar philosophy he identifies

in *Beautiful Losers* — violated that sense of propriety and decorum that distinguished a large portion of the Victorian readership.¹¹ It is not surprising that there was no review, no word of the scurrilous text or the perfervid imagination that gave birth to it in the various literary magazines of the day.

Zuleima's Allah, a God of Love for whom sexual passion is not a sin but a sacrament, a means of transcendence, stands in contrast to the perverted conception of God entertained by the sanctimonious and spiritually moribund Crusaders for Christ. "A Juggernaut, at whose bloody shrine whole hecatombs of human victims were to be sacrificed," He is worshipped in fear by those whose creed seems to enjoin the sacrifice of others rather than that "total sacrifice of self" (54) which characterizes the Rousseauistic Baron or that standing outside the self engendered by ecstasy. In Lee's terminology, a dionysiac ontology is opposed to "the ontology of savage fields"; the former envisions a world of original identity or unified being where "God is alive. Magic is afoot," and "sexual ecstasy and the dislocation of rationality give entry to it."¹²

In *The Monk Knight*, religion when abused becomes a horrible and ghastly perversion, a kind of death force. The narrator no less than Zuleima, whom he regards as an avatar of a future race of superhuman beings to be ushered in by the millennium, is aghast at "that creed which the armed masses of Christendom went forth to propagate with fire and sword." "Those Christian people, who were so anxious, like the churchmen of the present day, to teach what they do so indifferently practice" are distinguished by

Superstition, under the name of piety —
 fanaticism, under the garb of religion —
 fire, sword, pillage, hatred,
 uncharitableness, revolting lust,
 brutality — all the horrid passions that
 ever lowered man to the condition of the
 brute. . . . What a creed! What a conception
they must have had of the Deity who could
 thus have been propitiated. (31-3)

This is the God of established Christianity condemned in Callaghan's *Such Is My Beloved*, Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, MacLennan's *Each Man's Son* and *The Watch That Ends the Night*, Symons' *Place d'Armes*, Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Davies' *Fifth Business*, and in works by other Southern Ontario writers like Gibson and Reaney who protest the Calvinist-Methodist hatred of the body, the instincts, and the natural world.

Thus tutored by the pagan Zuleima and the dionysian Baron, the Monk Knight arrives in Auvergne, France, on the wedding anniversary of the Baron and the Baroness. Disguised as an alleged friend of the Baron's, the Monk Gonzalles — "in Palestine we have passed as twins" (115) — he proclaims to Ernestina that

the Monk Knight is dead, that the Baron is alive and that “‘you will think this night, even in your husband’s arms, that Gonzales in the semblance of Abdallah will possess you’” (117). Discovering the “real” identity of the Monk Knight, she falls madly in love with this “‘superhuman’” being whom she identifies as the Baron’s “‘second self’” (112), and they marry. The Baron himself had encouraged her to see the Monk as “‘the god of her mind’s creation’” (118). As is the Baron for Zuleima, the “‘saint-like’” (111) Monk Knight with his “‘Christ-like countenance’” (136)—blasphemy of blasphemies!—is for the Baroness that “‘phantom, which imagination moulded into such life and strength, and beauty, that my sick soul languished for the embodiment’” (139). He is at once an erotic and a spiritual ideal.

“‘No longer the wife of a mortal’” (138), the Lady Ernestina lives with the Monk Knight as goddess and god or the prelapsarian Eve and Adam. For them, “‘passion is . . . not the gross sensuality which priests pronounce it to be, but a divine emanation from the God who created woman . . . the last and most perfect of his creatures’” (57). Woman, the body, passion and ecstasy are redeemed from the curse of the church. Here as in Blake, Byron, Shelley and many contemporary Canadian writers, “‘the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys’” and denies that “‘the nakedness of woman is the work of God’” and not the Devil.¹³ Ernestina’s is “‘not the cold hackneyed seemingness of the wanton’” and “‘not the dissembling virtue of the cold and prudent wife, which inspires disgust on the one hand, and on the other chills passion in its bud (121).’”

WHILE RICHARDSON’S “REBEL ANGELS” may disregard convention in private, they possess a very Canadian reluctance to openly defy the laws of the land or to overthrow such venerable institutions as marriage. However critical of the church and its self-serving brand of Christianity, they still seek its blessings and prefer to live within a social framework. The major characters are socially conscious: at the head of society in Auverge, “‘they were not indifferent’” to its demands and felt “‘the necessity for sacrificing something to appearances, in a world made up of appearances and falsehood alone’” (163). Like Richardson’s Canadian characters, despite the pull of a sometimes fierce and romantic individualism, they accept the compromises of the world and their participation in it. When, through the sheer intensity of their all-absorbing love, the Monk Knight and Ernestina forego the claims of the social dimension of their identity in a world which is all relationship, they court a tragic fate.

In their “‘transcendant passion’” (138), the Baroness and the Monk Knight strive to merge into one another totally. “‘I would be a part of yourself, identified, infused into the holy father of my child’” exclaims Ernestina in a wicked pun,

“and because I cannot reach this keen acme of my happiness, that happiness is incomplete” (128). This romantic quest to abrogate the borders between themselves is an ambiguous, double-edged affair. Like Byron’s Lara who both soars above and sinks beneath the common man, Richardson’s saintly lovers ironically hook twice the darkness when they try to catch twice the romantic glory of love and passion. “The tumult of those heaven-bestowed raptures which blended them into one mystic identity” (131) is also beginning to consume them. “‘My love for you is destroying me!’” (128) wails the titanic Monk Knight. His lineaments as a Manfred or a Fatal Lover who destroys himself and the woman he loves to madness are disclosed in Ernestina’s description of him as “‘the more than man who is slowly killing me with his intensity’” (134), a very Cohenesque intensity.

Eventually, the Baron, who has died in battle, attempts to reclaim his wife. Though a bizarre situation, it is one that is repeated in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. In MacLennan’s novel, Jerome, who “had returned from the dead,” finds his sensuous and angelic wife married to the man whom he has asked to look after her when he is gone: his double, the once celibate George Stewart who at one point feels that Jerome “seemed to be inside me, *to be me* . . .” “‘I had hoped to make love to you’ he said simply, ‘and now you’re married to George.’”¹⁴ Like Jerome, the Baron has wished for death but is fated to live, just as Catherine and Ernestina are fated to die.

The Baron is rebuffed by his former friend and his former wife. Ernestina avers that her guiding principle is “‘constancy’” or “‘fidelity,’” familiar Richardsonian watchwords. Desperately in love with his better half, he proposes a *ménage à trois* or what he terms, appropriately enough, a “‘double marriage’” (154). The couple recoil in shock and dismiss him. With “‘the seal of our strong friendship . . . broken — the tie . . . snapped asunder’” (143), the relationship between the Monk Knight and the Baron now degenerates into that struggle-of-brothers conflict which is prominent throughout Richardson’s canon. Banished to the forest, the once noble Baron undergoes one of those “sudden and unaccountable changes in the human mind” (143) which also characterizes tragic figures like Wacousta and Gerald Grantham, the protagonist of *The Canadian Brothers*. Here is that fascination for a “hairspring balance at the very edge of breakdown” that Lee notes again and again in Ondaatje’s writing.¹⁵

The Baron feels betrayed, robbed of his spiritual treasure. Separation from his spiritual likeness or feminine self is intolerable. As in *Wacousta* or Byron’s “Manfred,” it is the root of a crime of vengeance, wounded pride, and despair. The revengeful Baron succumbs to a cruel viciousness. Like a true Gothic tyrant, he imprisons the lovers in a labyrinthine underground cavern below the chateau. As in *Wacousta* and its sequel, we find descent imagery belonging to the night world of romance as described in Frye’s *The Secular Scripture*. These grotesque passages with their strong sado-masochistic colouring suggest the influence of Byron’s “The

Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale” and of Poe’s tales of horror, especially “Ligeia.” Intertextual echoes abound. A parallel scene later in the story involving a grisly live burial complicated by cannibalism is taken almost verbatim from one of the most famous of Gothic novels by an exemplar of the *Schauer-Romantik* or Chamber-of-Horrors School, Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*.¹⁶ Critics have commented on a similar use of a sense of brooding evil and of the details of physical horror to highlight an erotic theme in *Beautiful Losers* and poems like “Lovers” which typify the “decadent” aspects of Cohen’s romanticism.

In another sudden reversal “renewing the broken bond of love and friendship,” the Baron, the Baroness and the Monk Knight ascend out of “‘these subterranean tombs’” (154), mysteriously reconciled to one another. The Baron and the Baroness remarry. The Monk Knight disappears, only to return again as the Monk Gonzales, having grown darker even as Wacousta grows taller. Since he has become Ernestina’s confessor, the expression of his overwhelming love no longer has a physical component. It is at this point when there is a synthesis of opposing attitudes or forces and the three figures are balanced within a larger, integrated psychological entity, that the life-size ebony carving is made that the narrator comes upon centuries later. An essential but elusive equilibrium is momentarily attained; the equally matched opposites are held together in a fruitful rather than a destructive tension. It is a unique moment in Richardson, but only a moment.

The Monk Knight’s and Ernestina’s excessive passion for identification, though reconstituted on a higher level, has become so intense that it tilts the balance and threatens to destroy them both. In one of the paradoxes of apocalyptic romanticism, the thirst for the infinite that is the source of their vitality also leads to death. Of course, for them at least, death holds no threat but only the assurance of a final complete merging, of “‘visions of future love and existence’” (178) beyond the grave. “The utter surrender as it were, of the identity of each to the other” (163) has passed beyond all human bounds. As with *Wacousta*, Reaney’s Donnelly Trilogy, *The Watch That Ends the Night*, and novels by Ondaatje, Kroetsch, and Findley, readers are confronted not only with a paradoxical blurring of identity but also with the problematical status of that natural energy which is embodied in the reckless vitality and violence of disturbingly ambiguous figures. Again, the terms appropriate to Richardson are not those of good and evil but the more ambiguous ones of order and energy.

In this work *à la Beddoes*, in which the forces of life and death interpenetrate and are often surprisingly confused, sex no less than religious teaching is both an instrument of life and death. Lee stresses a similar point in *Beautiful Losers*: “Traditional asceticism and the cult of ecstatic sex are alike in the sinister appetites they release. . . . Opposites coincide.”¹⁷ Excess in love as in violence proves as dangerous and destructive as it does in *The Canadian Brothers* with the Canadian garrison officer Gerald Grantham and the American *femme fatale* Matilda Mont-

gomery. They ignore community and seek an intense awareness of self outside the bounds of quotidian reality; their fate suggests that whatever the egotistical assertion achieves, it is an ambiguous triumph. The drive to freedom is also a quest for death: "The raptures they tasted were not of earth. . . . Their depth and fulness had nothing human in them. They would have grown into each other if they could" (167). Abdallah and Ernestina embody the world of violent personal passions, of the exultant self. Like Gina Bixby and Jethroe Chone, Callaghan's criminal saints or saintly outlaws in *Close to the Sun Again*, the Monk Knight and the Baroness are lovers knowing only the law of their own love; the terrible excess of their passion, the terrible beauty in the excess, suggests a dual sense that human beings are both incredibly depraved and incredibly precious.

The further contortions and writhings of the plot of *The Monk Knight* are too complex to faithfully summarize here. Such are a few of the instances of overlapping identity. There seems to be no end to the text's "Chinese puzzle-box" scenes and characters which rival those in many Canadian postmodern works. As in *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers*, Richardson's intent seems to be to connect everyone with everyone else. Identity loses its significance as individuation. Defying closure, the entire dream-like cycle appears on the verge of beginning over again in the final chapters. The controversial nature of "such balancing monsters of love" (*Beautiful Losers*) as we find in Cohen, Davies, and Richardson's saints illustrates John Moss's contention in *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* that saintliness in our literature arises from some amazing sources, ones that are often considered strange or perverse.¹⁸

NOTES

¹ David Beasley, *The Canadian Don Quixote: The Life and Works of Major John Richardson, Canada's First Novelist* (Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 1977), 48.

² John Richardson, *The Monk Knight of St. John. A Tale of the Crusades* (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850), 121. All future references are to this text and occur parenthetically in the text.

³ Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada*, rev. ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1967), 30-31.

⁴ Beasley, p. 161.

⁵ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press), 23-26.

⁶ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (London: Oxford, 1951), 59.

⁷ Northrop Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), 65.

⁸ Dennis Duffy, *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1982), 51-53.

⁹ Frye, *Scripture*, 40.

- ¹⁰ Hugh MacLennan, *The Watch That Ends The Night* (New York: Signet, 1959), 14.
- ¹¹ Dennis Lee, *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: Anansi, 1977), 82.
- ¹² Lee, p. 82.
- ¹³ William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in *Blake: Complete Works*, ed. Geoffrey Keyes (London: Oxford, 1966), 151-52.
- ¹⁴ *Watch*, 306; 341, 307.
- ¹⁵ Lee, 20.
- ¹⁶ Compare the cavern scene involving the Countess of Clermont and her lover to an analogous one in Maturin's *Melmoth The Wanderer*, a scene Devendra P. Varma notes in his *The Gothic Flame: Being a History of the Gothic Novel in England* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), 167.
- ¹⁷ Lee, p. 88.
- ¹⁸ Leonard Cohen, *Beautiful Losers* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 120-21. See "Forgive Us Our Saints" in John Moss, *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977).



WOLVERINE

greg simison

will cover
a forty-mile trapline
in a single day
devouring every catch

will strip the bait
and leave unsprung
the hair-trigger traps
set exclusively for him

will fight to the death
to keep a stolen kill
giving ground
only to grizzly

will rule a domain
of a million acres
patrolling its boundaries
every two weeks

will eventually
break a trapper's will

drive him mad

a forty-pound ghost
who steals through his dreams
bridging
the yawning gap
between
the rare cinnamon bear
and the impossible sasquatch



"HELENA'S HOUSEHOLD"

James De Mille's Heretical Text

Bruce F. MacDonald

Critical studies of James De Mille have tended to centre almost exclusively on *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* or on his long poem, "Behind the Veil," both of them published posthumously. Criticism has also tended to assume that De Mille was religiously conservative. This narrow focus on two works and on an assumed conservatism has had a distorting effect on a fuller view of De Mille. *Strange Manuscript*, for instance, can be read as far from orthodox and more than satire: as denying the basic tenets of Christianity itself. "Behind the Veil" reads like a "Vision Quest," a shamanic out-of-body-experience which finally denies the exclusive claims of any religion. Yet it is easy to assume, in the present critical climate, that in the debate over evolution, for instance, De Mille "would have been on the side of the anti-Darwinists. He had been brought up in an atmosphere of austere evangelical Christianity."¹

It is important that we open up new directions for De Mille criticism, that we examine what Keefer refers to in a larger Maritime context as "the richness and often problematic diversity of Maritime fiction . . . the alternative values and vision this fiction realizes."² A closer examination of an early novel, *Helena's Household*,³ provides just such an opportunity, with some intriguing insights into De Mille's thought and art. De Mille had difficulties publishing *Helena* and was compelled to make changes in it, largely because its theology was unorthodox. Its inversions and theological discussions give a far different vision of James De Mille than that based only on the current readings of *Strange Manuscript* and "Behind the Veil."

De Mille family tradition, through his nephew L. J. Burpee, tells us that even James felt *Helena's Household* was "an emasculated version of the original novel."⁴ Carlton & Porter of New York had already published *Martyr of the Catacombs: A Tale of Ancient Rome* in 1865, apparently the first book De Mille published.⁵ It is a conventional story of heroic Christians in the Catacombs of Rome. However, Robert Carter & Bros. was not pleased with the original version of *Helena's Household* which must have been submitted at about the time *Martyr* was in the press. Although the subject is still the persecution of Roman Christians, the editor would not print the novel without changes to several chapters because he "did not consider [they] would prove palatable to the theological thought of the day, however true

they might be historically.”⁶ Something had changed in De Mille’s handling of the story of the Roman Christians between *Martyr* and *Helena’s Household*. We do not know exactly what the motive for the change was, but there is sufficient historical and internal evidence to suggest the essentially theological frames of reference with which he was working in this early part of his career.

De Mille made the required changes, but seems to have lapsed into a cynicism that made the writing of future serious books almost impossible.⁷ One wonders if De Mille was afraid similar changes would be required of *Strange Manuscript*, written about the same time as *Helena’s Household*, and so did not submit it for publication. Both novels indicate a tremendous struggle within him between the piety of his early years in the Anglican and Baptist Churches and a profound and thoughtful questioning of accepted values and beliefs — questions about how the experience of the Christians in Rome coloured and distorted “the fair humanities of old religion.”⁸

In dealing with such a text, the critic is faced with special problems. Is it possible to determine what De Mille added so he would not offend the theologically conservative reader? And more important, is it possible to derive a sense of De Mille’s original intentions from the present text? There are important implications for understanding De Mille and his other writings in the answers to those questions.

We must also attempt to appreciate a novel which is not at all in tune with late 20th century taste, but which seems to exist for the sole purpose of propounding a theological argument: narrative and dramatic concerns are secondary. M. G. Parks summarizes this emphasis succinctly: “Indeed his tendency to examine at length the interplay of these forces [of first century religion] slows down the action of the novel. His method is to invent characters to express, in intellectual terms and in their lives, the beliefs they uphold.”⁹ Readers accustomed to psychological or sociological realism or post-modernist abstraction/concretion might agree with Carole Gerson’s evaluation of the novel as “a turgid reconstruction of first-century Roman life,”¹⁰ or think it, “Almost unreadable today, [since] it appealed to those with a taste for fiction flavoured with a strong sense of piety.”¹¹ Even De Mille’s artistic objectivity is called into question: “In this pietistic novel De Mille reveals his strong Baptist background. . . . His objectivity suffers in his treatment of early Christianity, both in its doctrinal and ceremonial aspects.”¹²

These readings of the text, however, are an aspect of the critical distortion of seeing De Mille only through the eyes of *Strange Manuscript* and “Behind the Veil” and are contradicted by the novel itself as well as by nineteenth and early twentieth century readings which found it admirable or even “‘far and away the best of De Mille’s novels.’”¹³ Except for Parks’ assessment, the evaluations tend to depend on cultural or religious reactions to subject matter rather than on an examination of the text in a more inclusive sense.

Piety may appear to be a problem at first, but much of what is more accurately

Victorian "sentiment" reads today like piety. The innocent, Christian child, Marcus, for instance, who seems to be modelled on Dickens' Paul Dombey from *Dombey and Son* and who has much of the sentiment which is prominent in Dickens, is only partly an expression of Annapolis Valley piety. He is closer in many ways to the elevated Victorian ideal of family and childhood innocence. De Mille was aware of the distinction between "The Real" and "The Ideal" and also between "cant" (the language of piety) and the Ideal. He detested cant but portrays love and familial relations in the "Ideal" style, which he defines as follows:

The Ideal — Where the writer describes characters and scenes that are elevated beyond real life. The ideal must rise from the real. The writer takes striking circumstances, as in human life, and builds up an ideal world therefrom.¹⁴

As we tend to overlook sentimentality in Dickens, so we need to look beyond it in De Mille if we are to understand the narrative devices, irony and figurative language and the complex inversions of theological and dramatic emphasis through which De Mille conveys his quite unorthodox positions in *Helena's Household*.

It is also important to understand as much as possible about De Mille's beliefs and attitudes, and the study which follows can help enlighten some of the mystery of this strange writer. As Parks observes, we need to know more about De Mille and, "While the personality, convictions, and ideals of De Mille can be only partially understood at our present stage of knowledge, what is known or can reasonably be deduced is of the utmost importance"¹⁵ to an understanding of his other works.

The power of conservative religious groups at the time should be recognized at the outset, and De Mille was in the middle of a sectarian battle about colleges at the time *Helena's Household* was published. In 1865 he moved from the Baptist Acadia College to the Presbyterian (though nominally provincial) Dalhousie College. The Anglicans already had Kings College. De Mille moved at the same time from the church of his father, the Baptist, to the Anglican Church into which he had been born. At least one Baptist historian was displeased and comments, "Professor James DeMill [sic], who was doing most excellent work in Acadia College, was induced, for reasons perfectly satisfactory no doubt to himself, to accept a chair in Dalhousie. This was in 1865."¹⁶

A quick look through the records of Acadia College shows that most of the teaching staff stayed only one or two years, and that De Mille's tenure from 1861-65 was fairly long. However, he had other connections with the college, having been a student and teacher. Two brothers had graduated from Acadia in 1849 and 1860 and his father was a member of the Board of Governors and "liberally aided her by large pecuniary donations."¹⁷ His father-in-law had been the President of the College and earlier of Horton Academy where he went to school. Even if he had not had such close ties to the college, moves of the sort he made, in the political and religious climate of the time, were not made lightly.

Honour and religion were serious matters, as witness Joseph Howe's duel with pistols in Halifax's Point Pleasant Park over a question of honour in 1840.¹⁸ De Mille had been at Acadia and knew the tremendous animosity and righteous zeal of the Baptist Convention on this matter of education. They had made education an election issue for many years, even causing Howe's defeat in 1843,¹⁹ and continued with it, finally forcing a readjustment of grants in 1875.²⁰

This was a world where doctrinal purity was examined carefully. Although the Baptists were actually the Reform Party of their day, they were theologically conservative and punished those who differed from the mainstream. The minutes of the Baptist Convention have numerous references to people like the pastor from Wilmot — the Convention "revoked his license to preach, and excluded him with thirteen others who adhere to him"²¹ — or the church in Annapolis: "This church has been called to pass through a severe trial with reference to their once esteemed pastor, in having to exclude him from their communion and his pastoral relation to them."²² Even the British and Foreign Bible Society "have refused to aid in the circulation of those versions of the Scriptures in foreign languages which have been made by Baptist missionaries, solely because our brethren have faithfully translated the word Baptize by words which signify to immerse."²³

It was, then, a considerable step for De Mille to move from Acadia to Dalhousie and from the Baptist to the Anglican Church at a time when it was advisable for everyone to belong to some kind of religious power group. But it was even more of a threat to write the sorts of things he does in *Helena's Household*, which call into question many of the cherished beliefs of traditional Christianity. De Mille would be familiar from newspapers with the persecution of the relatively new Spiritualist movement in the eastern United States at the time,²⁴ and in *Lady of the Ice* he refers to the Mormons who were also being persecuted at about that time. He and his brother had found themselves in the middle of a vicious inter-Baptist feud when they ran an alternate Baptist newspaper in 1861.

It is likely his father's presence that kept him at Acadia: at the same meeting of the Baptist Convention (at Berwick, August 19-22, 1865) to which he sent his resignation, the Board of Governors also called upon the membership "to note the removal by death of one of their brethren, Nathan S. DeMill, Esq., of St. John."²⁵ It may be that James did not want to hurt his father by the move, or that his father's death precipitated some of his own questions about religion.

In a passage from *The Cryptogram* we seem to get a reflection of the difficulties De Mille had in making his decision to leave Acadia College, when one of the characters explains:

"At length a crisis arrived. I had either to sacrifice my conscience or resign my position. I chose the latter alternative, and in doing so I gave up my political life forever. I need not tell the bitterness of my disappointment. But the loss of worldly prospects and of hope was as nothing compared with other things. The worst of all was the

reception which I met at home. My young, and as I supposed loving wife, to whom I went at once with my story, and from whom I expected the warmest sympathy, greeted me with nothing but tears and reproaches. She could only look upon my act with the world's eyes. She called it ridiculous Quixotism . . . [But] after all it was not so bad. I soon found employment . . . I could be more independent, though the prospects were poor."²⁶

This is purely speculation, but the above passage seems to reflect some of the conflicts of conscience De Mille faced at the time *Helena's Household* was written, (it was published shortly after he moved to Dalhousie) and a move to Dalhousie College, which was just starting up after a long period of inactivity, would indeed have "poor prospects." Acadia was well established at the time, even having an Alumni Association since 1860.²⁷ The coldness and bitterness which Mrs. De Mille showed to MacMechan when he wanted to interview her for a possible biography²⁸ are also reflected in this passage from *The Cryptogram*.

The time of writing *Helena's Household* was not a pleasant time and the move to Dalhousie seems to have more to do with conscience than academic promotion. *Helena's Household* even suggests that De Mille was at odds not only with the Baptist church but with the main currents of western Christianity.

THE DRAMATIC MODE OF *Helena's Household* is not typical of most fiction, being mainly a form of dramatized theological discourse. The editor at Robert Carter & Bros. sensed rightly that the "theological thought" in the novel would be in some way unacceptable to his readers and that De Mille's historic reconstructions were being used as a means of unorthodox theological exploration. A further threat arose because the novel was perhaps even "true" historically, and this would imply that the historic sources of certain Christian doctrines made the beliefs themselves suspect. De Mille was combining theology and history in a fictional work to convey ideas by implication which would not be approved in a more direct form, as in an essay or speech.

De Mille also uses devices from religious literature. It is helpful, in trying to understand the form of *Helena*, to see the characters as allegorical, as in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The basic parable structure can be seen in the arrangement of setting and characters. Evil, represented by Nero's court, is in conflict with Good, represented by Helena's household. That parable would be fine for a conservative audience except that the "good" characters are not all Christian (let alone of one denominational leaning) and the Christians are not all "good." It is noteworthy that baptism is not mentioned in the novel, either by immersion or otherwise, and that De Mille is certainly not supporting a Baptist theology.

The parable thus implies that a non-Christian truth may be valid and, because

the Christian characters do not all find the truth they are seeking, the Christian answers may not always be valid. The parable from the outset introduces a number of questions which the conservative Christian of De Mille's day might well have felt threatening. It is interesting that in *Strange Manuscript*, written about this time, the inversion is carried even farther, so that in that novel it is impossible to define what is Good or Evil.

"Helena's Household" is at the centre of the parable and this core represents certain values. Cineas, Helena's brother, embodies Greek religion and culture; Labeo, her husband, is the epitome of Roman virtues and strength; and Helena seems to represent the sort of person who would become a Christian, one caught between traditions and seeking other solutions. Marcus (Helena's son), at least at the beginning of the novel, represents innocent, untested Christianity. Ironically, although he seems in some ways an ideal of childhood innocence, he uses the cant of Christian piety to which De Mille objected strongly in other contexts, and when his Christianity is tested, even for a short time, it quickly decays. Marcus is thus a sentimental character but certainly not a Christian ideal.

Connected to this household are others who are part of the religious mosaic of first century Roman society. Marcus' nurse is a slave and a Christian and represents the many lower class characters who people the novel anonymously as the Christian church. Another slave of Labeo's estate is Isaac, a learned Jew and the librarian and doctor on the estate. It is in conversations between Isaac and Cineas that we get a sense of the depth of De Mille's interest in Greek religion and in Judaism.

The British connection is also important and is in some ways related to De Mille's little book *The Early English Church*,²⁹ and helps to introduce certain aspects of Druid religion into the novel. De Mille was interested in Druid religion, and earlier versions of the novel may have made the connection clearer. Labeo spends much time in Britain with the Roman army, Marcus and Helena die there, and Galdus, a slave from Britain who becomes Marcus' fast friend, is from Britain. Galdus' speaks to Marcus like Caliban to Stephano in *The Tempest*, "'You are my God, and I worship you'" (193). Galdus contributes to the theological discussion by explaining his experiences with the cruelties of Druid rituals and gives us an insight into some of the darker potentials of religion.

The novel may draw on the parable and allegory for its structure, but this outline indicates that it is not a Christian parable. In fact, the non-Christian characters have the strong roles and the Christians seem to be distanced and to lack depth.

There are two centres of focus in the novel, then. Helena's household provides ties to the world of the Christians and their peculiar problems, because Helena, Marcus and the nurse are Christian. The other centre of action, Nero's court, where Labeo and Cineas are favorites, dramatizes the effects of absolute authority and absolute corruption and is the source of threat and destruction in the plot. The plot, however, is driven by historic forces rather than by the volition of the charac-

ters (including Nero who is a victim of history as much as of his own immorality), with the result that one has the sense that morality and religion have little effect on the outcome of life and the characters are caught in an inhuman progression of events: they may seek God or the gods, Christianity or the religions of Rome, but it is no easy matter for them to feel the influence of the Divine in the puzzle of history.

The plot and characters, then, suggest little that is pious, so that the summary and comments so far seem like they refer to a completely different novel than the one MacLeod refers to as "pietistic" and revealing nothing but De Mille's Baptist prejudices.³⁰ One approach to resolving the conflict of the piety of the language and the almost anti-Christian sentiments of the plot is to assume that the pietistic passages are not original material, but were put in later to satisfy the editor and disguise some quite heretical implications.

We know, for instance, that De Mille detested cant and false piety. A former student at Acadia College, Herbert Creed, even found it necessary to emphasize that "'While he was doubtless a sincere Christian'" still "'he took delight in ridiculing everything like cant, and even the ordinary words and actions of the 'pious' sort of people often brought to his keen eye and thin curling lip that peculiar sarcastic smile of his.'" ³¹ If one reads the pious passages of *Helena's Household* not as "Baptist prejudice" but as satirical, as piety parodying itself, they make more sense in relation to the rest of the text. De Mille's own sarcastic attitude to superficial piety makes it hard to imagine that he would include the pieties of Marcus and Helena (as a means of disguising the deeper implications of his argument?), without himself smiling sarcastically.

Seeing the piety as a later addition also accounts for another anomaly at the end of the novel. Cineas and Isaac are the most articulate characters in the novel and their discussions raise some serious questions about the formation of early Christianity and the interpretation of Scripture. Yet the Christians are given nothing of substance with which to argue against them. Christianity, at least in most of its forms, is even presented as a progressively negative or weakening influence. The major weight of the Christian argument at the end of the novel is finally left to Helena, and here the novel almost falls apart because her comments about Christianity are actually mere lists of Christian pieties, as if De Mille could not be bothered with a connected argument.

IF WE MOVE BEYOND PIETY and the assumption that De Mille must be conservative because he was raised a Baptist, to the more substantial debate which underlies De Mille's parable, we begin to enter into some very complex rhetorical structures.

Christianity in the novel is neither derived from nor invested in the Bible but is placed in history and is seen as a product of a response of human beings to historic circumstances. There is no "Scripture" or "Divine Word" here to proclaim absolute truth, and meaning fluctuates with circumstance, so that the Christians have to struggle to find what their religion really is about. It is the fluidity of the Roman version of the Christian religion which is important for De Mille's argument.

The "Scriptures," as far as they exist, are Jewish, and Isaac, Labeo's Jewish slave, knows more about them than do the Christians. The Christians draw from "Scripture" for their services, but they are described as, "the psalms of the Jews, which the Christians had also adopted, and to which they had given a new meaning" (271). The newness of the meanings they assign to the Scriptures is emphasized many times as we hear in Isaac's words the Jewish interpretation of Scripture and then hear it with a completely different meaning from the Christians. The linguist De Mille would especially sympathize with the learned Isaac's comment to Cineas, "'But I need not say that to us, who know the original, the translation does not possess the same beauties'" (33).

De Mille not only questions the authority of the translations of the Bible on which western churches are based, but, more profoundly, he questions biblical authority itself, the cornerstone of Protestant theology, by dramatizing the limitations of the people who wrote the texts. The Bible is thus the word of history, rather than the "Word of God."

In this vein St. Paul, the writer of most of the New Testament, is brought into the novel as a strong but distant and shadowy figure. With him is Luke, who wrote the "Gospel of St. Luke" and the "Book of the Acts of the Apostles," much of it about Paul. The major authors of the New Testament text are in the novel, then, and are trying to find their way in this new religion, like all the rest. A knowledgeable reader might begin to realize from this dramatization that the New Testament contains very little of the Jewish background from which "the Jewish Teacher" — Jesus — arose. The deep spirituality of Judaism, which the Greek Cineas recognizes as containing "All that he had ever heard of the mysterious knowledge of the Egyptians and Asiatics" (35) is lost to a more superficial view derived from Roman experience which is immersed in ignorance, suffering and grief.

Manuscripts are being passed among the Christians, but no one has a complete account of what the new religion is about. Helena and Cineas have a gospel for a while but have to return it to its owner (oddly, they do not think of having it copied). Helena is converted to Christianity as a result of reading the gospel, but Cineas feels the gospel is not sufficient: he needs to know more, but there are no other sources of information. Ignorance seems thus to be a pervasive aspect of the Roman church in the novel, and the religion which comes from the Roman experience, including most of Western Christianity, is shown to be subject to the historic distortion of Rome.

This is not an anti-Roman Catholic novel, however. It seeks to uncover roots which pre-date the founding of that church.

As in *The Cord and Creese* (1869) or *The Cryptogram* (1870), De Mille gives us in *Helena* a puzzle or cryptogram to read, but in this case it is a religious puzzle and the clues are in biblical and theological knowledge. Cineas and Helena, for instance, studied under the "Master," Theophilus, in Athens. His name means "lover of God," but is also the name of the person to whom Luke's "Gospel" and "Book of Acts" are addressed.³² Most of De Mille's readers would recognize the name Theophilus and his connection with Luke. In the novel, then, it is implied that Luke, St. Paul's companion, is a friend or disciple of Theophilus, like Cineas and Helena.

De Mille makes a point of having Theophilus die without finding truth, even though it is implied that he has read Luke's accounts of Jesus' life and the history of the early Christians. The old Master dies, pleading, "O God, reveal thyself!" and Cineas comments, echoing King Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes (and perhaps also echoing De Mille), "'... all life and all religion are full of perplexity. What can make it vanish? Never can it, till we arrive at that other life in which we all believe'" (96). (The "other life" that is being referred to here, by the way, is not the Christian heaven, but the Greek other life according to the teachings of Socrates.)

The "Scriptures" of the Christians, then, are dramatized in their formative years, while they are being written by people in historic settings, before they have been collected together, codified and de-historicized. The implication, of course, is that "Scripture" is relative to the person doing the writing and the historic circumstance and is not dictated by God (as was held by many Christians of the nineteenth century.)³³

AN EASY PIETY IS NOT POSSIBLE IN THIS NOVEL. Not only are the scriptural guides to Christian life inadequate but De Mille, through Cineas' words and actions, questions much of Christian doctrine. Cineas' name seems to come from the Greek "ΣΙΝΙΟΝ," a sieve. He is the confidante of almost all the characters, including Nero, and he, like the academic De Mille, sifts every idea, looking for truth. He is described as "an earnest inquirer after truth, and sought it under all forms. He had heard the Christian doctrine explained . . . and yet he found it not acceptable" (117). If this characterization applies to De Mille also, as it seems to in what follows here, then De Mille is rejecting much of Christian doctrine through Cineas, who carries the major weight of the novel's theological explorations.

Cineas' first problem, like Helena's, is the conflict between intellect and simple faith. Helena says she admires "the poor and illiterate man [who] takes his God to

himself, and prays to him, and is comforted while he prays" (20). Cineas feels the same way about his Christian friend, the centurion Julius:

He felt a kind of envy of his friend, and for a moment wished that he himself might have the same calm faith. For it was his nature to question all things; he struggled with doubt that rose behind every belief, and the habit of a lifetime of speculation could not readily be lost. (220)

The conflict here is not between pagan and Christian, but, as in many nineteenth century writers, between "calm faith" and the claims of intellect: behind every belief there is doubt. However, through Cineas' doubts De Mille can examine many of the fundamental questions facing Christianity in the nineteenth century, from literalism to the identity of Jesus himself.

Isaac is a literalist, and although Jewish, is representative of any religious literalism. Isaac explains to Cineas that Jewish Biblical prophecy will be fulfilled literally, in the destruction of nations and the killing of thousands of people in war and pestilence. In language that reflects the arguments of Christian literalists of De Mille's day, Isaac explains the horror of the "Last Days." Cineas is repelled by Isaac's descriptions of blood and a vengeful God.

To Cineas, raised on Socratic ideas of the purity of the divine, this "was to vulgarize the sublime conception of the Infinite Mind" (123). De Mille's own satiric smile at the "pious sort of people" of his day, can be seen when Cineas objects sneeringly,

"And is that all? Is that the end of your divine revelation? Why, beside that, Plato is indeed Divine. Socrates is a God beside such a Messiah. For your promised leader would only fill the earth with terrible wars and all mankind would be convulsed." (123)

Again, in language that almost sounds like the debate De Mille must have carried on before leaving the Baptist Church, Cineas pleads with the literalist Isaac: "Tell me that your prophecies of triumph are figurative. Tell me that his victory is over the soul, and then I will look for the Divine in your writings." But the literalist replies, almost cruelly, "No . . . impossible. They are literal, or nothing is true. Take away that literal truth, and all the hope of ages dies" (124).

Psychologically this debate is accurate. The literalist cannot let go of any part of his thought system without feeling threatened, and someone like Cineas (De Mille), who has received a wider education, cannot think in the narrow terms of the literalist. This is a conflict, not between two religions, but between ways of seeing the world and ways of reading texts. De Mille sides with Cineas here and we see in Isaac's fate the practical results of literalism.

Isaac assumes that God will send a literal, physical Messiah to defeat the Romans and become King in Jerusalem. Labeo frees him from slavery and he goes to Judea to be part of this literal victory. He is faced with defeat, suffering and tremendous

corruption among his fellow Jews and begins to question, " 'O God of Abraham . . . if thou canst allow this, then what is there that thou wilt not allow to be done?' " (406). But once doubt enters the literalist view, the whole structure begins to crumble.

Isaac dies just as Jerusalem is destroyed and the temple is burning and his death seems to be the inevitable end of one who believes any text literally:

For a few moments Isaac stood motionless. Then he walked forward and threw his sword into the flames.

Then he raised his clenched fist to the skies, and looking up, cried out, in a loud and piercing voice, —

" 'O God of Abraham! How hast thou mocked the people who trusted in thee!'"

The next instant he rushed forward, and sprang into the raging flames. (410)

Isaac's words here even echo Jesus on the cross — " 'My God, My God. Why hast thou forsaken me.' " ³⁴ (One could almost conclude that De Mille thought Jesus, like Isaac, had taken the Jewish Scripture too literally in seeing himself as the messiah, and that he found out his mistake too late.)

Of course, if the accuracy of the text of the Bible is in some doubt, as is implied in the manuscripts and conditions of composition in the novel, literal interpretation of a corrupted text serves no purpose. An unreliable text cannot be interpreted literally. But De Mille's implied doubts go farther even than this.

The Christianity which develops in the novel (and it is changing and adapting constantly) is not some monolithic system of beliefs. The Christian characters are struggling and evolving, with very limited guidance, to derive a system of beliefs from their teachers and fellows. The Roman Christians, limited and distorted by isolation and suffering and with no direct contact with Jesus and only limited contact with St. Paul, are presented as the makers of Christianity and of the Bible. But De Mille is even more specific in presenting the source of the peculiar distortion he sees in Christianity: it is not Jesus or his teachings that are to blame, nor even St. Paul, but the catacombs.

Before Nero drives the Christians into hiding in the catacombs there is a sense of optimism. Helena and Marcus especially are full of light and love and the Christian message has a ring of hope about it, as if God does indeed love the world. The strength of Christianity is embodied in St. Paul as seen through the eyes of Julius (the centurion who accompanied Paul on his journeys):

"But he had something more than mere courage . . . he had that spiritual power to sustain him, which made him superior to other men. By that supernatural influence, he was enabled to foretell our deliverance, to save himself from the most venomous of reptiles, and to heal the sick by his touch." (76)

This "supernatural" strength in Paul is not shared by any of the other Christian characters in the novel and so does not protect them from the experience of persecution and the catacombs which changes them radically and which, it is implied,

put an indelible stamp on subsequent Christian belief. In this reading of history the catacombs may have more to do with Christianity than Christ.

De Mille was fascinated by the catacombs. He had visited them while in Rome, and they had a profound influence on his imagination. He lectured on them and talked about them³⁵ and his first novel, *The Martyr of the Catacombs*, is mainly about life underground. They are a place of adventure for his Young Dodge Club in *The Seven Hills* (1872). The cave dwelling Kosekin in *Strange Manuscript* may be an imaginative extension of Christians who never got out of this "vast Christian Necropolis" where "the Christians found a place for their dead" (213).

The catacombs in *Helena's Household* are described almost as Adam More describes the place of the dead in *Strange Manuscript*. Cineas and the family enter the darkness for the funeral of Marcus' nurse:

It was a wild, weird scene. The passage was about seven feet high, and not more than four feet wide. The walls, on either side, were rough, and bore the marks of excavating tools. The torches served to illumine the scene but faintly. The darkness that opened before them was intense. (214)

As long as this place is merely a cemetery, the Christians have a sense of hope, but Nero institutes a horrible persecution of Christians and they are driven permanently underground. There, in the darkness, children, women and men sicken and die. Even Julius, the centurion, becomes despondent and the whole religion turns to a form of life-in-death. The Christians who escaped execution

seemed far better than those who had perished on the cross or by fire. At first it seemed so; but as time passed, and the gloom deepened around them, this living burial seemed worse than death. (267)

Now, even the teachings of the gospel give only "momentary relief . . . [because] these feelings were only transitory; no joy or content could endure in so frightful a place; the gloom affected the physical constitution, and thus acted upon the mind also" (267).

De Mille seems to be implying that out of the catacomb experience comes the denial of the world and the hope for death (like the Kosekin, again) which is characteristic of many branches of nineteenth century Christianity, the sense that "They lost all hope in this life, and looked eagerly to the next one" (268).

George Woodcock, writing of *Strange Manuscript*, makes a connection between Christianity and the death wish, but sees it as coming from the Old Testament rather than the catacombs:

To those who considered themselves enlightened and rational, as De Mille undoubtedly did, much of the Old Testament-oriented religion of their age seemed motivated by . . . a turning away from light into a longed-for darkness.³⁶

In *Helena* the catacombs, not the Old Testament, have this effect.

Even Marcus, who was the centre of faith and pious sentiments early in the novel, and who fled to the catacombs for only three days, falls under "a profound melancholy." There is no resurrection for him after three days in the tomb, except the resurrection to a living death:

That life under ground had a double horror; it was in darkness, and it was among the dead. It was the valley of the shadow of death! Alas! that shadow had passed over their souls. (314)

It is significant that the two pillars of piety, Helena and Marcus, never overcome the effects of this shadow and gradually weaken and die. It is as if De Mille is suggesting that their religious faith did not have any deep roots or power and that they are really no different from the pagan husband Labeo of whom De Mille writes, "the very blackness of darkness gathered around Labeo, and his soul was filled with desolation" (332).

So, in this novel, pious sentiments or beliefs mean nothing in the face of the darkness of life. The literalist Isaac and the pious Helena both end in despair.

The problems and conflicts which De Mille raises are not raised just to shock his pious readers — there is a strong sense of the novel being a vehicle of searching as well as of criticism. Cineas seems to reflect De Mille's own retraction when he says,

"Believe me, I am not one who brings up a score of petty objections to a pure and elevated religion for an idle purpose. I am distressed. I am perplexed. I wish that this Christianity of yours could be made acceptable to me. But it cannot be. (224)

The novel was not conceived by De Mille as petty, and it is not even satiric (except where piety parodies itself). It is rather De Mille's way of dealing with distress and perplexity.

DE MILLE HAD TROUBLE finding satisfactory endings for his serious novels, either because he did not wish to follow through the implications of his vision or because he was forced to change the endings in order to publish. But although *Helena*, like *Strange Manuscript*, does not seem to end adequately, it is still possible to see something of the synthesis of religion toward which he was struggling. He was not anti-religious by any means, but he does not seem to have believed in many of the church's doctrines and in Christianity's exclusive claim to truth and God's ear. Again, Cineas is central to the resolution of conflicting forces.

The primary conflict seems at first to be between intellect and faith, with faith as something to be envied but also as a subtle form of ignorance. Thus Cineas envies Helena, as Helena had earlier envied the poor peasant, because "She had . . . gained . . . firm faith, sure faith, absolute knowledge of God and love for him. And he wished that he could be like her" (179). His problem is that "His keen, subtle, and speculative mind led him to scrutinize everything carefully and ask — why?" (179)

Ironically, Isaac, the Jew, also says, like Helena, " 'My faith in Him cannot be shaken by any conceivable thing' " (377).

This kind of faith might be called "blind faith" or "unthinking faith" or even "literal faith" but the opposite of this kind of faith is despair and both fall into despair: Helena after the catacomb experience and Isaac after the fall of Jerusalem. Cineas, the intellectual, Platonic sifter, does not expect "literal" meaning, and so does not fall into despair.

Besides pointing out the "literalist" qualities of what is commonly called "faith," and the tendency of the faithful to fall into despair, there are other doctrines with which De Mille has problems, especially the idea of sin.

The first time we encounter the Christian idea of "sin" is in a scene where a Christian Roman Centurion, Eubulus, is protecting his daughter from attempted gang rape. Julius and Cineas help him and then find that the Christian soldier is consumed with guilt for shedding blood during the incident. Julius objects that " 'A religion which teaches this [idea of sin] cannot come from God.' " And Cineas cannot believe that Eubulus thinks God must forgive his action: " 'Forgive! . . . Is that the word? — forgive! He will approve of it' " (173). Again, some of De Mille's distaste for subservient piety and guilt can be seen in Cineas, who, as a Seeker, says, " 'but if in you, a Christian, I find such sentiments as these, what can I think? Will I not be forced to think that it is all baseness, and poverty of spirit, and abject meanness?' " (173-4).

Further, this problem of sin seems to be more than just the conflict of heroic action and grovelling. In one of the longest and most passionate speeches of the book, Cineas argues the ideas of sin, eternal punishment and the necessity for sacrifice as redemption. In these lines, which I quote at length, we can get a sense of De Mille's own passionate objections to the ideas of his contemporaries:

"To me it is simply inconceivable that God, under any circumstances, should suffer death."

To this Julius answered, that Christ died to atone for sin. All men are sinners, and subject to the wrath of God. Unless they can obtain pardon, they must suffer forever.

To this doctrine Cineas expressed the strongest repugnance.

"I acknowledge," said he, "that there is much sin in the world, but a large number of men are simple, good-hearted folk, and to say that they are under God's wrath, and liable to eternal punishment, seems so shocking that I do not think it deserves discussion.

"To *pardon sin*, you say. What sin? I deny that all men are sinners. I know many good, wise, and holy men, who have done nothing to merit any future punishment, and who, in fact should receive in the future nothing but blessedness. For myself, I do not see what I have done that needed such suffering on my behalf. You will say that he died for me. Why should he die for me? What punishment have I deserved that he should take it upon himself and suffer in my place?

"I, from my earliest youth, have tried to seek after truth, and God. Is this sin? I have given myself up to this lifelong pursuit. Have I incurred God's wrath, — the

wrath of One whom my soul craves to know and seeks to love? . . . I have always endeavored to live a pure life, and will you tell me that eternal punishment lies before me? For what? What have I ever done? Can you believe this, and yet affirm that God is just?" (222-3)

This passage may be in the mouth of a Greek character, but the phrases which Julius uses, "Christ died to atone for sin," "All men are sinners and subject to the wrath of God," or Christ "died for me" are the language of the Baptist and Anglican churches to which De Mille belonged.

Here De Mille questions the whole sin/wrath/sacrifice/redemption doctrine which has been at the centre of Christianity since the days of Augustine. Elsewhere in the novel De Mille even associates the human sacrifice of the cross with Druid human sacrifice and the Wrath of God with the cruel god Galdus had known in Britain. The Biblical injunction to "Fear the Lord," is turned on its head in this scene when Galdus says, almost flippantly, " 'Yes, all that I ever heard about one God, or many gods, makes me fear one and all . . . Those who know him best, fear him most' " (191).

It is against this dark, bloodthirsty, vengeful aspect of Christianity that De Mille seems to be directing the full force of his rhetoric. De Mille builds up examples of human sacrifice from different cultures: the human sacrifice which Galdus has experienced, where " 'I have seen my own brother laid on a stone, and the priest plunge his sharp knife in his throat,' " (192) [shades of Kosekin]; the human sacrifice of the cross; the Prometheus of Aeschylus, punished as "Thee, victim doomed," (150) because he loved mankind; even the "mysterious repast" of blood and flesh (260) pile up as evidence for Cineas' argument that religion has distorted some form of original truth or spirituality. Christianity turns to human sacrifice and is no better here than the Druids (or the Kosekin) except that its cannibalism is symbolic.

De Mille elsewhere quotes Coleridge admiringly in his support of,

The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
The fair humanities of old religion,
The power, the beauty and the majesty.³⁷

In De Mille's reading of history the "fair humanities" seem to have been lost from Christianity and the same cruelty found in "pagan" religion has taken their place.

Much of Western Christianity has emphasized sin as basic to human experience and De Mille, both in the Baptist and Anglican churches, would have learned that idea quite consistently. One wonders where his rebellion comes from or what philosophical position he is aligning himself with in these objections. A clue to this mystery is in a cryptic reference in his odd little book, *The Early English Church*. In a general discussion of the history of the church he says,

In the beginning of the fifth century a British Christian, Pelagius, disturbed the

world with doctrines *esteemed* heretical; and St. Germanus was sent over from Gaul to preach against them. [*italics mine*]³⁸

De Mille is here resurrecting an ancient debate between St. Augustine and Pelagius, a British monk of the fourth century, and in *Helena* he presents the same discussion dramatically.

Pelagius argued that humans are not completely depraved (as formulated by St. Augustine in his doctrine of original sin and upheld by most churches since), but that although we are inclined to sin, we have the innate capacity (not dependent on redemptive action from outside ourselves) to choose the good.

Pelagius' argument is based on the injunction in Matthew 5:48 to the effect that we should strive to be perfect like God. If we look at Cineas' argument against the idea of human depravity (quoted at length earlier), we find he argues that he has been trying to perfect himself to be like God. Cineas is, then, acting on the Pelagian attitude which the church has "esteemed heretical."

The Pelagian hero is very different than the martyr hero of the catacombs. For Cineas the heroes of truth are those who have struggled for perfection, instead of merely enduring suffering. However, in following the Pelagian ideas about heroism in this part of the novel, De Mille brings into question another cherished Christian doctrine having to do with Christ's divinity.

Jesus is compared closely in the novel with Prometheus, Socrates and Plato and De Mille seems to suggest that if Jesus is a divine messenger, he is one of several. The similarities between Prometheus and Jesus are not as close as between Socrates and Jesus, but they give Cineas room to ponder. Jesus' death reminds him of Prometheus' death: " 'Yes, there was a repetition of all that Aeschylus has presented to us — a Being who loves men, who does good to them, who suffers for them, who endures the mysterious anger of the Supreme' " (150). He finds other similarities: the scorn of those watching the death and the earthquake as evidence that "nature sympathizes" (151). He then sees how Socrates, when he was put to death, forgave his enemies, just like Jesus. This, he says, " 'is the crowning glory of his [Socrates'] sublime life' " (152).

All these similarities suggest to Cineas that Jesus " 'is another Socrates, formed under different circumstances, and, perhaps, more favorable ones' " (153). Then Cineas analyses Socrates' and Jesus' cultural influences and arrives at a combined social/evolutionary/divine account of their historic roles.

Socrates is an appropriate messenger to the Greeks. He is "lively, fond of banter, quick at retort, and had that indirect way of making assertions, which is a characteristic of the people to which he belonged" (153). Jesus, on the other hand, " 'came fresh from a solemn, silent people, full of veneration, possessed of sublime ideas of God, and convinced of his love for them. He was a true child of such a people' " (154).

These teachers are in part produced by their societies, but also " 'Socrates

plainly stated that he was sent by God, as did the Jewish teacher, but he never pretended to perform miracles.' " Cineas accounts for Socrates' lack of supernatural powers, except for his guiding spirit, "his dæmon," by saying half-humorously, " 'But, perhaps, among the sceptical Athenians it was better not to have the power of performing miracles. It might have put an end to his career at an early period' " (154). The teachers may be appropriate to their societies, but the humour suggests that they were both "sent by God."

THE NOVEL SKILLFULLY PRESENTS A CASE for "divine relativity." The novel removes the reader to an historic distance from the beginnings of Christianity; presents the mix of religious discussion and practice in the first century; presents each cultural group with its own messiah or teacher; and then concludes that " 'I cannot help believing that this wonderful man [Jesus] was *a* divine messenger sent by God to *that* people to teach *them*' " [italics mine] (148). God is still presented as being active in these teachers, but Jesus no longer has the status of the "Only Son of God."

If we follow through implications further we find that what Jesus taught the first century Jews, and what was filtered through the consciousness of the Roman Christians were not the same thing and may not be entirely appropriate to the present. It may not, in fact, be possible to determine what the real "historical Jesus" was like, a task the German theologians of De Mille's day were struggling to accomplish, without success.

It is not much wonder that the first editor wanted De Mille's novel to be changed in some way before presenting it to a religiously conservative public. De Mille leaves almost none of the central Christian doctrines unquestioned.

If the major Christian ideas of the infallibility of Scripture, the necessity for faith in a just or loving Deity, the sinfulness of man and the redemptive action of the crucifixion, along with the divinity of Christ are to be discarded or at least questioned, one wonders what De Mille has left of the teachings of his youth.

Again, Cineas seems to speak the alternative. He wishes first to avoid literal interpretation of texts because "In a spiritual interpretation he saw the truest and sublimest philosophy" (180). De Mille seems to have in mind here the sort of interpretation Emanuel Swedenborg practiced with Scripture. De Mille had read Swedenborg in university³⁹ and it is possible that studying at Brown University in the 1850's he had some contact with the Swedenborg Foundation that was established in New York in 1849 to distribute books and ideas. Swedenborgian criticism tends to seek correspondences between the rhetorical structures of the text and the spiritual condition of the human being. Thus Cineas, objecting to Isaac's literalism, seems to speak as a Swedenborgian would:

"Cannot your Messiah . . . of whom you speak so much, be, after all, as I have suggested before, a holy Prophet — a Teacher — one who will try to make your people purer in heart, and better in life? This I think would be an act more worthy of God, than to send a king or a general who would only shed the blood of men." (181)

This would be a "spiritual interpretation" of Scripture in a Swedenborgian sense, because it interprets the text as applying to spiritual transformation and not to literal, historical conquest. In this paradigm "faith" is not dependent on "good" things happening externally or literally, but is directed toward personal understanding, knowledge and evolution, as in the Pelagian sense.

Applied to the person of Jesus, a "spiritual interpretation" does not concern itself with whether he is the "only" Son of God or if he was a sacrifice on the cross or even if the text is literally true. Jesus becomes "a Teacher — one who will try to make your people purer in heart, and better in life." But a "spiritual interpretation" can accept that same Pelagian aim of human perfection through moral action in any other divine teacher, like Socrates or Plato or Prometheus. The "messiah" is, figuratively, the divine coming into the human world to help human beings, whatever form that messiah may take.

This interpretation of the role of the Messiah as Teacher also accounts for Cineas' role at the end of the novel — he returns to Athens as a Christian teacher, but one has the sense that he will not enter the literalist's trap of sin and guilt and despair. Even with the changes De Mille has had to make in the novel to avoid the censors, Cineas can still be seen as another Pelagian messiah, and that role is open to anyone who seeks truth.

If the above reading of *Helena's Household* is at all valid, James De Mille's characters are saying things about Christianity which were revolutionary, heretical, certainly out of step with most of the churches of his day. He has defused those comments to an extent, with pious passages, as required by his editor, but enough of the original remains to suggest the range and depth of his questioning and the struggle and perplexity he went through to arrive at solutions to his questions.

The novel is not purely an attempt to recreate Roman life, as in some other books at about the same time: many of the conflicts represented by De Mille's characters were things De Mille was struggling with, so that even though Cineas is a convincing Greek intellectual, he is also De Mille arguing with the Baptists and Anglicans of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and even though Isaac is a convincing first century Jew, he also argues like the pious literalists who were the bane of De Mille's life.

The novel does not try to set up an alternative orthodoxy. In fact, De Mille seems to be objecting to the literalist stance which codifies and claims to solve spiritual mysteries, and this refusal to define the "right" stance may help clarify some of the problems critics have had with the relativity of values in *Strange Manuscript*. He does, however, argue against the Roman, Augustinian ideas of sin and God's wrath

which, through Calvin and many branches of Protestantism, made much of nineteenth century Christianity harsh and repressive. He argues for the Pelagian optimism of perfectibility.

For the Pelagian Cineas and for De Mille the pursuit of "truth" becomes a life-long endeavour to keep doubt and understanding in a creative balance, to maintain a constant stance of moral and spiritual relativity. De Mille outlines this relativity in triple echo, as if to emphasize it more. Cineas defends himself in a passage which is a fitting defense of De Mille's early artistic aims and which echoes Martin Luther's famous "Here I stand" defense against heresy:

"I will stand where I am, and in my doubt will still pray to Him, as if, as I have always believed, he indeed hears prayers, then surely he will at some time hear mine . . . if not in this life, yet perhaps in the next." (224)

NOTES

- ¹ M. G. Parks, "Editor's Introduction," in James De Mille, *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, (Oshawa, Ont.: Carleton Univ. Press, 1986), xxix. (One should also recognize that in the 19th century, the Baptists were the members of various Reform Parties, publically arguing against privilege and for universal education and opportunity. They were, in many ways, the radicals.)
- ² Janice Kulyk Keefer. *Under Eastern Eyes: a critical reading of Maritime fiction*. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1987, x.
- ³ James De Mille, *Helena's Household: a tale of Rome in the first century* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1867). (Page references following quotations in the text are from this edition.)
- ⁴ L. J. Burpee, "James De Mille," *Nation* (N.Y.), 83:138 (Aug. 16, 1906), quoted in R. E. Watters, "Introduction," to James De Mille, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), x.
- ⁵ James De Mille, *Martyr of the Catacombs: A tale of ancient Rome*, (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1865). Information about this novel has been scant, usually appearing in bibliographies as being published in "(1858?)." M. G. Parks lists *Helena's Household* as "De Mille's first published book," in 1867 and quotes A. H. De Mill's remark that 1866 was "long before he began to write." ("Strange to Strangers Only," *Canadian Literature* 70 (Autumn 1976), 63.) There is still considerable misunderstanding about when and what De Mille published. *Martyr* is not included in the CIHM microfiche collection of 19th century Canadiana. There is a copy of the book in the University of Detroit Library.
- ⁶ Burpee, x.
- ⁷ Parks, "Editor's Introduction," xxv.
- ⁸ James De Mille, *The Elements of Rhetoric* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1878), 275.
- ⁹ M. G. Parks, "Strange to Strangers Only," *Canadian Literature* 70 (1976), 69.
- ¹⁰ Carole Gerson, "Three Writers of Victorian Canada," in *Canadian Writers and Their Works: Fiction series*, Vol. 1, eds., Lecker, David, Quigly (Downsview, Ont.: ECW Press, 1983), 201.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 206.

- ¹² Douglas E. MacLeod, *A Critical Biography of James De Mille* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1968), 47.
- ¹³ Burpee, quoted in Parks, "Editor's Introduction," xlv.
- ¹⁴ *Rhetoric*, 306.
- ¹⁵ Parks, "Strangers Only," 76.
- ¹⁶ I. E. Bill, *Fifty Years with the Baptist Ministers and Churches of the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (St. John, N.B.: Barnes, 1880), 117. (In 1939, after time had allowed the issue to cool, Longley is more charitable, in that he suggests De Mille's move was "due to a new effort of the Government at Halifax to establish a provincial university." His father-in-law, Dr. Pryor (to whom *Helena's Household* is dedicated), had turned down the Dalhousie position before James was offered it. (R. S. Longley, *Acadia University, 1838-1938*, (Kentville, N.S.: Kentville Publishing, 1939), 77.)
- ¹⁷ Bill, 430.
- ¹⁸ George Patterson, *More Studies in Nova Scotian History* (Halifax: Imperial Publishing, 1941), 85.
- ¹⁹ Longley, 58.
- ²⁰ Bill, 118.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 92. There are many examples of this kind of action in the minutes of the churches, without specific explanations, except that most seem to be on doctrinal grounds. Although Acadia did not require a statement of faith from its faculty members, there was considerable pressure from the Convention to assure that the students taught there would be able to carry on the Baptist traditions.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 100.
- ²⁴ Dunbar Moodie kept a spiritualism diary of about 250 pages and Catherine and Susanna acted as mediums. Spiritualism was popular even among the clergy in Europe and North America except that their activities were usually kept secret because of the prevailing prejudice. See Michael Peterman, "In Search of Agnes Strickland's Sisters," *Canadian Literature* 121 (Summer, 1989), 121.
- ²⁵ Bill, 430.
- ²⁶ James De Mille, *The Cryptogram* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1870), 9.
- ²⁷ Bill, 399.
- ²⁸ Parks, "Editor's Introduction," xxi.
- ²⁹ James De Mille, *The Early English Church* (Halifax, 1877).
- ³⁰ MacLeod, 47.
- ³¹ Quoted in A. R. Bevan, "James De Mille and Archibald MacMechan," *Dalhousie Review*, XXXV, 3 (Autumn 1955), 205.
- ³² Luke 1:1 and Acts 1:1-2.
- ³³ De Mille is here doing something similar with Christian doctrine as the contemporary German theologians were doing with the Scriptures: trying to sift through to find the "historic Jesus." De Mille implies that the Biblical text is too far removed from the original events to achieve a sense of what the "Jewish teacher" was actually like, and seems to see Christianity as a largely Greek and Roman creation. There is a different stream of Christianity, the "British church" of *The Early English Church*,

but that De Mille feels has been destroyed also by the Roman church coming into England to suppress the Pelagian "heresy."

³⁴ Matthew 27:46 KJV.

³⁵ Bevan, 205.

³⁶ George Woodcock, "De Mille and the Utopian Vision," in *The Canadian Novel: Beginnings*, Vol. II, ed. John Moss, (Toronto: NC Press, 1980), 109.

³⁷ De Mille, *Rhetoric*, 275.

³⁸ *English Church*, 11.

³⁹ MacLeod, 26.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

Cornelia C. Hornosty

In the movie, they use pods to make the switch. Very clever — a greenhouse is hidden on a ship in the harbor. Special flowers begin turning up in every home and office. Something invades, eventually makes away with the whole town. Somehow the people just aren't the same as they were before. At first, this alarms and distresses. Wives scream and are hushed up. A few people resist for awhile, hide for a time. Later, everyone finds it so easy: you just fall asleep and it is achieved. What was the problem? In this film, it is not clear whether anyone dies or is reborn, what is destroyed, what is renewed, who is awake, who is asleep. It is not clear who the enemy really is. It is not clear why we keep remaking the story and watching it dozens of times. We revel in its sounds of alarm, but we forget to feel afraid. And we nod off.



POSSIBLE STORMS

JAMAICA KINCAID, *A Small Place*. Collins PS, \$19.95.

BARBARA HARLOW, *Resistance Literature*. Routledge, Chapman & Hall, \$11.95.

LAWRENCE D. KRITZMAN, ed., *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and other Writings 1977-1984*. Routledge, Chapman & Hall, \$35.00.

EACH OF THESE BOOKS makes a distinct, thought-provoking contribution to current discussions of post-coloniality and all that that term implies. Although predictable topics appear *passim* (e.g. the correlation of political and literary power, the means of linguistic oppression, possible methods of liberation, legacies of Frantz Fanon, and so on), the real strength of these books is that each goes beyond such new clichés to explore the convoluted conditions of possibility for a tangible, effective political resistance. Taken as a group these three books constitute a serendipitous triangulation, because here we have illustrations of the practice (Kincaid), study (Harlow), and theory (Foucault) of possible resistance cultures. The writing in each is critically interrogative; reading becomes an act of forced participation. There's no room for lazy/liberal apologetics. And that makes the process disquieting in all senses of the word.

Disquiet, in fact, is the primary and lethal effect of Jamaica Kincaid's all-too-brief *A Small Place*. This is a short, sad, and extraordinarily angry book that lobotomizes the touristic mindset of depoliticized readers. The perfect antidote to Cruise Brochures, *A Small Place* speaks about Antigua from within a context similar to that of Derek Walcott or George Lamming.

Kincaid addresses the peculiarly Caribbean aspects of decolonizing readers and writers; that is, how do you create a text that (1) resists economic and cultural imperialism; (2) seeks to dismantle a culture's self-representations as both delusive and mystifying; but (3) recognizes that these representations fulfil crucial economic and psychic desires of both local and overseas interests? More specifically, how do you convince European and/or North American readers (read maggot-white winter sunseekers) that their paradisaical "getaway spot" is a third world ghetto? Worse, a ghetto that their culture and their own tourism has selfishly created and sustained through various shadings of historical, economic, and political imperialisms? The project is fraught with writerly risks from the outset; most liberal readers, after all, don't like to be caught with their politically-correct designer-swimwear down around their ankles.

A Small Place, in other words, is an intensely irritating and incontrovertibly honest book. Kincaid parodically appropriates that grand expansionist mode — the travel essay — for her own purposes of deconstructive "re-misprision"; throughout she exposes and re-exposes the more fungoid substructures that underlie those sustained images of blue lagoons and happy rhythm-laden natives. Behind the guise of a dispassionate travel reporter her narrator coolly itemizes corruptions in Antiguan political circles, examples of touristic ignorance, and specific forms of historical and economic exploitation. As in Findley's *The Wars*, Kincaid, subtly deploys the open-endedness of that maddening word, "you", thus continually manipulating her readers into either complicity or hypocritical disgust. Unsympathetic readers will rightly foreground Kincaid's shrill arrogance — a kind of perverse Parnassian sneer against anyone unlucky enough to be a non-Antiguan and/or unwise enough to ever have been

a tourist. But such a response would be unfair because partial. Despite its tonal or attitudinal coarseness, its pervasive self-righteousness, and Kincaid's own bizarre (and delusive) denial of self-implication, *A Small Place* is an important and sophisticated irony: a small hit of counter-power, delivered in a deceptively pedestrian idiom against a deceptively benign antagonist.

Although considerably less subtle, Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature* is an equally earnest attempt to trace alternative scenarios to official, fossilized world/literature views. Rejecting from the outset traditional Western categorizations of literature, Harlow bases her study on N'gugi's revolutionary division of all writing into "the aesthetic of oppression and exploitation and of acquiescence with imperialism; and that of human struggle for total liberation". Ambitious, self-consciously preliminary, and bracingly aggressive, the book focuses on little-studied guerrilla/political activist writings (in English) from Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East (with a strong focus on Palestine, Kenya, South Africa, Lebanon, Nicaragua, and Egypt.)

Over five chapters Harlow investigates resistance poetry and narratives, prison memoirs, utopian, dystopian, and post-independence developments. Underpinning each is a commitment to the necessity and possibility of peripheralized groups to reclaim, "re-member" their own amputated histories — to use literature as a re-historicizing process, and as such a site of crucial ideological struggle. For all this admirable idealism, however, *Resistance Literature* is something of a bumpy ride; it is not an altogether successful mixture of introduction, survey, theory, close textual analysis, and proselytizing.

At its best, *Resistance Literature* forces a more elastic definition of metaphors and British legacies, but on N'gugi's tough and demanding dialectic. More particu-

larly, Harlow is able to deploy her considerable skills in "allegorizing" texts to re-direct her readers into their own readings of literature. Hence one of her most off-handed comments on the shape of resistance writing — "the very bareness of the language is part of the offensive" — brilliantly re-focuses the impulses and effects of a text like Kincaid's *A Small Place*. Overall, then, Harlow opens a vast new literary terrain, one offering theoretical, political, and critical enrichment.

Harlow partially derives this kind of hybrid enrichment through a careful use of various contemporary critical theorists, most notably the "subject" of the last book under consideration: *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*. Lawrence Kritzman, the editor of this substantial volume, has performed an enviable act of academic courtesy in this particular compilation. To begin, these sixteen interviews, four lectures and one extract (apparently from the projected fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality*) are important in their own right: the entries are divided into such general topics as "Theories of the Political: History, Power and the Law," "The Politics of Contemporary Life," "The Ethics of Sexuality," and "Notes on the Power of Culture." Many of these pieces appear for the first time in English. The title is a bit misleading, however, since one of Foucault's most interesting interviews ("Power and Sex") is transcribed from a taped conversation made in 1975. As such this volume offers not only an extraordinarily rich variety of insights into Foucault's last ten years, but a fascinating analogue to the major books.

I use "analogue" advisedly because this book is not, as the blurb proclaims, "a guide by Foucault through Foucault's own works." This suggests a kind of autobiographical Coles Notes. Foucault saw the interview genre, rather, not as a site

for simple-minded reduction, but as a strategy for either further exploration, additional demystification, or both. In this sense Kritzman's real contribution is that he provides Foucault one compressed space in which to problematize further our interpretations of his entire *oeuvre*. Readers wanting a simple explanation of what, for example, power really *is* are told, "It would be bold of me indeed if I were to tell you my ideas on this subject are clearer now [1978] than [in 1972]"; what then follows is a meticulous and demanding re-speculation on "the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was . . . while refraining from seeing power everywhere, I also think there is a specificity in these new techniques of training."

Interestingly Foucault emphasizes throughout the truly revolutionary/conversionary potential of these "strategic knowledges"; against those critics who see only the pessimistic arch-reactionary, Foucault himself counters in an anonymous 1980 interview in *Le Monde*:

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply, not judgements, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes — all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms.

For me such poetic language is both beautifully bizarre and jarringly uncharacteristic; for here Foucault is reminiscent of Blake and Shelley, pre-figurative of N'gugi and Kincaid; characteristic of virtually all those resistance writers of Harlow. A point of convergence amongst

resistances, a testimony to the many unpredictabilities contained in Kritzman's volume.

Given Foucault's tremendous importance (and frequent misuse) in contemporary literary criticism and theory, given the fact that these many interviews are spliced with four powerful lectures and an extract (on "The Battle for Chastity"), this volume is indispensable. It represents the possibility of resistance thought at its most demanding.

GARY BOIRE

SUN, RUM & ROMANCE

GÉRARD ETIENNE, *La Reine Soleil levée*. Guérin.
PIERRE KARCH, *Noëlle à Cuba*. Prise de Parole.

THE ACTION OF THESE two novels takes place in a Caribbean country — Haiti in the case of the first, and Cuba in the second; in each case the locale plays an important role in the narrative, but there ends the similarity, for Etienne's récit is very much the insider's view of the place and Karch's the tourist's; Etienne's to be read by those seriously seeking enlightenment about the sorry reality of life in his benighted country and Karch's to be packed for a good read on a vacation trip — perhaps to Cuba.

To begin on the lighter side: *Noëlle à Cuba* is a playful novel whose games begin with its title. It is only marginally about a character called Noëlle, but it *is* about Christmas-time in Cuba with a group of vacationing Montrealers. Among the group is an amateur astrologer called Astrid and a ubiquitous outsider called Icare who has a bathetic encounter with a para-sail operator called Dedalo. An unnamed writer makes occasional incursions into the text with his own text which ironizes on the first, and make weighty statements on philosophical issues. There are intriguing reflections upon representation: 'le but de toute forme d'art est de

multiplier les points de vue,' says the anonymous narrator. One of the main elements of the story is the search for the lost paintings of the Canadian painter James Wilson Morrice whose works represent life in Cuba. Ernest Hemingway enters the narrative in the form of a monument to him made out of the melted-down propellers of the fishing boats of the village immortalized in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Enid Rinseau-Despres, a prunish school-marm, becomes a figure of fun in a comic scene of over-representation when she reads her latest children's book to the exasperated company.

Despite its length, the novel is described within strict limits, both physical and temporal. The physical space is, of course, the island, which we see for the first time as the travellers fly in from Montreal: 'Cuba n'était plus une île quelconque sur laquelle on pouvait construire des systèmes et écrire des romans. Cuba, depuis qu'on l'apercevait, était une île qui baigne dans la mer, qui a ses limites, son corps de femme qu'on convoite et dont on se demande s'il nous rendra heureux ou ridicule.' Since Lise has brought with her a year's worth of outdated newspapers, she keeps up with the frequent past in Montreal and the rest of the world and Liljana evokes her exotic travels as a young woman in Europe. The temporal limits are obvious: 'Les vacances, j'entends surtout celles passées à l'étranger, permettent à chacun d'être ce qu'il voudrait et de vivre ses phantasmes à l'intérieur de parenthèses bien définies, rassurantes, donc, car on sait qu'il est impossible de les déborder.'

The key to the fantasies of the characters — and of the reader — is the mysterious Icare. He is unusual because, although he lives in Toronto, he is a francophone. His charismatic effect is established at the very outset when the even more mysterious Black Widow has him picked out of the hotel bus and

escorted into her car. Throughout the novel he continues to give satisfaction of various kinds to various people: consolation to a bereaved member of the party, safety from a sinister encounter with the local populace to another, a moving Christmas reminder of her desperately-missed family to the grandmotherly Euridice, a reincarnation of a long-lost stranger to one family and the restitution of a lost object to another. For a group of local children he is a benign Pied Piper — 'l'enchanteur venu de quelque pays lointain.'

But in the foreground is adventure, violent because a death is foretold and could have occurred on several different occasions when there are attempts at murder; romantic because there are various couplings on the dance floor, on the beach, in bedrooms. Most encounters end in a satisfying conclusion — though the Black Widow drops out of sight disappointingly early. Events come full circle and end where they began with a flight, but this time a flight back to reality. The passengers return with a sense of a new truth learned: 'le bonheur ne se vit pas au jour le jour comme on est trop porté à le croire, mais il est fait de souvenirs.' The memory that we will retain of this book is that 'les palmiers jetaient sur tout une ombre différente de celle des érables' and the heady mix of sun, rum and romance will have beguiled us even if they have not brought about the same transformations in the reader as in the characters.

If the Cuba of the first novel is an island of palm-fringed beaches and limpid blue sea, the Haiti of *La Reine Soleil levée* is a place of urban pollution, where the lush interior serves to hide squads of vicious officials who swoop down to inflict raids of casual brutality upon the already hard-pressed populace.

The main protagonist is Mathilda, devastated by the sudden, painful paralysis which has stricken her husband Jo

Cannel, and desperate to find a cure for him. In her frantic search, she is trapped in the terrifying space between conflicting elements of Haitian reality: the dehumanizing squalor of the alien hospital on the one hand, and the sinister court of the familiar voodoo priest on the other. Mathilda is 'd'une beauté foudroyante, ce qu'on appelle, dans le pays, une femme dahoméenne de sang propre.' Jo is 'bon vivant, respectueux, ami de tout le monde!' Their understanding is so complete and so self-sufficient, that it causes some envy among their acquaintances; they seem, by their very perfection, to be tempting providence. For their impeccable credentials are no proof against their country's régime. Jo's sickness is a metaphor for the paralysis and impotence of Haitians in the face of the corruption and oppression rife in their country. The rulers 'ont créé un enfer sur une terre autrefois belle, généreuse, parfumée. Avec la complicité des autres dieux, ils nous ont enlevé notre âme.' Of course there is no cure for Jo's illness when the whole hierarchy of the country is sick.

The position of extreme hopelessness galvanizes Mathilda into extreme and quite unpremeditated action. Like the hero of Etienne's earlier novel, *Un Ambassadeur macoute à Montréal* she becomes a magically inspired leader; and like the crowd in Montreal, Mathilda's neighbours rally to her: 'L'espace d'un cillement, voilà une bande de mortels conscients de la dynamique d'un temps qui se fait, d'une présence encore plus riche que le quotidien, celle d'une Noire à l'image des femmes traquées prenant la tête des mouvements d'insurrection.'

In this densely written novel, the two days of Mathilda's calvary are meticulously and movingly documented against the background of the clearly delineated Haitian social order. It is a story of devotion and sacrifice and of the triumph of the human spirit. One suspects that the

critic Léon-François Hoffman is right when he says 'aucun roman n'a jamais, que l'on sache, contribué à réformer quoi que ce soit en Haïti.' If such a reform through literature were possible, *La Reine Soleil levée* would be the novel to bring it about. If it is not, we can be but grateful that Gérard Etienne continues to write in this vein and speaks of the specific in a voice which we all understand.

VIVIEN BOSLEY

D'UN PAYS L'AUTRE

NAÏM KATTAN, *Le Repos et l'oubli*. Hurtubise HMH, \$16.50.

DANIEL POLIQUIN, *L'Obomsawin*. Editions Prise de Parole, \$14.95.

Le Repos et l'oubli est un recueil d'essais qui s'inscrit assez bien dans le prolongement des oeuvres précédentes de l'auteur, toutes plus ou moins placées sous le signe de l'hybridation culturelle. Collection de 20 essais précédés d'une préface de l'auteur, et répartis en deux sections non titrées et du reste assez librement séparées.

Comme à l'habitude, Kattan se révèle d'emblée l'homme "venu d'ailleurs" qui observe et analyse la réalité nord-américaine. Ici cependant, il va plus loin dans sa réflexion, du moins dans certains essais, les plus forts, qui entraînent le reste de l'ouvrage. C'est en gros, mais sans faire injustice au livre, la trace d'un homme qui a baigné dans plusieurs cultures fondatrices (Islam, Judaïsme, Christianisme) et qui réfléchit sur les rapports qu'elles instaurent (et présupposent) entre l'homme et de divin. D'où l'examen de certaines notions essentielles: autorité, pouvoir, prière, écriture, temps, origine, instant/durée, sur lesquelles est centré tout discours contemporain.

Kattan paraît au plus dense dans les premiers essais, e.g. "Temps et saisons," "Suite et succession" puis "Histoire et

destin" où il éclaire pour l'occident moderne, mal instruit, des nuances sans lesquelles l'Islam, le Judaïsme d'aujourd'hui resteraient opaques, et opaques du même coup certains soubresauts et certains anathèmes contemporains. Ainsi, voir Rushdie comme un révélateur de cette vérité en Islam: la littérature est toujours transgression car l'empire de Dieu *est* le monde, dont le Verbe est la Loi (Torah) et la Lecture (Coran). Point de place dans l'ordre de la pure glose, pour l'invention; encore moins pour le rêve. Cet Islam est bien le vrai: le livre de Kattan vient à point pour nous le rappeler.

Ailleurs dans cet ouvrage, soit des réflexions pertinentes, encore que point forcément convaincantes — comme par exemple sur la crise contemporaine du sens, que Kattan déclare analogue à la rupture survenue entre les champs iconique et verbal et constatée dès la Bible et le Coran — soit des remarques plutôt banales, comme sur l'amitié, la connaissance et le savoir, la censure et la tolérance.

La cohérence est souvent le point faible de tout recueil d'essais. *Le Repos et l'oubli* ne fait pas exception, malgré le soin que prend l'auteur de cheviller l'ensemble par la répétition dans le corps de plusieurs textes de la formule du titre. Les cahots sont plus vivement ressentis sur le plan de la syntaxe et du style. Hurtubise HMH nous avait habitués à plus de rigueur rédactionnelle, et plus de vigilance sur ce plan est à recommander. A recommander également de lire ce livre qui, malgré des inégalités inhérentes au genre, est le témoignage intense d'un esprit venu d'un pays d'ailleurs et sincèrement préoccupé de deviner "le sens de l'instant et du monde" d'ici.

C'est d'un tout autre pays que parle Poliquin dans son *Obomsawin* (prendre la phrase comme la réponse à la double question: "De quoi est-ce que ça parle?" et "D'où est-ce que ça parle?"). Sur une structure de reconstruction du passé —

ici thématisé par le procès différé d'un métis, Thomas Obomsawin, peintre célèbre, et qui aurait mis le feu à sa maison de Sioux Junction dont on voulait faire un musée de l'art amérindien — Poliquin exploite très adroitement, et sans jamais décoller de l'attachant récit, l'espace narratologique contemporain.

Le roman est donné à lire comme l'histoire d'un *procès* ("Qui a incendié la maison du peintre?"), mais aussi d'un *processus* ("Comment trouver la paix par l'écriture?").

Si le narrateur-déprime (le Déprimé), comme le François du *Grand Meaulnes*, apprend au contact d'un autre le sens de la vie, et du même coup la signification de la sienne, il a en outre la révélation de la véracité du texte définitif. Il règle ses comptes avec lui-même, avec l'écriture, et découvre la source de la joie ou la fin de la déprime, autre forme ici de la névrose. Après quoi, logiquement, il ne resterait plus que le silence. Rien là le nouveau, mais l'on reste bien en pleine réflexion contemporaine . . .

Au coeur de l'intrigue, se trouve le combat du narrateur avec la langue. Des trois biographies du peintre amérindien — du reste appelé "l'alingue" — les deux premières (l'un en anglais, l'autre en français "international") parlaient faux. Seule la troisième, appelée par le retournement linguistique du biographe, sera la bonne car écrite en français d'ici et de maintenant, porteur des effets de réel canadien évoqués plus haut. Elle est en fait un acte de foi ("autodafé") thématisé et ritualisé dans le roman par la destruction par le feu d'une biographie ancienne ("la pourriture de menterie" p. 154) afin d'incendier la maison de Thomas.

Pour faire justice à ce court roman "romanesque" mais qui est cependant un fascinant traitement de techniques narratives modernes, il faudrait parler de son écriture "immédiate" qui met le lecteur en pleine situation, selon un mode de

saisie du réel quasi cinématographique (grâce en particulier à l'emploi du présent) ; et parler aussi de sa forte valeur documentaire : ce Canada, à la "jonction" (Sioux Junction) des trois cultures fondatrices (d'où la nécessité de trois biographies?) est bien le nôtre. Du reste Sioux Junction est bien donné à diverses reprises comme le lieu de l'origine, le point de départ d'où tout et tous sont partis. Y revenir pour y voir clair, pour faire la lumière (sur cette affaire de feu) au cours d'un procès officiel ne peut donc manquer de mener à des révélations. Et l'on reconnaîtra la vitalité, mais aussi les mesquineries, les complexes, la rudesse, l'intolérance et la fascination de l'argent et du sens des affaires qui caractérisent le monde actuel.

L'Obomsawin est un livre à mettre entre le plus de mains possible. Il ne dépasserait pas un programme universitaire de littérature canadienne.

CLAUDE BOUYGUES

"DEUX SOLITUDES" APPRIVOISÉES

KATHY MEZEI, *Bibliography of Criticism on English and French Literary Translations in Canada/Bibliographie de la Critique des Traductions Littéraires Anglaises et Françaises au Canada*, Ottawa Univ. Press, \$19.95.

ROBERT MARTEAU, *Voyage to Vendée*, trans. David Homel. Exile Edns, \$9.95.

Dans un pays comme le nôtre où il existe une barrière quasi insurmontable entre les deux cultures et langues nationales, la traduction implique *a priori* quelque chose de positif. En pratiquant une brèche dans ce mur de silence, généré et entretenu par nos "deux solitudes", elle contribue, symboliquement et concrètement,

à promouvoir le dialogue entre nos deux cultures. Vus sous cet angle, *Bibliography of Criticism on English and French Literary Translations in Canada / Bibliographie de la critique des traductions littéraires anglaises et françaises au Canada* de Kathy Mezei et la traduction de *Voyage en Vendée* que signe David Homel représentent un effort considérable dans cette direction.

L'enseignement de la traduction pour former des traducteurs existe à peine depuis trente ans. Ceci explique en partie la raison pour laquelle il existe de graves lacunes en matière de textes critiques et théoriques portant sur la traduction littéraire, champ d'études qui, au Canada, n'en est qu'à ses débuts. La bibliographie commentée de Kathy Mezei vient à temps remplir une de ces lacunes et représente donc un indispensable outil de travail tant pour les chercheurs que pour les enseignants et les étudiants oeuvrant dans ce domaine. Cette recherche, qui se veut un travail de "filature", comporte 581 entrées. Celles-ci recouvrent les quatre dernières décennies (1950-1986), et se subdivisent en 9 sections : articles, bibliographies, livres, entrevues, introductions, comptes rendus de fond, comptes rendus, thèses et, en dernier lieu, notes des traducteurs. Par ailleurs, cet ouvrage fouillé et bien structuré, auquel ont collaboré Patricia Mason et Maureen Hole, témoigne d'un respect inné non seulement des deux langues (les annotations étant soit en français soit en anglais), mais aussi des traducteurs littéraires qui, en fin d'ouvrage, sont arrachés à leur anonymat traditionnel par le biais d'un index qui leur est consacré. Ce travail enregistre l'histoire de la traduction littéraire au Canada et offre, par ricochet, une base solide pour les recherches futures.

Dans sa préface à la traduction des *Tableaux parisiens*, de Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin avança en 1923 l'hypothèse

selon laquelle la traduction se situe à mi-chemin de la création littéraire et de la critique. De nos jours, cette hypothèse n'est plus contestée, la traduction étant reconnue comme discipline connexe de la critique. A cet égard notamment, les notes du traducteur jouent un rôle incontestable dans la documentation des procédés de traduction. Or, il est regrettable que David Homel se soit abstenu d'incorporer à *Voyage To Vendée* des commentaires sur les opérations auxquelles il s'est livré au cours de sa rédaction. Cependant, cette traduction confirme à nouveau un fait: pour qu'il y ait "bonne" traduction, la prédilection du traducteur doit aller vers l'auteur qu'il traduit. David Homel a, en effet, à son actif plusieurs traductions de textes de Robert Marteau parmi lesquelles on trouve: *Mount-Royal* (1982), *Pig-Skinning* (1984) et *River Without End: A Logbook of the Saint-Lawrence* (1987).

Sa connaissance du style alambiqué et de l'univers imaginaire hermétique de l'auteur lui ont certes été de bon secours, car *Voyage To Vendée* met indéniablement en évidence sa virtuosité. A titre d'exemple, notons que cette traduction littéraire n'est pas "inflationniste," selon l'expression de Steiner. En effet, le texte source se résume à 88 pages, et le texte cible, lui, à 89 pages. De plus, le traducteur s'est gardé d'adopter le parti de la rationalisation, de la clarification. Ce qui n'est pas "clair" dans l'original conserve son mystère dans la traduction, preuve irréfutable que le sens profond de l'oeuvre n'a pas été déformé. Par ailleurs, il ne remanie jamais arbitrairement la ponctuation, et réussit ainsi à respecter la rythmique de la prose marteauienne. Dans ce sens, David Homel s'inscrit dans le courant des traducteurs littéraires qui, parce qu'ils privilégient "la lettre" du texte source, parviennent à en rendre l'altérité.

ANNE BROWN

CULTURAL MEMORY

ANTONINO MAZZA, *The Way I Remember It*, with music written and performed by Aldo Mazza, and with their parents Domenico and Angela. Trans-Verse Productions, \$11.95 (record or cassette).

IN ITS EDITORIAL on the death of Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Tel Quel* wrote that this was more than just Italy's loss, for 'we are all Italian intellectuals' in the sense that so much of our cultural history has been written there. Antonino Mazza — who has produced exceptional translations of Pasolini, the first to be done in Canada — is concerned with this paradoxical universality of a particular history. In this he echoes Pasolini's concern with the cultural past as evidenced by the personal present. So keenly did Pasolini feel this that we find him lamenting, in *La Divina mimesis*, the disappearance of certain physical types, for with them vanished an entire history. This is, admittedly, a populist history based on an oral tradition — hence the great importance Pasolini attached to dialect forms — and so it is fitting that Mazza should address this theme in a recording which mixes his own lyrics with the music of his brother Aldo.

The cover of the album, *The Way I Remember It*, reproduces, on the front, a photograph of Antonino and Aldo taken when they were very young, together with their mother. Along the left edge a photo of an office tower extends over the back cover, and is superimposed on a picture of Antonino as a child, seated in a pedal car. Here, in visual terms, are his themes, as announced on the album cover, which speaks of the swallowing up of difference experienced by those who emigrate to such homogenizing cultures as our own — what Pasolini referred to as 'anthropological genocide.' The album proposes a rediscovery of ethnicity to counteract this levelling effect, and commemorates Mazza's own discovery of his father's

ability (unknown to him before) to accompany with the tambourine a recitation from his vast storehouse of Calabrian dialect poems in the *altercatio* mode, a mode which extends back to Theocritus and Virgil.

That recitation is reproduced in the album and is its center, the (re)discovery of the father who is absent from the photo on the cover. Antonino's words flow out of this poem and Aldo's music takes us back into it, although the distinction is undermined both by the musicality of Antonino's words and the resistance to sonority of Aldo's electronic compositions (and in that use of technology we hear at once the alienating factors of which the album cover speaks and of their recuperation into cultural memory).

The first poem speaks of the "cosmic ear" which contained the house into which Antonino was born, of the "nightingale" which was between his mother's lips, of waiting for his father to return from the sea, and of a dream which contains the word which contains the house. Mazza's talents are most fully revealed in their lyric mode, as in this poem. Yet, paradoxically, he declaims his poetry, sacrificing an aural lyricism for the declarative formality of the oral tradition, a sacrifice which is redeemed by the music.

In addition to "Our House is in a Cosmic Ear," the album contains other lyrics, such as "Fuoco"; "Viaggio," a poem of journeying ("home so soon after so long"); "Muscoli" and "In the Threshold" on the immigrant experience; an elegy ("Giovannina"); "Release the Sun," a poem about poetry ("Poetry is about learning about sailing a boat / in the rain / in the rain and one acre of light"); and an epigram called "Doors": "Places we go through / to come from."

But the heart of the album remains that wonderful *calabrese* poem recited by Domenico Mazza, "Si si veru poeta." A series of riddles with solutions, it contains

the other poems on the disc, just as its percussive accompaniment contains Aldo's music. "Tell me," asks the poet, "who does its journeying with no feet"; "who sends you greetings from afar"; "who while breaking remains intact." "The ship," he replies; "the letter"; "the sea." While listening to this album I remembered when Antonino and I were students in Toronto, and the conversations about Calvino and Eco, but I also remembered my grandfather who, like the Mazza family from Calabria, never alluded to the past, and who was never heard to speak a word of dialect. "My house is your house, take it." Thank you, Tonino.

RICHARD CAVELL

IMAGE/TEXT

NAOMI JACKSON GROVES, *One Summer in Quebec: A. Y. Jackson in 1925: A Family View*. Penumbra, \$14.95.

ASHELEIGH MOORHOUSE, *Art, Sight and Language: A Reading/Writing of Some Contemporary Canadian Art*. Penumbra, \$21.95.

FROM 1921 TO 1947, A. Y. Jackson would go on sketching tours (usually in early spring) downriver from Quebec City along the North and South shores of the St. Lawrence. However, in 1925, owing to teaching commitments at the Ontario College of Art, Jackson missed his spring tour, going instead in the summer of that year, and spending most of his time on the Ile d'Orleans. Accompanying Jackson were the ethnologist Marius Barbeau, and Arthur Lismer, like Jackson a member of the Group of Seven. The 59 pencil sketches reproduced here are a record of that trip.

Naomi Jackson Groves (A. Y.'s niece) has provided a fifty-page introduction in which she describes the sketches (now in the McMichael collection at Kleinburg, where Jackson himself went to live towards the end of his life) and how they

came to be. The sketches are valuable as documents of this trip and as sources for paintings by Jackson, some of which are reproduced here in black and white. It was perhaps Barbeau's presence which lent Jackson's sketches a documentary quality, with their precision, their annotations and their measurements, a quality greatly suffused in the paintings derived from them. Groves points out that Barbeau and Jackson were lifelong friends, and confirms that the paintings by Jackson which serve as illustration to Barbeau's *The Downfall of Temlaham* (1928) were done expressly for that book (considered to be one of the most beautiful produced in Canada). Jackson's sketches have much in common, in fact, with illustrations he did for W. H. Blake's translation (published 1924) of Adjutor Rivard's *Chez Nous*; indeed, they have so much in common, in some instances, that one is left wanting more information on how Groves (who is the cataloguer of A.Y.'s works) came to assign these particular sketches to that particular year, especially since none of the sketches appears to bear a date. Groves remarks rather curiously, in this context, that some of the sketches "would seem to be illustrations for some work along the lines of the already published *Chez Nous*," without connecting the sketches to that work itself.

We tend to elide the importance of the fact that most of the Group provided illustrations for literary texts, that their work derived from the textual milieu of such magazines as *Studio*, and that their work in design made them acutely aware of the interaction of text and image. It is precisely the imbrication of textual with artistic practice which Asheleigh Moorhouse seeks to confront in *Art, Sight and Language*, a "reading/writing" of six contemporary Canadian artists: Shelagh Alexander, Janice Gurney, Rae Johnson, Joanne Tod, Jeff Wall, and Shirley Wiitala. These six readings are preceded by a

theoretical introduction in which Moorhouse (himself an artist) discusses the notion of "the subject who makes art and of the subject who looks at it," drawing on the writings of Sartre, Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Foucault, Barthes, Kristeva and Derrida in the process.

Seeking to elucidate a relationship between the biological self and the concept of the Subject, Moorhouse begins his introduction with a discussion of cell biology. The essential connection Moorhouse makes is between the contingency factor operant within DNA molecules and the processual nature of the Subject; he complicates the ambiguity of the Subject further by arguing for the necessity of a Subject position which is neither Male nor Female but androgynous (again employing a biological analogy). Moorhouse's avowed program is, thus, not to provide a "critique" or an "analysis" of these works, but rather "a very personal and admittedly passionate reading/writing" of them. Passion, however, is never in evidence, and one would think that the possibility of a "personal" reading (rather than one constituted by the codes governing the possibilities of such a reading) would be undermined by the theoretical stance elaborated in the introduction.

One of Moorhouse's central concerns is the "male gaze" and the ways in which it is deconstructed by artists such as Janice Gurney in her 1982 mixed media work, "Portrait of Me as My Grandmother's Faults," where the full-length portrait of a naked woman has white lines superimposed on it which divide it into neat parcels, as if the woman were a piece of meat, or perhaps an anatomical specimen, the artist thereby making us see "the violence of the look." Similarly, Gurney breaks down likenesses in her self portraits, indicating the futility of any attempt to fix the Subject.

In both his theoretical introduction, and throughout his essays, Moorhouse

states that ideology has no place in art, or in art criticism. It is ironic, then, that one of his best readings occurs in the chapter on Joanne Tod, whose work foregrounds many of the ideological assumptions of art and society. Tod's 1984 work in oil called "Shh . . . They Own the Restaurant" is seen as a meditation on the "comfortable" nature of Realism. Just as that comfort is undermined by certain technical inconsistencies, so the comfort of the scene is undermined for some of the viewers within it by the presence of difference — in this case, racial difference, and hence the title. Thus, Realism and racism are seen to have certain ideological underpinnings in common relating to the colonization of difference.

The chapter on Jeff Wall is likewise very good. Moorhouse argues that Wall's use of cibachrome transparencies, enlarged often to lifesize, raises immediately the issue of presence, while the quite clearly *posed* nature of the images they contain undermines it, revealing the image as a signifier rather than a signified, and in this context the association of the cibachrome blowups with advertising is instructive.

The final reading, of Shirley Wiitasalo's work, becomes a writing, a prose poem in its own right/write, but it is at this point that the greatest gap in Moorhouse's program becomes evident: why must we write art to bring it into being? What is this fundamental interrelationship between text and image? Moorhouse is aware of the importance of the question, but never gets far enough out of what he calls the "semiotic muskeg" to address it fully. Yet, if *Art, Sight and Language* lacks the theoretical sophistication evident in Philip Monk's *Struggles With the Image* (1988), which overlaps with it considerably in subject matter, it remains important for its often successful readings of artists who would otherwise remain too little known. And although there are some serious slips

in the production of this volume (including wandering footnotes, typos, and a reproduction which fails to show the details discussed in the text), values at Penumbra Press (winner of the George Wittenborn Award of Excellence for publishing in the visual arts) remain admirably high.

RICHARD CAVELL

OPACITY VS. ACCESSIBILITY

J. MICHAEL YATES, *Torpor: Collected Fiction, 1960-1978, Volume 2*. Cacanadadada, n.p.

LINDA LEITH, ed., *Telling Differences: New English Fiction from Quebec*. Véhicule, \$12.95.

LESLEY KRUEGER, *Hard Travel*. Oberon, \$25.95/12.95.

"SMOKESTACK IN THE DESERT," the first of several fabular pieces in J. Michael Yates' *Torpor*, begins at the end: civilization has diminished to a few attendants stoking a pollutant furnace and welcoming the rare straggler who, attracted by the mysterious smokestack piercing the clouds of toxic fumes it emits, has made a successful journey across the desert. But we, presumably part of the stragglers, are warned that the stack and furnace "won't confront you as mystery for long. You might say there aren't any mysteries here." The pieces that follow are, as Yates' dedication asserts, "For the suicides, both swift and slow," perhaps the slowest of all being contained in the concluding fable, that of photographer Sono Nis whose passion for introspection reduces his life to an absurd, frenzied attempt to record everything about his past, present, and future self. His future has already been destroyed since he has rendered himself sterile with his "deadly routine" of x-raying his interior self several times a day. In Sono Nis' journal is to be found another warning: "Come out of your musty studios and

miserable dreams. While you destroy yourselves with your paintings and your literature, attempting to falsify time and space, your own present is passing — without you.” These warnings bode ill for the future of a civilization whose art has grown so introspective that it fails to establish any connection to its audience.

Ironically, Yates’ own *Torpor* provides the most extreme example of introspection transforming potentially exciting pieces of fiction into obscure *tours de force*. One of the epigraphs to Yates’ first volume of collected fiction, *Torque*, a passage drawn from Paul Valéry’s *The Art of Poetry*, reveals that Yates recognizes the risks that he takes: “Obscurity, a product of two factors. If my mind is richer, more rapid, freer, more disciplined than yours, neither you nor I can do anything about it.” Opacity does have its rewards when the dense fog yields glimmers of beauty, poignancy, insight, or provocation; in *Torpor*, however, opacity produces little but tedium. Weaving an overwhelming sense of the scientific, technical, and mechanical properties of life into an occasional sense of its poetry, the dismally prophetic “Smokestack in the Desert,” the vividly etched narrative of “The Sinking of the Northwest Passage,” and the intricate description of the web-weaving process of “*Latrodectus Schoice-tans*” provide a compelling introduction to this collection. However, with the perversity of “A Naive and Straightforward Narrative,” the collection becomes increasingly monotonous.

By contrast, there are spontaneity and variety wanting in *Telling Differences*, edited by Linda Leith, which joins the growing number of anthologies devoted to “New English Fiction from Quebec.” Widely differing cultural backgrounds and a variety of styles and interests prevent tedium, although the self-consciousness of these writers is mannered and therefore annoying. While the stories by

Ann Diamond, Kenneth Radu, P. Scott Lawrence, Robyn Sara, Stephen Henighan, Ludmilla Bereshko, Michael Mirolla, Richard Lanoie, Yesim Ternar, George Szanto, and T. F. Rigelhof are generally competent several are also seriously flawed by pretension; however, two very different stories emerge as truly superior. First is a story of fragile beauty, Renato Trujillo’s “The Winding Staircase.” Set in Buenos Aires, this story traces the initial resistance but ultimate initiation of the narrator, a grocery store clerk, to the dangerously enticing world of beauty, art, and dreams when he and his friend Jorge are invited into the home of a great Argentinian writer. Equally successful is Trevor Ferguson’s “Thundering.” In forceful prose, it tells the story of how Trudy obtains the privilege to ride in the pack with the other bikers.

Several of the stories in Lesley Krueger’s first published book, *Hard Travel*, also challenge the dire prophecies of Yates’ *Torpor*. Despite a few shortcomings Krueger generally tells her stories well. The collection opens with an evocative description of Lake Atitlan in “Guatemala.” Monroe, on assignment to photograph the beauties of Guatemala, confronts the mediocrity of his talents and his life as he searches for an image to give his pictures a fulcrum.

A girl with a deformed eye gives him hope. Most of Krueger’s stories are haunted by odd faces. “Talk about Suffering Here Below,” tells the story of a rape victim who is deceived by a trustworthy face. In “The Way We Live Today,” Richard discovers and attempts to adapt to his wife’s new “face,” when she becomes a lesbian after the birth of their child. Three of the remaining stories are uneven, although “Mary Ellen Among the Tarahumara” has a fine ending: when her son constructs a chessboard from souvenir carvings and baskets, a mother realizes that he is remembering his father,

a face she wishes to escape. The story that completes *Hard Travel* — “Merle-oh!” — is the strongest in the collection. Here, Krueger shows her own face and uses the first-person voice. The narrator undertakes the “hard travel” to the buried memory of Merle’s black face, a perilous undertaking captured in the epigraph from Thomas à Kempis prefacing Krueger’s book. “They who travel seldom come home holy.”

LESLEY D. CLEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL THEATRE

JOHN KRIZANC, *Tamara*. Stoddart, 1989, \$24.95.

A COLLABORATION OF John Krizanc and director Richard Rose, *Tamara* was first performed in Toronto by the Necessary Angel Theatre Company on May 8, 1981. The present text is based on the third production, which was staged in November, 1987 at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City. The action takes place on January 10 and 11, 1927 at Gabriele d’Annunzio’s country villa, Il Vittoriale degli Italiani (The Shrine of Italian Victories), where Mussolini is supposedly keeping Italy’s “greatest poet and patriot” under house arrest. Each scene (there are one hundred and nine altogether) is set in one of the villa’s many ostentatious rooms, stairways and passageways, and the audience participates directly in the action by observing and following one or more of the ten characters from room to room. Because the scenes are performed “simultaneously with different actors . . . often playing as many as eight scenes at one time,” several stages are required, a complex structure which Krizanc and Rose call “environmental theatre.”

The current script includes an engaging foreword by Alberto Manguel, and is de-

signed to facilitate the reading of the play: the text “is divided into twenty-one different sections — A through U — with each section approximately a unit of time in which a number of scenes occur simultaneously.” My only complaint about the editorial apparatus is that while the text is generally free of typographical errors there are a number of inaccuracies in the spelling of Italian words: examples include “Padoua” for Padova, p. 76; “Toccatta” for toccata, p. 144; “patrono” for padrone, p. 161; “Capice” for Capisce, p. 179; “Italiano” for Italiani, p. 198; and “Turina” for Torino, p. 283.

On one level *Tamara* is a Brechtian allegory of Italian society during the 1920’s and 1930’s, the period that gave rise to fascism. The spectators purchase passports, rather than tickets, which they are required to submit to the sneering fascist policeman upon entering the theatre. There are also stringent regulations governing the audience’s participation. Each spectator must remain within his/her designated group and is permitted to follow a different character only when two characters meet. We are further warned: “do not talk, do not get in the way, do not go wandering about on your own, and . . . do not stand in front of a door. . . .” The behaviour of both the characters and the audience is closely monitored by the secret police and by a snarly Captain who informs us that “Anyone found wandering around on their own will be deported.” If one belongs to a large group of spectators it is easy to miss a good deal of the action. Thus what appears initially to be a radical and liberating theatrical experience is undermined by a tyrannical superstructure. Paradoxically, however, the play, whether read or observed in performance, becomes, as Manguel observes, “the exact antithesis of fascism, because it condemns the audience to the unbearable freedom of a concerned and active witness.”

The title of the play refers to Tamara de Lempicka, the "aristocratic French-speaking Polish exile" and art-deco painter who has been invited to paint d'Annunzio's portrait. The character is based on the historical de Lempicka, whose decadent paintings and social life inspired Krizanc to write the play. The relationship between de Lempicka and d'Annunzio, whose libertine life was as celebrated as his exotic and morbid art, is similar to all other relationships in the play: sadistic, obsessive, and spiritually empty, like fascism itself. Although the relationship constitutes only one trajectory of the action (another plot-line revolves around a murder mystery), it addresses a subject which is central to all of Krizanc's plays, namely the artist's place in society. The most celebrated Italian writer and war hero of the early twentieth century, d'Annunzio could have helped to prevent Mussolini's rise to power. (A few years earlier, at the age of 54, d'Annunzio had enlisted in and influenced Italy's decision to join World War I.) His response to the fascist regime, however, was to yield passively to exile in exchange for material well-being and a steady supply of cocaine.

Tamara has had a distinguished stage history, winning the Dora Mavor Moore Award, the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle Award, and the Mexican Association of Theatre Critics and Journalists Award. Yet while the play's creators purport that its serious critique of decadence in politics and culture has universal appeal, *Tamara* has primarily attracted affluent North American audiences and critics, many of whom have ignored its darker themes, delighting instead in the chase of characters and in the lavish buffet catered during the "intermezzo" in d'Annunzio's stately dining room. "Tamara," wrote one critic, "is not to be taken too seriously. It is basically a clever, diverting whodunit" (Mel Gussow, *The*

New York Times, 3 December 1987). Ticket prices, including the buffet and a champagne cocktail upon admission, have ranged from \$85 to \$135 per performance. And in order to appreciate the play's multiple structures audiences have been advised to see it more than once. In its limited accessibility the play is problematic and decidedly anti-Brechtian.

VIVIANA COMENSOLI

STRUCTURE OF BELIEF

RINA LASNIER, *Ou Le Langage des Sources: Essais*. Estuaire, Ecrits des Forges, \$8.00.

RINA LASNIER'S ELEVATED conception both of poetry and the poet's role as part of a firm structure of belief has been a feature of the Quebec literary scene for fifty years. Her output of work has been steady and impressive, her intellectual interests wide. Few comparisons can be made with poets in English Canada, although Clément Moisan's study of analogies with Margaret Avison (whose work is minimal, quantitatively) has opened up possibilities for further exploration. At first glance, writers of Rina Lasnier's own generation such as Dorothy Livesay or P. K. Page might offer parallels. But the former's commitment to socialism does not enter into her perception of the imaginative process, and in the latter's work it is difficult to detect any expression of personal belief. And both these writers are deliberate adventurers in modernity. On the other hand, Rina Lasnier's work celebrates a unity where the word is part of a sacred cosmos and echoes the intellectual perception of a moral order expressed through the Christian symbolism of the Catholic church. As conscious as anyone can be of the way in which the creative act occurs in the mind, she answers the "*lucidité profanatrice*" of Valéry's *La Jeune Parque* with *La Malemer*, whose marine imagery of the subconscious

merges in the birth of the poem with Christian revelation.

It would be difficult for any collection of critical essays to rival the breadth and depth of those appearing in *Liberté* (Nov.-Dec. 1976), but the short studies in this volume can be perceived as a kind of addenda to that issue. There is, for example, an updated selective bibliography by Lucie Bourassa which supplements the exhaustive study published by Yvan Lajoie.

Jean-Pierre Issenhuth finds Rina Lasnier's *oeuvre* comparable to a caravan winding its way with slow dignity across the landscape of Africa, its starting point unknown, its destination eternity. He notes the love of beauty which ties her to the mystic theology of the Eastern Church, analyses the role of nature in her work, and comments on the densely packed verses which recall certain Oriental poetry, "*Les vers ont horreur du vide, comme la nature.*" In a stimulating but somewhat impressionistic sketch, Monique Bosco uses the cathedral as a symbol, first to link Rina Lasnier's successive variations on a theme with Monet's series of shimmering façades, and second to present the whole work as a solidly built stone edifice, constructed "*pierre à pierre. Vers à vers. Prière après prière.*"

André Brochu contributes a perceptive analysis of the poet's short poems (he limits the discussion to quatrains and tercets) which, he believes, are the seeds from which the longer poems grow. He also touches on the question — as vexed in French as in English — of the modern use of classical imagery, without nevertheless pointing out the obvious fact that, sad though it may be, classical figures have ceased to carry for most readers the electric charge of subliminal associations which used to be the common property of the reading public. In much of Rina Lasnier's work, one also has to contend with a heavy freight of biblical references

which, in spite of the archetypal associations commonly attached to them, are not always immediately accessible as poetic experience.

The interest of the collection, laudatory for the most part and somewhat uneven in quality, lies also in its reflection of the increasing cosmopolitanism of the Quebec literary scene which has, since 1960, developed its own sophistication. Critics have been arriving in the last few years who bring, along with their French culture, an experience of other languages, literatures, and places — Spanish, for example. It is a healthy sign to find someone noticing analogies between Lasnier and Near Eastern poets. But it seems to me foolhardy to make judgements about her work in English without being fully conversant both with the nuances of the language itself and the changes which have taken place in poetic expression since the earlier part of the century. There are real gaps in this critical field which need to be filled by informed studies on the osmosis which can occur between French and English not just at the level of vocabulary and image, but, a more subtle matter, between the rhythmic patterns of two languages co-existing in the poet's mind. Rina Lasnier's own statements about her debt to Francis Thompson and Gerard Manley Hopkins (neither of them appropriate models for the young writer) would provide a starting point for such a study and offer an unusual angle from which to observe the development of this Quebec poet.

GWLADYS DOWNES

AMBITION

L. M. MONTGOMERY, *Along the Shore: Tales by the Sea*, edited by Rea Wilmhurst. McClelland & Stewart, \$19.95.

Along the Shore, the second collection of Montgomery work to be rescued from

obscurity by editor Rea Wilmshurst, contains 16 short stories linked thematically by the sea. With one exception, these stories were written before 1908, that is, during Montgomery's apprentice years, when she was learning how to deal with weaknesses in her writing and build on strengths. In order to develop as a writer Montgomery had to rise above limitations imposed by the literary fashions of her day and by the restrictions of the facts of her life.

The stories in *Along the Shore* catch her at a time in her career when she was starting to realize her ambition. In the first place, the stories reflect Montgomery's markets — children's periodicals and homemaker magazines, publications which demand superficial treatment of the subject, one-dimensional characters and happy endings. Not surprisingly then, the stories are populated with beautiful proud women, handsome noble men, faithful children and dogs. For the most part, theme is obscure, story line predictable, although the writing is deft enough.

But it is when romance gives way to passion, sentimentality to emotion and stereotype to character, that the game turns exciting. "A Strayed Allegiance" begins with the main character, Easterbrook Elliott, a cold fish if ever there was one, engaged to beautiful and wealthy Marian Lesley. Then he sets eyes on the magnificent, Magdalen Crawford, an unspoiled girl from the cove, and is swept away. While there is still a lot of melodrama going on here, the characters are able to rise above it. They are real people who feel deeply and, because of their feelings, make decisions which change the outcome of the story and of their lives.

It is evident in the writing itself that Montgomery struggled with her writing. "A Strayed Allegiance" (1897) contains the two following descriptions: "The sun, red as a smouldering ember, was half

buried in the silken violet rim of the sea; the west was a vast lake of saffron and rose and ethereal green, through which floated the curved shallop of a thin new moon, slowly deepening from lustreless white, through gleaming silver, into burnished gold, and attended by one solitary, pearl-white star"; "The houses . . . seemed like . . . larger shells washed up by the sea, so grey and bleached were they from long exposure to sea winds and spray." Clearly, her penchant for purple prose was being brought under artistic control in the concise, apt simile, and this control happens only with the extended effort of artist. Character descriptions, too, indicate that Montgomery worked toward an awareness that specific details bring a character to life and general terms create stereotypes.

Long before 1930, when "A House Divided Against Itself," the last story in this collection, was written, Montgomery had learned to reach for the particular that makes the difference, but in the book under review, this story is our strongest evidence of her achievement. Here, she gives us two crusty old fishermen cousins, Big George and Little George, who, after living together for thirty years, have a serious falling out over a naked woman. Big George is five foot one; he knits socks and writes poetry and has anchors tattooed on the backs of his hands: "He was a Liberal in politics and has Laurier's picture hanging over his bed." Little George is six foot two; he cooks up pea soups and clam chowders and his picture of Sir John Macdonald hangs over the clock shelf: "He had a harmless hobby of collecting skulls from the old Indian graveyard."

Montgomery's voice speaks a lilting, lyrical sea. Her characters' dialogue is, for the most part, gentle. Her horizon is gracious, her hills swell softly, her sea is sparkling, her gales are seldom more than bracing. Storms and drownings occur, to be sure, but not with the onerous dark

quality which is always present in the writing of, say, another Maritimer, Alistair MacLeod.

The greater threat of the sea in Montgomery's work (a threat presented metaphorically in several scenes where unaware characters become caught in caves and coves by tides) is the manner in which it traps and holds those born and bred to it, so that they can never leave, not even if they try. In "The Magical Bond of the Sea," the first story in the collection, Nora Shelley tries to leave by letting herself be adopted and educated by a rich couple. Her return at the end of the story appears to be a happy ending. However, the writing at this point takes on a disquieting tone which suggests that Nora has chosen the easy way out, that the more difficult choice of staying out there would have allowed her greater freedom of growth.

After her marriage, Montgomery returned to Prince Edward Island only to visit. Perhaps she knew that she had to keep her distance in order to maintain perspective and objectivity. Perhaps, too, she knew that to seek discomfort is to sharpen self-knowledge and self-confidence which, in turn, allows full self-expression.

CECELIA FREY

UN PAYS INCONNU

YVES BEAUCHEMIN, *Du sommet d'un arbre*. Québec/Amérique, \$9.95.

ANDRÉ BROCHU, *La Visée critique*. Boréal, n.p.

Du sommet d'un arbre: journal is a collection of four texts broadcast on Radio-Canada between 1979 and 1985. Self-reflexive and impressionistic, these diaries provide glimpses of the life and times of Yves Beauchemin, their first-person narrator and chief character, from his early childhood in the 1940s in Clova, Abitibi, to his adulthood in Montréal in the 1980s. "Mon père travaillait pour les Améri-

cains," and "Je fus le premier de ma classe à utiliser dans une composition l'expression 'ruban d'argent' pour désigner une rivière. Le choc que cela causa dépasse toute description," the sentences that begin and end the first section of "Enfance," the opening journal, introduce important themes of "cette auto-psychanalyse pour diffusion publique."

Born in 1941 in Noranda, the young child, who already wore "des lunettes aux verres épais," moved to Clova in 1946, where his father worked for "une filiale de l'*International Paper* de New York." In this isolated company town, the doctor, the general manager of the company, and the priest were the "trois piliers" of society; the arrival of the train was "le grand événement de la journée"; and forest fires, especially the "grand feu" of 1953, were objects of both fascination and terror. Beauchemin enjoyed these surroundings, yet his bad eyesight and poor physical co-ordination led him to the intellectual pursuits of books, films, music, and, ultimately, his own verbal compositions. These pleasures, introduced to him by his mother, who inoculated him with "le virus de la lecture," and encouraged by his grandfather, who "lisait comme un enragé," became even more available in Joliette, where the family moved when Beauchemin was thirteen, and in Montréal, where he moved in 1962 to attend university.

References to books and music help both the content and form of the three diaries set in Montréal that comprise the bulk of *Du sommet d'un arbre*. Balzac, Jules Romain, and Proust mark stages of Beauchemin's reading — and writing. The source of his most profound happiness, and, in some ways, of his best esthetic inspirations, however, is still his family. This collection of diaries is most importantly a series of illuminations about Yves Beauchemin as son, husband, and father,

and as lover and creator of aural and verbal artifacts.

For the anglophone reader, however, perhaps Beauchemin's observations about his role in Québec society are even more interesting. Introduced in the description of his father as working "pour les Américains," the theme of cultural alienation continues in his designation of Montréal as becoming, because of the new construction of the 1960s and 1970s, "un minable succédané de New York." It was Montréal, nevertheless, that made Beauchemin discover that he was "québécois," and the 1970s that gave him hope, with the rise of René Lévesque and the PQ victory in 1976, of an independent Québec. In March 1985, when *Du sommet d'un arbre* concludes, Beauchemin still admires Lévesque. Yet he worries profoundly about the good faith of Mulroney as he negotiates a new deal for Québec with Lévesque and the "tendance aveugle" of Québec "à l'autodestruction développée par trois siècles de colonisation." Because it is fundamentally a series of autobiographical snapshots, Beauchemin's journal does not place these political observations in a fully-developed context. That is done deliberately, and for an anglophone Canadian, with much more sobering effect, in *La visée critique*.

La visée critique: essais autobiographiques et littéraires is a collection of twenty articles, all but three previously published, prepared by André Brochu between 1974 and 1987. For their new appearance, Brochu has organized them into four parts — "Autobiographies" (3), "Circonstances" (5), "Positions" (5), and "Lectures" (7) — and added an "Avant-propos." In this he explains that "L'ordonnance des matières reproduit le mouvement d'une visée: de l'alpha, qui est la subjectivité critique, à l'omega — l'oeuvre, le texte, l'infini des mots — par le jeu des circonstances et des positions qui confortent le sujet et l'objet." In "Autobio-

graphies" Brochu reminisces about his childhood in Saint-Eustache, describes the writing of his first novel, *Adéodat*, as a kind of therapy for a serious bout of his chronic manic depression, and records his discovery in 1961 of "la littérature canadienne-française" through his reading of Gérard Bessette's *Le libraire*.

"Autobiocritique," written in 1986 — his review of his career as a critic of French and Québec literature from the 1960s to the present — moves from innocence to experience, from joy to melancholy, and from agitation to resignation. Transition structures many of the essays, each part, and the entire work. Since the cultural "circonstances" condition the critic's "autobiographies," define his "positions," and pervade his "lectures," it is moreover both a personal pattern for Brochu as writer and critic and a public pattern for Brochu as a Québécois. Thus, although these essays discuss many subjects, their central preoccupation is the fact, and fate, of Brochu as a Québécois who shares a culture with France and a continent with the United States and who is dominated by both.

In the essays this preoccupation takes various shapes. In "Le mimétisme culturel au Québec" (1975) Brochu presents his "conception marxiste" that Québec has gone from a pre-industrial society providing raw material for export to a post-industrial society consuming imports, and that Quebecers must find the means to become productive and participate directly in the development of the means of production if they are to achieve an autonomous culture, "originale et accordée à notre époque." In "Le nouveau consensus," written in April 1977, Brochu suggests that the victory of René Lévesque in November 1976 allows for such a possibility. In "Littérature Québec," however, written in 1984 but not published until 1987, the bright hopes of the 1970s, through a combination of factors that

have to do with such matters as changes in education and reading habits, the development of computer technology, and the vogue of theory in the teaching of literature, have darkened into the sombre reality of a Québec culture that seems strong but is actually "comme une métaphore en l'air à laquelle l'oxygène risque fort de venir à manquer".

And can the destruction implied in these images be averted? Both Beauchemin and Brochu would probably reply "non!" Yet for an anglophone Canadian the Québécois position seems far from futile, especially when it is compared with that of the rest of Canada. For although France and the United States may influence Québec, its geographical distance from the first and its linguistic difference from the second protect it from total domination. In that way the "circumstances" and "positions" of Québec give it both a unique position within North America and a special status within Canada. Yet, although we anglophone Canadians also grew up in small "American" towns, read "foreign literature" before we discovered our own, and suffered various kinds of cultural alienation, neither Beauchemin nor Brochu appears to know. And that is too bad. For, because of their self-imposed isolation from other Canadians, these Québécois have failed to learn the biographies, circumstances, positions, and readings of the "pays inconnu" of Canada, a "visé critique" in which they would discover certainly a source of comparison, probably several matters of interest, and possibly even a measure of hope.

MARY JANE EDWARDS



DIFFICULT PASSAGE

JEAN DELISLE, *Translation: An Interpretive Approach*. Univ. of Ottawa Press, trans. P. Logan and M. Creery, \$14.95.

GERARD BESSETTE, *The Cycle*. Exile Editions, \$14.95. (Trans. A. D. Martin-Sperry.)

JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT, *Like a Child of the Earth*. Talonbooks, \$11.95.

THE UNIVERSITY OF Ottawa Press collection of Translation Studies (Cahiers de traductologie) is a much-needed forum for research in the field. *Translation* is the translation of the first part of no. 4, Jean Delisle's *L'Analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction: théorie et pratique* (1980). Patricia Logan and Monica Creery are to be complimented on their excellent work in translating this work on translation.

Delisle's approach to translation is summed up in the preliminary statement: "The translation of pragmatic texts is an art of re-expression based on writing techniques." The statement may seem simple, but the importance of writing has been under-emphasized by linguistic theories concentrating on code and competence rather than text and performance in describing language transfers. Discourse analysis (the French title of his book is more explicit about Delisle's method) deciphers meaning in a particular text and determines the appropriate manipulation of language. The exercise, which I dislike calling a set of techniques, is applied to "pragmatic texts" which Delisle describes, though not without some necessary ambiguities, as tending to be denotative, objective, contextualized, didactic and possibly codified. Although an effective description of literary texts is offered, literary texts are excluded from study for pragmatic and pedagogical reasons, because the language used in them has "little in common with ordinary language and writing" and is the most difficult to translate.

Through Delisle's method, language skills are directed from the level of competence to performance. In the chapter on the theoretical foundations of the method, Deslisle describes the stages of comprehension, reformulation and verification in an illustrative text. The discussion which follows, on the differences between his method and the comparative approach of Darbelnet and Vinay, would have found a better place in the unfortunately brief summary of "Theories of Translation" earlier in the chapter. The third chapter, on the "Levels of Language Manipulation," adds details about the analysis and reformulation of discourse which are the "proper focus" of his method. This ordering makes the development of the text, from theory to method, a little inconsistent. However, the only real drawback of the book is that it reproduces only the first part of the French version. Teachers of translation, Delisle hopes, will be able to develop their own exercises out of the particular problems raised by language combinations and directions of translation.

Klein and Martin-Sperry enthusiastically meet the challenge of translating *Le crachat solaire*, the first version of Marchessault's trilogy, and Bessette's *Le cycle*. In both examples, readability in the target language is problematic, not because of the work's contextualization and the difficulty of directly transferring cultural re-language is problematic, not because of the anti-conventional use of language.

Marchessault's translator chose to replicate the source text in a rather literal version of it. Her linguistic choices highlight Marchessault's idiom, which is sometimes "far-fetched," that is, drawn from a vast and rich space approached from many directions at once. Marchessault delights in listing sometimes incongruent objects and contorting linear definitions of space and time, for instance in "the Native American land"

conceived for giants, for weavers, for potters, for farmers, for nomads, for architects, for musicians, for jaguars, for Mothers, for snakes, for bison, for American elks or tree-eaters, for white, black, and brown bears, for scribes.

The translator has reproduced as precisely as possible these disparate elements rather than forcing them into more habitual lexical and semantic structures. Some of the more obvious gallicisms, such as "dental caries" and "Javel water" seem unnecessary. However, the translation strategies chosen are a consistent and useful reminder that this is a translation.

Martin-Sperry has been successful in interpreting the "seven streams of semi-consciousness," an exercise which might be compared to keeping track of seven melodies at a time. The characters' ruminations include interactions and a common situation, making the walls between them, through which we listen *with* as well as *to* them, very thin indeed. Their voices, in translation, retain their distinctions of age, sex, family relation and character, although some tonalities are more easily heard than others. Perhaps this has to do with how the translator and the readers listen. My preference goes to Jacky, who starts the book by saying:

Grandpa's lying there in the big brown box he's not moving any more Mama said "Your grandfather's dead" her eyes were all red she looked ugly When you're dead you don't move any more you stay in a big box all the time all alone . . .

and whose affection for his grandfather, confused sense of loss, and urgent need to find someone to take him downstairs sustain a tension. On his way to the bathroom, little Jack introduces us to the characters who provide the focus of other chapters and whose idiolects are well served by the translation.

The passage from signifier to signified and referent is never smooth, and it is hard to say where Marchessault's grey-

hound is leading us, or whether, in Besette's universe, life goes on or simply around.

JO-ANNE ELDER

PRAIRIE WOMEN

LINDA GHAN, *A Gift of Sky*. Western Producer Prairie Books, \$22.95.

BRENDA RICHES, *Rites*. The Porcupine's Quill, \$8.95.

WRITING WITHIN THE tradition of prairie women's fiction, Linda Ghan focuses on a specific place; a new community of immigrants a few miles from Estevan, south-eastern Saskatchewan, and the life of a young girl growing up on a prairie farm during the 1920s and 1930s. Brenda Riches, on the other hand, avoids all references to time and place in *Rites*, her first collection of short stories, and would argue that authenticity in fiction need not rely on geography. Saskatchewan, however, has been her home since she left England in 1974 and she has played a significant role in Saskatchewan's literary life as fiction editor and then editor-in-chief for *Grain*. In an interview published in *Voices and Visions: Interviews with Saskatchewan Writers* (1985), she says that the prairies have exerted a strong influence on her work: "So often the happenings on the prairies that make the prairies so alive — the germinating seed, the growing grain — are secret processes which take place underground or in hidden ways."

Riches explores these secret processes in the fourteen stories collected in *Rites*, stories ranging from realistic to magic realism to fairy tale. The collection opens with a story about a beginning — a new day, a newly hatched bird, a book open to the first page; it ends with a woman's rambling monologue on death, but she keeps the focus on the important rituals

of her everyday life. As the title of the collection suggests, rituals shape the stories, including the rituals of the playground and a girl's sexual initiation in "Leavings"; the wine-and-writing regime of a woman in "Hannah's Day"; the death by fire of the mother in "When Helen Wakes."

Plot is subordinated to image, metaphor, and wit. One story ends with the powerful image of a woman entering her house "Like a nail into knotted wood." In "Breeding Ground" a man finally accepts the end of his marriage as he pours hot water on the maggots in the garbage, a disturbing but suitable metaphor. In "Leavings" the narrator's description of seesawing thrusts the reader back into childhood as the narrator recalls that "The best part was when I was on the high end because I was thrown into the air a little way, and the coming down was spongy, then hard." Riches' use of image and language can be powerful, as in a passage where a woman wants to help her husband, "to take him out where the black sea broke in white pieces again and again, show him how the sea went on anyway, and walk him beside its suck and swing" ("Fall"). The use of wit, however, is sometimes jarring. For example, in "The Maid" an angel falls in love with a ragpicker, and her maid observes that some are "fortified by purity; others find strength in martyrdom," but "many use crotches for crutches."

Ghan, too, explores the secret process of her narrator's life — Sara's shifting states as victim or victimizer, outsider or insider, powerless or powerful. One specific incident that takes place when Sara is nine prefigures the adult she will become. She takes the train to Estevan, by herself, to go to the dentist. As she sits in the chair, Dr. Lyons says, as he had on a previous occasion when drilling her tooth, "I hear they're going to get that Jew." But Sara is ready for him:

This time, I pushed his hand away.
 "I'm Jewish, too, you know."
 "Oh, I didn't mean —"
 "You did. You did mean it."
 I left his green office. (32)

She had turned a humiliation into a small victory. This scene is one of many in which Ghan focuses on a single event which, though describing external events, nevertheless enables the reader to interpret the secret processes behind the action.

Sara's "being" is inseparable from the prairie landscape that she loves, but the prairie and nature are not represented in sentimental terms. As her mother noted before the hail storm, "The sky is so beautiful. And so deadly." In choosing the title, *A Gift of Sky*, Ghan emphasizes the positive aspects. Douglas Thiel's cover painting, *Island in a Timestream*, provides a complementary message: a girl with arms outstretched to each side balances with ease and confidence on the rail that slices through the prairie landscape. Both writers have been shaped by the prairies. Linda Ghan has lived and worked in Jamaica and presently lives in Montreal where she writes drama and fiction in addition to teaching writing; however, her novel demonstrates that the Saskatchewan prairie where she lived her first ten years is still very much alive in her creative mind. As a result, she has made a major contribution to the tradition of prairie women's literature.

CAROL FAIRBANKS



MAUDITS

JEAN-PAUL MARCHAND, *Maudits Anglais! lettre ouverte aux Québécois d'un Franco-Ontarien indigné*. Stanké, \$13.95.

JACQUES LECLERC, *La guerre des langues dans l'affichage*. VLB, \$27.95.

JACQUES SAMSON ET ANDRÉ CARPENTIER (eds), *Actes. Premier colloque de bande dessinée de Montréal*. Analogon, n.p.

MAUDITS ANGLAIS! est au phénomène franco-canadien ce que, dans les années 60, l'essai de George Grant *Lament for a Nation* fut au phénomène canadien lui-même. Comme son illustre prédécesseur, il procède à partir d'une hypothèse extrêmement pessimiste — le progressif phagocytage de la culture et de la population francophones du Canada par la sphère économique-politique anglophone que symbolisent l'Ontario et les provinces de l'ouest — et aboutit à une dénonciation du bilinguisme et de la complaisance du gouvernement du Québec à l'égard des Anglo-Québécois.

Les quatre premiers chapitres retracent les grandes étapes des politiques fédérales et provinciales concernant les francophones hors-Québec, notamment dans les domaines scolaire et juridique. Faisant en guise de transition une comparaison entre la situation linguistique respective des Franco-Ontariens et des Anglo-Québécois, l'auteur stigmatise ensuite la politique, selon lui anglophile, de Robert Bourassa et particulièrement la loi 178 sur l'affichage en anglais à l'intérieur des commerces introduite en réponse à la décision de la Cour Suprême sur l'inconstitutionnalité de la loi 101. Démontrant enfin comment le bilinguisme, en tant qu'argument politique, vise davantage à l'assimilation qu'à l'égalité linguistique, il dénonce la propagande de l'organisation anglophone Alliance Québec et préconise une application intransigeante de la Charte de la langue française afin que, finalement libéré de la menace d'assimila-

tion anglaise, le peuple québécois devienne le partenaire authentiquement égal des Anglo-Canadiens.

Idéalisme et prosélytisme sont inévitables dans ce genre d'essai. L'argument développé n'en reste pas moins convaincant et quoiqu'il y ait lieu de questionner le rejet en bloc du bilinguisme comme politique de compromis, l'ouvrage de Jean-Paul Marchand constitue très certainement une étape dans l'interprétation politique du fait francophone au Canada.

Ouvrage de sociolinguistique où légistes et politologues trouveront leur compte, l'essai de Jacques Leclerc présente un panorama synchronique portant sur cent quatre-vingt un Etats souverains et régionaux (i.e. provinces canadiennes, cantons suisses, Etats américains, etc.) des lois et usages linguistiques dans le domaine de l'affichage, au sens le plus large du terme. Le livre est divisé en trois sections.

La première présente "une typologie des politiques linguistiques en matière d'affichage." L'auteur y examine d'abord les Etats avec législations sur l'affichage et l'application de celles-ci, puis les Etats sans législation. Après avoir exposé dans le premier segment tous les aspects de l'interventionnisme étatique en matière linguistique, il bat en brèche l'idée que la non-intervention soit toujours synonyme de respect des minorités. Adoptant dans les deux chapitres suivants une perspective résolument tournée vers le politique, il définit les raisons poussant les pouvoirs centraux et locaux à légiférer ou non dans le domaine de l'affichage: en fait de motifs éthiques, il faut plutôt voir dans l'attitude des Etats envers les langues un désir, pour les minorités, de maintenir le statu quo, et pour les majorités, d'exclure les idiomes concurrents; parallèlement, l'auteur stigmatise le discours sécurisant sur les lois linguistiques propre aux démocraties occidentales en démontrant combien peut être important l'écart entre les disposi-

tions juridiques et leur application sur le terrain. Allant jusqu'au bout de sa problématique réaliste, il établit finalement qu'il est impossible de trouver une corrélation entre types de régime politique et lois linguistiques.

Les deux sections suivantes, en fait d'imposantes annexes, présentent l'une la situation actuelle de chaque pays et Etat étudiés au regard des politiques linguistiques en matière d'affichage, l'autre les textes législatifs illustrant chaque cas.

Avec ce livre intelligent aux illustrations souvent ironiques, Jacques Leclerc, en plus d'exposer l'hétérogénéité des législations linguistiques de par le monde, témoigne de l'inquiétude d'un universitaire québécois pour l'avenir de sa langue, minoritaire dans son propre pays. C'est pourquoi on ne peut que louer la lucidité et l'objectivité qui font la force de cette étude.

Actes: premier colloque de bande dessinée recueille l'essentiel des communications du colloque organisé à l'UQAM sous l'égide de la "Société québécoise de recherche sur la bande dessinée" au printemps 1985. Cette manifestation reçut à l'époque un écho favorable, ses deux axes thématiques, Québec et bande dessinée, ayant été très intelligemment exploités.

Le recueil est divisé en trois parties: "Bande dessinée québécoise," "Enseignement et BD" et "Etudes diverses." L'hétérogénéité des thèmes, reflet du désir des organisateurs d'attirer un maximum d'intervenants pour un premier colloque, ne nuit en rien à la qualité propre de chaque texte. En fait, il y a lieu de se réjouir que les différents aspects abordés au cours de la conférence aient été a posteriori si judicieusement compartimentés: l'exploitation de l'ouvrage n'en est que facilitée.

En matière de contenu, les deux dernières parties n'apportent pas vraiment d'éléments nouveaux à la compréhension générale du medium: bande dessinée et enseignement ont donné lieu à maints

ouvrages depuis les années 60; quant aux "Etudes diverses," à l'exception du texte de Christiane Chassay sur le regard dans la bande dessinée érotico-pornographique ("L'homme au foyer"), on ne peut s'empêcher d'éprouver à leur lecture la sensation que, bien trop souvent, la bande dessinée est prétexte à des exercices universitaires de ce type où la complexité du propos le dispute à une certaine gratuité de la problématique.

C'est finalement grâce à sa première partie que l'ouvrage mérite le plus d'éloges. Toutes les contributions de cette section apportent éléments inédits et éclaircissements sur le domaine encore très mal exploré des "comics" québécois. Rétrospectives historiques, analyses de bandes et entrevues avec des créateurs concourent à mettre en évidence une idée-force: medium minoritaire chez une minorité nord-américaine, la bande dessinée au Québec s'avère être un des aspects de la difficile résistance francophone à la pénétration culturelle des Etats-Unis.

En en dégageant certains traits particuliers, cet ouvrage présente aux canadiens un aspect ignoré de la culture de masse au Québec qu'il serait malencontreux de négliger dans la perspective d'une définition globale du fait francophone en Amérique du nord.

JEAN-PAUL GABILLIET

FIXED SMILE

MARY MCALPINE, *The Other Side of Silence: A Life of Ethel Wilson*. Harbour, \$26.95.

LIKE ETHEL WILSON'S FICTION, the story of her life as told in Mary McAlpine's biography *The Other Side of Silence* is appealing, its tone conversational, its style easy, and its material interesting. The biography begins with Ethel Wilson's beguiling account of a smiling doll that had associations with loss and bereavement.

Its owner, a tailor, had lost his wife and was about to lose his minister, young Robert Bryant. Newly outfitted by the tailor in exquisitely sewn clothes, the doll was to be a farewell gift for the minister's daughter, Ethel Bryant, still a baby when her mother died and her father decided to leave his post in the African town of Port Elizabeth. "Smiling radiantly and sweetly," the doll was the child's companion through her few happy years in England and through her bereavement when Robert Bryant died. Young Ethel was passed among her "well-mannered relatives" until she was retrieved by her maternal grandmother, Annie Malkin, a gentle but adventurous woman who at the age of sixty-three had emigrated to Canada to join her sons in Vancouver. She had brought with her two maiden daughters and a young son; she returned to England to bring back her granddaughter Ethel. During the years of dislocation, bereavement, and change that brought the young orphan to British Columbia — the famous locale of Wilson's fiction — the doll kept its "enchanted" smile, though its delicate handsewn clothes became frayed and its features pale and nearly obliterated.

Reading McAlpine's biography, I begin to see this fixed smile as emblematic of Wilson's persona as she passed through the stages of her life, from cherished child, to orphan, to émigré, schoolgirl, teacher, and wife of a highly successful doctor. During professionally required social occasions, Wilson's smile would remain bright, though, McAlpine writes, it may have felt "as if it would crack into a thousand pieces and clatter to the floor." Despite her smile, her gushing talk, and her laughter, Wilson seemed aloof; for she was concealing behind her amiable and elegant social façade a secret persona — "the writer" who was observing and storing material for her stories. How she began to fit writing into her marriage to Dr.

Wallace Wilson may be suggested by a description of her sitting alone at night in a car, waiting for her husband who was visiting a patient. Meanwhile, alone and in the dark, she wrote. She may have been writing for years, but if so, she kept her activity in the dark. The visible aspects of her life were identified with her role as wife.

By all accounts, Wilson's marriage was remarkably happy, and her fiction captures a sense of quiet married happiness that is rare in modern literature. The anxieties inseparable from a loving relationship are reflected in the short stories revolving about Mrs. Forrester, an autobiographical character; the biography depicts Wilson's suffering over Dr. Wilson's mysterious ailments and the heart attacks that finally proved fatal. Sadly, her husband's death seemed to end Wilson's writing career.

To ask why Wilson gave up writing may be as fruitless as to wonder why she began. Wilson was secretive about her beginnings as a writer and modest about her accomplishments. However, her letters to editors show her discreetly promoting her career. In her essays, she expressed the hope (and belief) that her writing transcended the regionalism of its Canadian setting to achieve universal appeal. She may have been implying that it also transcended the boundaries of gender which she carefully observed in her personal life. As a well-brought-up woman, she preferred illness to confrontation as a way of expressing disagreement or defiance. She took to her bed when she felt overwhelmed by her mother-in-law, camouflaging her anger against the older woman as physical weakness: "She did not rage. She became silent. Her smile became a little stiff, . . . She took to her bed quite often." As "a smart orphan who had been properly brought up," Wilson had learned that the way to deal with problems was to have "a little breakdown";

health returned "when the problem was cleared up."

Whether she had learned the lesson of "a smart orphan" too well is a question the biographer might well have raised. For some problems, like widowhood, never cleared up for Wilson, and she spent many of her long final years in bed. She was arthritic, but also bereaved and "enraged": "It enrages me [she wrote McAlpine] that now that I have more spare time than ever in my life, I have no desire to 'write' . . . A bare desert, & nothing in it, not a weed, nor a flower." Perhaps her feeling of aridity can be traced back to the way she had learned to repress rage, especially her rage over loss, a traumatic experience of the child and the woman and wife. I wish McAlpine had given serious consideration to Wilson's rage, but she excuses herself from probing analysis by saying that though she knew Wilson for over thirty years, she can offer the reader only "glimpses" of a life rather than "the truth." *The Other Side of Silence* is an amiable collection of glimpses gathered from letters, photographs, reminiscences, verifiable facts, and the fiction. "Truth is so hard to know," Wilson had written in her story "Truth and Mrs. Forrester." If we cannot have truth, we do expect interpretation and critical insight, both made possible by, but constituting more than, a collation of quotations and glimpses. What lay hidden behind Wilson's carefully constructed brilliant surface?, we might ask. What of the rage contained by the radiant smile? Was it energizing as well as depleting? Did it figure in Ethel Wilson's art as well as in her despair?

BLANCHE H. GELFANT



MYSTERIES

WILLIAM DEVERELL, *Dance of Shiva*. Bantam Bks now O-U-S, n.p.

WILLIAM DEVERELL, *Platinum Blues*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p.

HOWARD ENGEL, *A Victim Must be Found*. Viking, \$22.95.

MAUREEN MOORE, *Field Work*. Women's Press, \$8.95.

ERIC WRIGHT. *A Question of Murder*. Collins.

IN JULY 1989, Greg Gatenby, the perspicacious director of Harbourfront, scheduled a week of "mystery readings." For four nights, Canadian authors of whodunnits, thrillers and suspense novels read to full houses. It was an unusual event, in that Harbourfront, which has hosted many of the prominent living writers, rarely if ever recognizes genre fiction. Gatenby, perhaps the first literary impresario, scheduled the event because he believed something important is happening in Canadian writing, something which ought to be taken note of by people who care about Canadian writing.

Ten years ago there was very little mystery fiction being written in Canada; publishers believed that the form, rooted as it so often is in its place, and knitted as it so often is into the sociology of crime and punishment, could not take hold in our bland settings and our respectable communities. Writers who tried to publish books set in Canada were usually rejected in Canada and, when submitting in the US, told to change their settings.

But over the past ten years the form has changed, publishing has changed and Canada has changed. The result is that Canadian mystery writers have found a place. Some have succeeded in the time-honoured Canadian way; they have written crime fiction indistinguishable from American or British, setting it in American, English or Scottish scenes and peopling it with the stock characters of the genre that mystery readers enjoy redis-

covering. Others have played with the form, expanding it, making something that throws a peculiar and interesting light on how Canadian writers are adapting to the increasingly global competition in the publishing world and still managing to hang onto their souls.

The year 1989 saw new books by most of Canada's most successful mystery writers: Bill Deverell, Howard Engel, Laurence Gough, John Reeves, Eric Wright, and L. R. Wright. As well new practitioners have appeared who are well worth following, including Ron Base, Jack Batten, Alison Gordon and Maureen Moore. The most interesting of these — for different reasons — are Deverell, Engel, Eric Wright and Moore.

Each of Bill Deverell's five thriller/mysteries has been intriguing in different ways. Each has expanded his range and shown development of his powers as a writer. His *Dance of Shiva* is the best modern mystery ever, perhaps the best mystery ever. It includes, among other astonishing accomplishments: a brilliant plot, constant surprises, excellent pacing and creation of suspense, beautiful evocation of place and perceptive illumination of the power and ambivalence of unalloyed good. This would be enough to make the book important. But what is most astonishing is that Deverell succeeds in developing the character of a murderer through the development of the plot. As a result, when the murderer is unmasked we realize that we ought to have known who it was by the character development alone, but we did not. That is, the craftily placed clues were clues of character, not fingerprints or deceptive alibis. This is the hardest thing to do in a mystery and, in my view, the thing most worth doing.

In his most recent book *Platinum Blues* Deverell sets his story on the California north coast, a setting which is a disappointment to his Canadian readers who treasured his development of the BC coast

in *Shiva*. His main characters are a small-town lawyer and a clutch of rock musicians. The plot is clever, the courtroom drama — always well done by Deverell who is a lawyer — is excellent. The conflicts created when artistic creativity, greed and amorality clash with the “small town values” of family love and loyalty and straight dealing make for an entertaining work. In the character or the hero, Oliver Gulliver (a peculiar name, one could hardly believe any parent could have a ear tinny enough to inflict it) Deverell gives us a version of the Canadian hero, who, characterized by his natural unaffected goodness, struggles to get a purchase in the corrupt world where murders are committed. Of course, Gulliver is not Canadian. Perhaps, since Deverell is dealing with genre fiction, where clichés can be used as archetypes, or vice versa, the book would have worked better if he had been.

The quintessential Canadian fictional good guy is Howard Engel's Benny Cooperman. Cooperman is a fictional phenomenon: the nebbish as hero. A man who has no passions, no fears, no ego. He is simply a nice guy shlumping along trying to make it in a tough profession. And this character, whose Jewish mother would rather watch television than have him over for dinner, whose idea of a stress-relieving tipple is a glass of milk, has succeeded in breaking open the competitive US mystery market for other Canadian writers. Benny Cooperman, a southern Ontario wimp, can be found in stacks on the mass markets racks all over the US. Why? It isn't Engel's writing. He rarely ventures beyond a compound sentence and the world seen through Benny's eyes is extremely two-dimensional. It isn't his plots which rarely offer a surprise twist or an ingenious complexity to keep the reader on his toes. Perhaps Benny's success derives from his extraordinary innocence, and the satisfaction we get from its tri-

umph. He took the nice-guy bland Canadian, put him into the world of mean streets and a “man's gotta do what a man's gotta do” ethic that is the hard-boiled detective story and let us enjoy watching him schmooze the sin and corruption right out of the detective story.

In Engel's most recent Cooperman novel, *A Victim Must be Found*, Benny gets involved with upper-class rich people, business people, art galleries and even a drunken and rather unpleasant artist. Benny can barely understand these to-him exotic people. In fact, he solves this mystery by nagging the suspects until they find him so annoying that they let their secrets out just to get rid of him. It is a typical Benny triumph and we just have to love him for it.

While Engel is writing what seem to be sly spoofs on the American hardboiled detective novel, the Toronto writer, Eric Wright, takes another form, the police procedural, plays it straight and does a good job of it. Wright's hero is a Toronto policeman Charlie Salter who finds himself involved in homicides no one else wants. In the Salter mysteries we get slices of Canadian life, usually Toronto and a look at the Canadian class system as it plays itself out between the families of the working-class Salter and his upper-middle class wife. The police procedural is a venerable form. In England it has a long history where readers watch Scotland Yard detectives tediously unravel clues in the works of authors as diverse as Free Will Crofts and P. D. James' Dagliesh novels. Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo used it to show the despair and anomie of Swedish Socialism while Simenon's mysteries can be seen as studies of French society's ability to grind down the individual Frenchman.

Not surprisingly, the form in the US has been exploited in a violent, dark and sometimes corrupt way. Police work in the US appears in these novels to be a descent

into the hell of American cities, into the minds of psychopaths and into the morally corrupt, repressive brutal police forces themselves. Sometimes the authors explore this world, often they appear to glorify in it.

Looked at this way Salter is to the police procedural what Cooperman is to the hardboiled. He is a gentle unassuming fellow who rarely experiences corruption or evil; his personal life is upright, his family relationships wholesome, his city, though far from perfect, is livable and the moral order he is policing is worth defending. Spending a few hours with an Eric Wright book, unlike those of his US counterparts, rarely gives one the intense desire to take a shower.

In his most recent, *A Question of Murder*, Wright's Toronto policeman, Salter, is involved in preventing what seems to be a terrorist act. This book is a definite falling off for Wright. The plot is confusing and the continual character development of Salter we have been watching from book to book doesn't quite work. Worst of all is Wright's adopting a second point of view — the point of view of one of the perpetrators. This is a device which, if not handled perfectly, can be very annoying. In this book it is annoying.

Deverell, Engel and Wright are all established popular writers with loyal followings. Maureen Moore, however, is a newcomer to the mystery genre. Her book, *Fieldwork*, belongs in the newly emerging category of feminist murder mysteries. Most feminist whodunnits are American. In some cases they take the hardboiled genre and bend it by creating a tough detective, of the kind the *Sunday Times Literary Supplement* recently called a "bulldoze Drummond." A good Canadian example of this approach are the Helen Keremeos books by the Vancouver author Eve Zaremba. A more commercially successful author, the Chicagooan Sara Peret-

sky, has created a woman detective who drinks, hangs out in a sleazy office and even tangles physically with stylized American hoodlum baddies. Making such women characters believable is a difficult feat and both Zaremba and Paretsky struggle to maintain the suspended disbelief upon which their chosen form relies.

Maureen Moore has taken the wiser course. She has written a standard whodunnit police procedural with a limited set of suspects and a believable feminist hero, Marsha Lewis, a criminology student. Marsha's position allows her to help the police yet retain her detachment from their points of view. Moore has thus solved the feminist conundrum of giving a woman an active yet believable role in solving crime.

Fieldwork does other things nicely as well. There are lots of the detailed slices of life which mystery readers enjoy: the persuasively realized Vancouver scene, the struggles of the feminist movement, and the inner conflicts of a young, vulnerable woman coping with a child on her own. Best of all, Moore pulls off the tricky challenge of the contemporary whodunnit; she manages to balance the moral issues and right the moral order in the end. As readers we may be disappointed that we never got to know the villain as well as we did some of the other suspects, nor to understand his motives in any but the most superficial sense. Yet the book satisfies at the moral level where murder mysteries must work to be true to what is most important in the form.

Watching what happens to the Canadian mystery in the coming years is going to be very interesting. Our best writers seem to be subverting the form as it is practised in America and Britain. In its place they are giving us a kind of crime fiction which reflects some of the ways in which Canada is different. And they are giving us Canadian heroes with the power

to amuse, to entertain and possibly to enlighten.

ELLEN GODFREY

BACKTRACKING

ANNE CAMPBELL, *Red Earth, Yellow Stone*. Thistledown, \$9.95.

ANDREW WREGGITT, *Making Movies*. Thistledown, \$9.95.

PERHAPS THERE IS SOMETHING to be learned about men's and women's writing from two new books of poetry published by Thistledown this year. Andrew Wreggitt's *Making Movies* and Anne Campbell's *Red Earth, Yellow Stone* provide, when compared, a curious difference: not just in poetics, but in sensibility. Entirely different ways of processing experience are portrayed. This difference becomes conspicuous when *time* is compared, as used and perceived by the two authors. Time in *Making Movies* moves so fast the words themselves seem to begin to crumble during reading, while in *Red Earth, Yellow Stone* time appears to be so still that an eternity might be encased between words dropped onto the page as if they landed there accidentally: as if the writer had passed by a sheet of paper holding a substance from which drops unintentionally spilled. The difference in the reading experience between these two books is largely one of speed and stillness; noise and silence; images and a curious cessation of images.

Because Andrew Wreggitt writes a number of poems about his childhood, there is a strong flavour of the fifties in his book (he was born in 1955). There are vague memories that turn out to be surprisingly clear about being a young boy falling asleep while a boxing match with Sonny Liston is on the radio; of burrowing in stiff grasses not much taller than he; of youngsters playing at making movies and showing them to each other; of cars in

front of the house, "a different car every week." He writes of his father as a memory, a presence, which remains in the form of very substantial images. The cars are one; the burning of the deceased father's clothes another; the memory of seeing something like a Sasquatch while hunting with his father yet another. Perhaps the decade in which we were born stamps us: it would seem so with Wreggitt. Memories are turned into settings that are as vivid as if they were on the screen. Photography, and moving photography especially, marks the nature of this collection. And it does so as if the image on the screen were more real than the memory. There is a sense that what is replayed has more value than what was lived in the first place. In the fifties, in any case, movies were something rare and special.

The same sensibility and treatment of experience comes through in the second section of the book, "Crossing the Date-line"; only here the author deals with the present. He travels through Japan and records his impressions. The effect is much like a movie, again. There is even an aura of the screenplay about Wreggitt's poetry: a writing that focuses on description of a scene. Sometimes the result is very pleasant, such as this setting in Japan outside "Time Time Cafe":

Rain hammers outside against
wide awnings,
tangles of bicycles on the sidewalk,
rain running through them,
crazy tablature up and down the street
Cymbal brush of tires. . . .

There is Mika, the blind girl, who massages the narrator's back as he attempts to describe America to her. This is another replaying motif, as if the author's description of things would make them more real to the (blind) reader. There is an assumption in this sort of poetics that only writing — the word on the page — can endow reality with its own being. Perhaps this is a literal extension of the idea that *in the*

beginning was the word. Whatever it is, the implication comments on the writing experience in general — and perhaps the movie maker's as well.

In section three, "The Living," Wreggitt goes back even further, to the decades before the 1950s. Here lurk the Depression and the Second World War. The poems reflect the scars that are left by those times. Characters emerge who have suffered and memories confound the author/narrator with their perpetual presence: "Some things that end / just go on ending, year after year. . . ." And a sense emerges that life somehow goes on without resolution, as in "Dolomite Pass" in which the narrator is mountain-climbing with his friend and says:

You and I have been climbing a long time,
years, I think,
pulling ourselves over the stubborn shoulders
of our lives. . . .

The closing poem, "The Living," is a beautiful display of an old man's fading mental presence: he is ill, has to take many pills, and keeps losing his focus as if he were lying in "a perfectly still pool / with himself at the centre."

Time, in all these poems, passes at what seems like breakneck speed. Time is also a confusing element, as in "Crossing the Dateline" where the plane the narrator is flying in seems to remain on the dateline without committing itself to either side — either day. The past and present, memory and current experience, are mixed to a point where chronology does not matter as much as the replaying of the event does, cinematically. There is also a strong focus on the *scene*: this is not so much a focus on the image as on the setting where an event is to occur. The setting, as it turns out, tends to be full of images the narrator uses, so there is perhaps a crowding of images. But even so, images are not obtrusive or overpowering in this book. They are simply there: they cannot help being

there any more than a photograph can help showing what was in the scene.

Anne Campbell's *Red Earth, Yellow Stone* is an altogether different, more transparent, reading experience. This is a short book and the poems in it are brief. Every word seems weighed for its own true weight — nuances, implications, inherent assumptions, sound, feeling, so there is a much stronger sense of uncertainty about language than in Wreggitt's book. Often the author/narrator has to resort to the dictionary in her uncertainty, only to find that obscurity deepens, and poetry opens up more avenues of verbal experience. Sense and logic are confounded, and as a result, the narrator's true feelings become uncertain, as do her memories of what is actually occurring. While with Wreggitt we seem to have a very firm grasp of what world we are in and what function the author/narrator/film-maker has in that world, with Campbell we are invited into a kind of *cloud of unknowing*.

In many ways *Red Earth, Yellow Stone* is a candid book. The narrator displays her emotional life: her feelings about domesticity; long-term relationships; her own body; the physical world and the spiritual; love; friendship. The narrator finds herself in a relationship she likes and apparently needs. But she also likes and needs her own solitude. Whatever conflict emerges is treated with doubt. The narrator hesitates, backtracks, rethinks statements, as if it were hard to keep things straight:

This is getting out of hand
that is to say
while I (the person I think of as me)
decide to keep open to you
wonder
who you are what Jungian
part you're playing
in my life this body soars
with other ideas to put it plainly
wants you
and not only that. . . .

Nothing can be taken for granted in such self-stopping writing. In an unusual way, Campbell manages to unite the lyric with speech. We sense there is a woman talking, yet it is also a refined lyric. The result is a kind of poetic candour. The narrator has a poetic sensibility, but will not drum up poetry per se, to use as a vessel for her ideas or thoughts. Her ideas and thoughts *are* the poetry.

There is a real identity question in Campbell's book. The problem with living with another on an intimate basis is an identity problem. Two people merge in more ways than was perhaps sought for. The poem "From One to Two" shows up the conflict, which riddles the whole book:

... but I digress
begin again

coming from my body
in my mind

the notion of becoming
one
with another one

knowing
there is a difference
in this from
being one
touching everything
(all the other ones)
all the time
from here
alone

coupling does
change things you know
makes you think
before you act

(the you I am speaking about is me)...

Here Campbell is using her words with all the implications they contain intact. The ground is swept away from under us: we cannot be sure we know what is passing in the brief lines and single words. As a result, we do not know who the narrator is any more, or who the "other" is. Ultimately, perhaps, Campbell is writing about that "moment of giving self over..."

Because this book seems to be in search

of a "moment" and its meaning(s), the sense of time is markedly different from Wreggitt's collection. Campbell attempts to reach the centre of a circle of sorts; the stillness inside a hurricane. It is a spiritual search for transcendence of a sort, peace of mind, a cessation of metaphorical storm. *Red Earth, Yellow Stone* is not a book to be read quickly: if you do, you will miss it. There is a great deal of thought behind every line and word and reading may possibly be as hard as writing when it comes to this kind of poetry. There is a veneer of simplicity but you have to pay, so to speak, to get the goods that are underneath. Wreggitt's cinematically portrayed passages reminding us of fleeting time, passions that come and go, the tragedy of life and death and duty, may be more appealing reading. But Campbell's candid doubt-inducing lyrics that backtrack on themselves and that claim and declaim in succession, may take us (the readers) further into our own lives and illusions.

KRISTJANA GUNNARS

LANDSCAPE OR LANGUAGE

ROBERT THACKER, *The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination*. University of New Mexico Press, \$32.50 (U.S.).

KENNETH G. ROBERT, ed., *Writing Saskatchewan: 20 Critical Essays*. Canadian Plains Research Center, \$12.50.

The Great Prairie Fact and Literary Imagination and *Writing Saskatchewan* illustrate a classic opposition in perceptions of how literature is conditioned by place. Thacker pursues the thesis that prairie landscape has been the prime influence on the literary imagination: "the land speaks louder than the people." The essays in *Writing Saskatchewan* seek the distinctiveness of Saskatchewan writing in cul-

tural rather than natural influences. One of the few consistent impressions to be gathered from the collection is that language speaks louder than the land.

Any comparison must, of course, take into account the different scope and intentions of the two books. Thacker surveys responses to the North American plains environment from the earliest European visits to the present. He offers the most comprehensive examination to date of accounts by explorers, traders and travellers, from Pedro to Castaneda with the Coronado expedition of 1540 to the more familiar figures of Henry Kelsey, Anthony Henday, David Thompson, Lewis and Clark, W. F. Butler, Zebulon Pike, Edwin James, and Josiah Gregg. He reviews, with illustrations, the paintings of George Catlin, Paul Kane, Carl Bodmer and Alfred Jacob Miller and the writings of Washington Irving, Margaret Fuller and Francis Parkman. In these early accounts, Thacker finds consistent features that will be basic to later literary responses to the plains: wonder, a sense of illusion, ambivalence instilled by the prairies' promise of freedom and threat to personal identity, a need to assimilate the new experience to a known world, as in the ubiquitous sea metaphor, and a struggle to adapt forms of expression to the insistent demands of the new experience. He sees in the differences between finished work and the artists' sketches and journals "a confrontation between their inculcated European aesthetic and the prairie."

Thacker finds a version of this confrontation in the pioneer fiction, where the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary landscape becomes a battleground for romance and realism. He focuses first on Hamlin Garland and especially on James Fenimore Cooper, credited as the first to present "a prairie landscape through its own terms." While acknowledging that Cooper worked not from

experience but from Edwin James's *Account of an Expedition*, Thacker maintains that Cooper transformed an actual experiential landscape into "a symbolic, mythic one." Garland worked from personal experience but rendered an essentially romantic landscape, while the later pioneer fiction of Willa Cather, F. P. Grove, Ole Rolvaag and Wallace Stegner moves uncertainly toward realism. Thacker devotes more attention to Cather's prairie fiction than to any other author, tracing her development from early tales of bitter alienation to the more accomplished *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*. In the process, her fiction is said to move, like Cooper's, "away from the literal prairie toward a symbolic one," her writings defining "a pattern of the ways in which landscape forces literary adaptation."

Thacker's final section, "Inhabitants," surveys briefly a range of post-pioneering writers, including Martha Ostenso, Conrad Richter, Sinclair Ross, W. O. Mitchell, Wright Morris, Margaret Laurence and Robert Kroetsch, for whom the human problem is how to live on the prairie once it is no longer new. In this context the prairie's challenge to personal identity emerges in images of traps and mirrors, and the writers work more self-consciously than their predecessors to devise "strategies to enclose prairie space, somehow, within the covers of a book." The land remains the prime determinant; as Thacker says, in a statement that could stand further explanation, "Laurence's romanticism is, of course, derived from the landscape itself."

What Thacker's survey demonstrates most convincingly is that the prairie landscape has made a powerful impression on both travellers and inhabitants, that writers have found it challenging to represent, and that it has served not only as setting but as theme and as a potent source of imagery in much fiction.

Less convincing is his thesis that the land "dictated the terms of its usage as literary setting." This does not seem to describe the process by which Cooper took an already written landscape and appropriated it to a symbolic system designed to articulate his New York view of the meaning of America. Similarly, when Cather takes a prairie seen in her early stories as a place where Danes are to be found swinging from their own windmill towers and most of the Poles, "too careless and discouraged to shave themselves keep their razors to cut their own throats with" and transforms it into a "retouched mythic garden," the terms of its usage are again dictated less by the land than by western ideologies. What remains most difficult to explain is how a land could dictate such contrary uses as those of Cather and Sinclair Ross. The determinist thesis splits on the rocks of its own environment, as though Thacker had failed to learn the lesson of his own first chapters so aptly restated in a passage he quotes from G. B. Crump:

In the nineteenth century, the pioneer projected on the plains his version of American promise; in the twentieth, they became the wasteland where the dream turned to dust. On a metaphysical level, their empty expanses suggest the void of reality before it has been processed and given shape by the consciousness of the perceiver.

Thacker's absorption in his thesis also leads to occasional insensitivity to actual uses of the land in the texts under review. The ranch scenes in *As For Me and My House*, for example, he situates in the foothills though the text specifies that the mountains are "four or five hundred miles west." And in *Wild Geese* he fails to address the apparent contradiction that Caleb represents the land, while his daughter Judith hates Caleb as passionately as she loves the earth. More generally, an argument so dependent on the effects of physical environment requires

more careful distinctions between prairie and parkland, rural and town settings, Illinois and North Dakota, and between the effects of landscape itself and those of climate, solitude, deprivation and discomfort.

In contrast to Thacker's broad survey, *Writing Saskatchewan* collects the papers from a 1987 symposium at Fort San devoted to contemporary writing in a specific part of the prairies. The papers are most notable for their variety and the interplay between contrasting approaches and contending views. There are papers with a theoretical bias. The Australian critic Russell McDougall elaborates a series of reading strategies or positions for an outsider approaching Saskatchewan poetry; Dennis Cooley develops a theoretical construct for distinguishing poetry of the eye from poetry of the ear. There are equally practical approaches, as in Susan Gingell's study of the adaptation of language to place. There are a number of general views like Fred Wah's formal classifications of the poetry and Kim McCaw's review of trends in Saskatchewan playwriting, and there are a few specific studies like Diane Bessai's analysis of the genesis and structure of Linda Griffiths' and Marie Campbell's *Jessica*. Traditional poetics, as in Sharon Butala's down-to-earth defence of realism, are set off against post-realist poetics, as in Geoff Hancock's polemic for a fiction as protean in its inventive strategies as science and as responsive to a world of change. In addition to more conventional essays, there are also Rudy Wiebe's stern admonition to the writers to regard their craft and Aritha van Herk's whimsical personification of Saskatchewan. There are, inevitably, some weak papers, like Robert Currie's romantic, anti-intellectual defence against the critics, and there are strong ones, like Simone Vauthier's creative reading of Edna Alford's "The Lineman." Vauthier's paper is notable for its fullness of

imaginative response and range of linguistic tactics. By applying a set of critical concepts with deftness and subtlety, she invites the reader to a precise yet fluid re-engagement with the story.

In the many oppositions among the papers there is an element of dialogue. Wayne Tefs's distinction between realist and visionary fiction is contested by David Williams and Sharon Butala; Rex Devere'll responds directly to Diane Bessai. The structuring of the conference to promote such dialogue is most apparent in the last section, "Fear of the Novel: The Linked Sequence of Short Stories in Saskatchewan Fiction," containing short papers by David Carpenter, Andreas Schroeder, Guy Vanderhaeghe and Edna Alford, none of whom can agree on the properties, the significance or even the existence of such a trend in Saskatchewan fiction. The disparity of views extends to the central question implicit in the topic of the conference, the influence of place on literature. Some writers assume or argue the existence of a distinctive Saskatchewan literature, while others consider the question premature or, as Patrick Lane contends, irrelevant: "What is important is not that poetry is written here, but that it is written at all."

There are, nonetheless, some inferences about Saskatchewan writing to be drawn from the diversity of these essays. The writers see their place as marked by a distinctive Saskatchewan experience and a vernacular that expresses it. They share a related concern for language and form as means to either capture or transcend that local culture. One unusual feature of that culture may be the sense of community among the writers, seen in acknowledgements of mutual influence and respect and in frequent references to collective creation, the importance of theatre companies, the Summer School of the Arts and other co-operative institutions. What they do not seem much concerned

about, despite the geographical definition of their subject, is the influence of the land. Fred Wah, for example, finds the poetry, "not as qualified by the landscape as I first thought." It may be, as Sharon Butala says, that a generation of writers at home on the land can "turn to other considerations." The contrast with Thacker's survey would thus be a result of the different periods examined. But the contrast may also reflect national differences. The Saskatchewan writers' preoccupation with the influence of community, culture and form rather than landscape may be typically Canadian, while Thacker's approach through nature and landscape is in the tradition of western American studies, in which America itself tends to become an environmental determinist's thesis. The two volumes should make valuable complementary reading for the growing number of scholars interested in comparative study of the two Wests.

DICK HARRISON

"OTHER"

TREVOR CLARK, *Born to Lose*. ECW Press, \$12.00.

DAVID HOMEL, *Electrical Storms*. Random House, \$21.95.

STAN PERSKY, *Buddy's: Meditations on Desire*. New Star Books, \$19.95.

THOUGH THEY HAVE little in common, the characters in these three texts — gay men, working-class teenagers, street people and eccentric academics — do share their marginality in a society unwilling to accept, at times even acknowledge, elements different from itself. What a pleasure it can be, then, to hear these voices, too often silenced or gone unheard. But what a disappointment, too, when the attempt is awkward and unconvincing.

Trevor Clark's collection of stories, *Born to Lose*, is an uninspired literary triptych meant to evoke the gritty realities

of life close to the edge. On the streets, or at the brink of suicide, Clark's underdog figures more often than not fail to convince. At moments, people and places do come to life. But too easily Clark relies on virtually nonsensical physical descriptions: "Her face was fragile, yet the bones were strong. It was tough but cute, primitive but sensitive, ugly but attractive." Such passages, and there are many, are unenlightening, substituting paradox for depth. "I've become acquainted with a character," says another of Clark's down-and-outers, "This is literature." Surely the author is as deluded as the character who speaks these words.

"Malaise," the middle story, shows a more deft hand. Written in the form of a lengthy, autobiographical suicide note, the story's tone is ironic, self-mocking and, as a result, rather more believable, even touching. Angela, a depressed English professor, after asking herself how a sensitive mind can "do anything but break down in a world as fraught with horror and calamity as this one," ultimately rejects suicide and decides instead to fix herself another drink. Malaise triumphs over death in this reassuring story.

In David Homel's *Electrical Storms* teenaged Vinnie Rabb professes to speak a different language, identifying not only with life in a somnolent Chicago suburb in the 1960's, but with the universal condition of adolescence. Evoking a modern tradition that began with Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, Homel's coming-of-age story chronicles not only the growth of Vinnie, but of his entire misfit gang, the Kensington Krazies. The group watch a friend being bludgeoned, burned and then buried alive; years later they unite as young adults to avenge the murder. The murder, the belated act of vengeance, and a pseudo-Freudian explanation for the killer's hostility, forsake reality for silly contrivance. Better for Homel to have relied less on absurd plot twists and

focused more on the lives of these teenagers, who resemble the de-sensitized adolescents in the work of Brett Easton Ellis.

Stan Persky's *Buddy's: Meditations on Desire*, in its bold attempts to deconstruct pornography and delineate gay desire, forges a rather remarkable synthesis of the sacred and the profane. *Buddy's* is a sensitive, and sometimes elegiac, series of personal accounts and recollections. Already celebrated by the gay press as a gutsy exploration of gay sexuality, its style and intelligent commentary will attract a readership beyond the gay community. In fact, this is precisely Persky's wish:

Let it serve then as the beginning of these meditations on desire, discourse, darkness. They invoke the locales and language of the homoerotic. But, of course, they're not intended solely for those who share that particular sexual "preference" — which is, in fact, not a preference but a passion.

With a broad gaze upon his environs, Persky explores gay life in all its complexity, pains and pleasures. Two of the pieces are especially apropos. "Gay: A Tale of Faerie" traces the genealogy of the word "gay" to reveal its varied historical meanings; "Personals" looks into personal ads as "countless testimony to the pluralism of desire." Persky's unabashed, and often personal, honesty is impressive. He unapologetically explains that the gay community has not "ceased desiring" as a result of AIDS, although it has been "baffled by how to continue desiring in the midst of its horror." The text's implicit answer is that by continuing to desire, and to love, gay life and culture will continue to flourish.

Buddy's dazzles with its dizzying flights from the banal to the poetic, and back again. These breathless flights, however, are not without their rough spots. In "God" Persky sets up an absurd syllogism comparing his sexual partner of the moment to God. In "Eros," the author tries to

elucidate the inherent democracy of gay relations, but fails to see that they are as conscious of class and of age as any other kind of social relationship. Still, *Buddy's* is an important social document that should inspire much debate.

THOMAS HASTINGS

L'APRES - "MATOU" . . .

YVES BEAUCHEMIN, *Juliette Pomerleau*. Québec/Amérique, \$24.95.

IL EST FACILE d'imaginer la pression que le créateur du *Matou* a dû ressentir, tout au long de la création de son dernier roman, *Juliette Pomerleau*. Que de lecteurs et lectrices il avait captivés! Et que d'attentes il avait ainsi créées! En effet, l'on sait que *Le Matou*, paru en 1981, s'est vendu à plus d'un million d'exemplaires, et qu'il a été traduit dans au moins cinq langues. En outre, il ne serait sans doute pas erroné d'affirmer qu'avec *Les Filles de Caleb*, d'Arlette Cousture, *Le Matou* est à l'origine du courant des best-sellers québécois amorcé au début des années quatre-vingt.

Avec *Juliette Pomerleau*, Yves Beauchemin, alliant la matérialité du texte à l'aspect physique de son personnage principal, a fait paraître un énorme roman — quelque sept cents pages —, et une énorme personnage; de plus, fidèle à sa manière, l'auteur orchestre plusieurs intrigues, dont la principale sera la recherche qu'entreprend Juliette Pomerleau de sa nièce Adèle Joannette, dont elle est sans nouvelles depuis neuf ans. Mais cette recherche n'a pas été déclenchée par hasard: Juliette avait jadis fait la promesse envers sa soeur Joséphine, en 1976, de s'occuper d'Adèle, promesse qu'elle n'avait tenue, en fait, que quelques semaines.

Mais voilà que Juliette est atteinte d'une grave maladie, et c'est presque à

l'article de la mort qu'elle se rappelle cet engagement et qu'elle demande à ses amis de poursuivre cette quête à sa place. Mais, ô miracle!, Juliette sera sauvée par . . . la musique! En effet, des concerts de son ami et voisin Bohuslav Martinek lui font un bien immense, pour finalement la guérir. Elle pourra donc elle-même poursuivre cette recherche qui la conduira, on s'en doute, à travers toutes sortes de voies imprévues.

Le début du roman semblera sans doute à plusieurs quelque peu laborieux. En effet, à la manière de la musique qu'il semble affectionner et à laquelle il consacre une large place, Yves Beauchemin essaie d'orchestrer divers niveaux d'intrigues avec pour résultat que quelques fausses notes se glissent ici et là, ou encore que l'ensemble n'arrive pas à être totalement homogène. Il faut dire, à la décharge de l'auteur, que l'énormité de la fresque ne rendait pas la tâche facile: le romancier devait nous présenter non seulement son personnage éponyme, mais aussi tous ceux qui partagent le même immeuble qu'elle et qui seront de près ou de loin liés à l'intrigue principale: Denis, le neveu de Juliette; sa soeur maléfique Elvina; l'étrange dentiste Ménard; les musiciens au dernier étage, Rachel et Bohuslav Martinek; et, enfin, Clément Fisette, qui jouera un rôle important dans la recherche d'Adèle.

C'est d'ailleurs lors de cette recherche et des démêlés avec un certain Livernoche, qui occupent la partie centrale du roman, que les fans du *Matou* en trouveront pour leur compte. L'intrigue est ici plus serrée, plus captivante aussi.

Dans une entrevue tenue au sujet du *Matou*, Y. Beauchemin déclarait: "Pour moi, un romancier c'est un peu comme un ami ou un voisin qui arriverait devant moi et me dirait: 'Ecoute, il m'est arrivé une histoire absolument extraordinaire; il faut que je te la raconte.'" Quêtes, déplacements, rebondissements: l'on trou-

vera, comme dans *Le Matou*, un roman qui là encore râtisse large. Mais y croira-t-on vraiment? Suivra-t-on la cure-miracle de Juliette ou encore les manigances d'Elvina sans froncer les sourcils? Est-ce que l'on parcourra cette intrigue zigzagante sans avoir l'impression que le procédé l'emporte sur le naturel? Le roman pourra parfois sembler obèse: des mots, des mots, qui s'efforcent de montrer. Mais que disent-ils, au juste? A cet égard, la patience du lecteur sera heureusement récompensée: au fur et à mesure qu'avance la lecture, le roman prend de la consistance, se raffermi, et l'on a l'impression que l'auteur ficelle mieux cet énorme morceau. Comme l'écrivait Jean-Roch Boivin, dans *Le Devoir*, ce roman est bel et bien un Titanic . . . qui flotte!

PIERRE HEBERT

SILENCES

E. D. BLODGETT, *Musical Offering*. Coach House, \$10.95.

ANN ROSENBERG, *Movement in Slow Time*. Coach House, \$12.95.

AT THE CENTRE OF E. D. Blodgett's *Musical Offering* the reader encounters a "Song of Silences," a sequence of nine poems which takes as its epigraph T. W. Adorno's famous remark: "... after Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric. . . ." This remark is of course as much a challenge as a statement of fact, and more than a few poets have tried to answer it, some of them even making answering it their life's work: the names of Nelly Sachs, Paul Celan, and Tadeusz Różywicz, amongst others, spring to mind. Before *Musical Offering*, however, Blodgett was not one of them, except perhaps obliquely in the mythological meditations on violence found in *Beast Gate* (1980), especially "salamander for nelly sachs." Not knowing Blodgett personally, I cannot say

why he has attempted to answer this challenge only now, in his fifth volume of poems, some four decades after Auschwitz. Yet this much at least is clear: whatever the reasons, he is concerned here with matters that have always informed his work in some manner.

Right from the first poem of his first volume (*take away the names* [1975]) Blodgett has made language and its vexed relation to whatever is not language the magnetic centre attracting and patterning the iron filings of his verse. For the most part, not-language has meant Nature, Culture, Myth (the capital letters are intended to suggest the level of abstraction at which Blodgett usually writes). Not until his fourth volume (*Arché/Elegies* [1983]) did he begin seriously to consider History as well, a shift marked by the volume's epigraph from F. R. Scott: "How shall we speak of Canada, / Mackenzie King dead?" Blodgett's answer was anything but as whimsical as Scott's question: meditate interrogatively on persons and places, acknowledging all the while the insufficiency of language: "And so this book of giving up . . ." ("Epistre dédicatoire (epilogue)"). Giving up is failing, of course, but it is also, paradoxically, succeeding, since giving up can be seen as making an offering. One pushes language to the limit, "where falling is cadence" and "to sing is flight, a figure / etched against a tomb" ("Wintering Over," *Musical Offering*); and in doing so, one attempts to answer Adorno's challenge, to write poems which are—however barbaric—at once mystical, musical, philosophical, memorial, if not always memorable therefore.

The offerings in Blodgett's latest book are arranged in three sections, "Preludes," "Fugues," and "Postlude," and all of them except those in "Preludes" are arranged as sequences. Following quite strictly this musical ideal of form, Blodgett announces his central theme in the

"Preludes": "I do not believe in gods / that play at green. / I believe // hunters surround us, / the music we hear counterpoints / red:green" ("Colours of War"). To try to fix the meanings of these words would be foolish, yet the counterpoint "red:green" clearly gestures towards the contrasts of death and life, war and peace, tragedy and pastoral, and so on. In "Fugues" these contrasts appear over and over again, nearly always in involved meditations on language, music, and silence intended, it would seem, to exemplify the claim that "the order / of the universe [is] the art / of fugue" ("Fire Music") — the absent copula perhaps suggesting that this connection exists beyond the realm of grammar. In the single poem of the "Postlude," these musical meditations find a conclusion in an unanswerable question (the metaphor of "becoming fish" occurs throughout Blodgett's five volumes): "How to become / fish, wholly contained // and containing . . . / to sing and become // singing" ("Naming the New Kilns").

Not all of Blodgett's musical offerings by any means succeed in their giving up: the prose-poem sequence "Night Thoughts on Clausewitz's *On War*" may be the best/worst example, and parts of "Epigraphs," "Song of Silences," and "Naming the New Kiln" rival it in laboured obscurity. Even at his best — as in parts of "Leavings," "Cadences," "Wintering Over," and "Fire Music" — Blodgett is a difficult and often precious poet, and he writes in what might be called a Mallarméan mode — possibly derived from Celan — presenting his readers with the sorts of difficulty that George Steiner has called "ontological," in order to call into question poetry as we think we know it.

Blodgett's work is not for everybody, and he can try the patience of even a sympathetic reader. Yet he is attempting more than many poets currently writing

in Canada, and his "givings up" are therefore worth offering.

The same cannot necessarily be said for Ann Rosenberg's *Movement in Slow Time*, "a tribute to Dante and his nature" modelled on the *Commedia* and recounting the "author's journey through an identified terrain [Vancouver] during a specific but untrue period of time [a single day in the early 1980s] . . . in which the reporting of character-revealing conversations and the expounding of philosophy is [sic] paramount." For this verbal, graphic, and pictorial composition is with few exceptions boring and banal. One quotation should suffice to make the point: "Oh Dante, you knew more and different things than I . . . But your vision is based on a similar world, on men and women similar to the ones I know. . . . I will . . . write about them in my vulgar tongue for the same reasons that you did." Rosenberg has clearly learned from writers like Joyce and Eliot that the Ordinary can find a place in High Art if one only hangs the dirty laundry on the Golden Bough (the so-called mythical method), but she seems to have forgotten that there is more than one way to hang a sheet. Anyone familiar with her *Bee Book*, a similar verbal, graphic, pictorial, and musical composition about the difficult sex life of a certain Habella, will probably find *Movement* a disappointment. Both works manifest the same concern with female sexuality in a masculine world, but *Movement* lacks the occasional wit and genuine strangeness of *The Bee Book*, which takes its models, sometimes quite imaginatively, from anthropology and entomology.

IAIN HIGGINS



POSTMODERN PARADOXES

LINDA HUTCHEON, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Oxford Univ. Press, \$16.95.

The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction is the second of two book-length studies Linda Hutcheon published in 1988. In the first, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Hutcheon continues her study of the "self-reflexivity" of contemporary art forms, an inquiry she began in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980) and further developed in *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (1985). In *The Canadian Postmodern* she attempts to develop her occasional writing on contemporary English-Canadian fiction — reviews, essays, a ECW monograph — into a more coherent and sustained "investigation not into the general phenomenon of postmodernism, but into the particular forms in which it appears in contemporary Canadian fiction." As a sustained investigation, however, *The Canadian Postmodern* can only be found wanting. Although Hutcheon has revised — indeed, at times, extensively rewritten — the original material in keeping with her stated intention, *The Canadian Postmodern* reads more like a collection of occasional texts — always interesting and often thought-provoking — than a coherent argument. What is more, despite the increasing emphasis in Hutcheon's writing on the historical and ideological nature of postmodernism, her theory remains primarily structuralist and ahistorical in its orientation. Finally, despite her frequently stated concern with process rather than with product, with reading rather than with the text written, her criticism remains, for the most part, fixed on the text as object — successive

chapters of *The Canadian Postmodern* almost invariably resolve themselves into *interpretations* of particular texts.

The Canadian Postmodern consists of a preface, eight chapters (one of which is titled "Introduction"), and an appendix. Of the eight chapters, the first six (including the Introduction) are revised versions of previously published texts. Only the last two chapters represent substantially new writing. "Process, Product, and Politics: The Postmodernism of Margaret Atwood," and "Seeing Double: Concluding with Kroetsch." Arguing that *The Canadian Postmodern* "grew out of attempts to work out for [her]self various issues arising from the writing of the chapter on the novel for the fourth volume of the *Literary History of Canada*, Hutcheon includes "The Novel (1972-1984)," an early version of her contribution to the fourth volume, as an appendix.

Although her work on "The Novel (1972-1984)" undoubtedly provided *one* of the contexts for the writing collected in *The Canadian Postmodern*, the single most important context — as her choice of title for the volume suggests — is surely the "investigation of the postmodern that, in fact," she acknowledges, "I discovered to underlie all my work over this period of time." That investigation, which really begins with *Narcissistic Narrative*, has led Hutcheon into a series of "contradictions," a word that in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* she uses as a synonym for paradox; indeed, her conception of the postmodern — Canadian or otherwise — is inextricably bound up in the notion of paradox. "I would like to begin," she writes at the outset of *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, "by arguing that, for me, postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges." In Hutcheon's writing paradoxes or "contradictions" serve, in effect,

as binary opposites; out of the tension between such oppositions as process/product, art/life, fiction/history, margin/centre, and most notably "the presence of the past," she structures both her theory and her criticism.

But are these postmodern paradoxes merely "*seeming* contradictions"? Do they merge dialectically? Or do the doubles remain doubles? While Hutcheon would undoubtedly respond with a resounding "no!" to all such suggestions, her articulation of a *poetics* of postmodernism assumes that, while the opposites may not merge, while the doubles may stay double, at some level the contradictions give way to some fundamental laws — even if it is only the law of paradox. As Tzvetan Todorov points out in his *Introduction to Poetics*,

the object of [poetics] is to transpose the work into the realm considered fundamental: it is a labour of decipherment and translation; the literary work is the expression of "something," and the goal of such studies is to reach this "something" through the poetic code.

Linda Hutcheon's poetics of postmodernism is grounded in "difference"; however, her ability even to *conceive* a text titled *The Canadian Postmodern* suggests that Hutcheon regards the differences between Canadian writing and writing elsewhere as less significant than the general laws or paradoxes she sees operating not only in the literatures of Europe and North and South America but in their "architecture . . . painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics, [and] historiography" as well. When she notes that *The Canadian Postmodern* is "an investigation not into the general phenomenon of postmodernism, but into the particular forms in which it appears in contemporary Canadian fiction" Hutcheon is declaring, in effect, that she is concerned in *The Canadian Postmodern* not with the estab-

lishment of the general laws of postmodernism but with particular Canadian texts as the *product* of those laws.

In the final chapter of *The Canadian Postmodern*, titled "Seeing Double: Concluding with Kroetsch," Hutcheon argues that Kroetsch is "at the paradoxical centre of the decentred phenomenon called postmodernism" and celebrates him as "Mr. Canadian Postmodern," "the master of double-talking paradox." However, with the publication of both *A Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Canadian Postmodern*, and with a career-long commitment to the double-talk of paradox, it is Hutcheon rather than Kroetsch who is at the "paradoxical centre" and it is to Hutcheon, too, that the title of "[Ms.] Canadian Postmodern" most fittingly belongs.

PAUL HJARTARSON

NEW FICTION

FRANCES ITANI, *Truth or Lies*. Oberon, \$12.95.

SUSAN KERSLAKE, *Blind Date*. Pottersfield Press, \$9.95.

AT FIRST SIGHT, Frances Itani's first short story collection, *Truth or Lies*, does not seem to be a book to cherish. Itani is a poet and children's writer whose three previous books of poetry, *No Other Lodging* (1978), *Rentree Bay* (1983) and *A Season of Mourning* (1988), are, with the exception of a few poems, minor, and do not point to greater achievement. What is more, the cover illustration of *Truth or Lies* consists of an obese naked woman, smudged in black, grey and white, against a background of the same colours: the result is repulsive. The seven stories inside are, however, a pleasant surprise. Itani's fiction, with its perceptive heroines, and wide variety of settings, including Austria, Canada and Japan, are written in precise prose; there is rarely an instance

of sloppy diction, or a section that needs tighter editing. Consider the perfection of the following paragraph, which is from the story "Grandmother":

But Grandmother extends her free arm, holding them back. She takes a deep breath, looks around her and her shoulders shift with that fine sense of determination we have somehow always known. Her head is thrown back, the reddish streaks in her hair caressing the grey. And then, she beckons: first to her children, who file past one by one. The sons and daughters, the wives and husbands of these, their children and their children's children. All of us pausing before her, alone, for a brief and private communication with Grandmother, spending our confusion, our sadness, our love, or whatever it is that we have brought to her to spend.

If Itani does have a fault, it is an occasional tendency, in such otherwise memorable stories as "Foolery" and "Songs for the Children," to explain situations to the point that she walks the edge of didacticism. Such a complaint, however, should not prevent readers from considering Itani's stories: *Truth or Lies* is, as Robert Weaver has stated, "a mature and thoughtful book." So far, Itani's greater strength lies in fiction, rather than poetry. It is a pity that "Clayton," a moving, powerful story, was not included. Biographical information on the author is also missing.

I started Susan Kerslake's collection of twelve stories, *Blind Date*, with high expectations; I knew her as the author of the good, if overwritten story collection *The Book of Fears* (1984), a book nominated for the Governor General's Award. Unlike the cover in which Oberon enclosed Itani's collection, Kerslake's book has an attractive illustration of two flowing mauve and purple curtains, a cover which invites the reader to raise the curtains and see what Kerslake sets upon her stage.

Kerslake, however, fails to convince. Her themes and settings are similar to Itani; she, too, uses observant female pro-

tagonists and international backgrounds, her settings, in this case, being Canada and Africa. But where Itani's prose is crisp and clear, Kerslake is a sloppy writer, with little feeling for the potential elegance of English. Her sentences often run on ("They had stirred a halo round my head and tried to scare me, but I wasn't scared and I ran back, which was all downhill and out of the dark and toward a sunlight that still sparkled up from the lake and the walls of our cottage with flaking paint and mossy spoors in the creases, with the same old folks sitting there, laughing, slightly blued by then, even Travis on plain old ginger ale and cherry syrup."). What is more, Kerslake's writing needs additional punctuation ("My cousin who was two understood and put his face in"); she frequently lacks a gift for suitable description ("It was at this time of night that he experienced his 'all's well with the world' feeling"); and her similes are sometimes unfortunate ("She sees a small blue wrinkled mouth. It looks like her grandfather's anus the time she'd been too close and Mama was wiping him up"). I am fully aware that literature sometimes demands that conventions of style and taste be broken, but I can see no reason for this procedure here. Even worse than the text, however, is its design; *Blind Date* is replete with typographical errors, absurdly long spaces after periods, hyphens used where long dashes are required, accents that have been scribbled on the page, uneven right-side and left-side justification, and words that are underlined rather than placed in italics. Judging from the diction and the design, it is as if an editor never touched the book, either before or after formatting. But the failure of *Blind Date* must, in the end, rest with its author, coming after *The Book of Fears*, Kerslake's new work is a major disappointment.

BOYD HOLMES

DYNAMICS OF MEMORY

NEIL K. BESNER, *The Light of Imagination: Mavis Gallant's Fiction*. University of British Columbia Press, \$29.95.

MAVIS GALLANT IS ONE of the most admired of Canadian writers internationally, yet until quite recently one of the least acknowledged in Canada. It has been Gallant's way to elude traditional Canadian categories of classification, partly because of her internationalism (living in Paris for nearly forty years while always writing in English) and partly because of the riddling quality of her narratives and their resistance to analysis. As Neil Besner remarks, it was only with the appearance in 1979 of *From the Fifteenth District* that Gallant's reputation in Canada was established, though by that time she had been a regular contributor to *The New Yorker* since 1951 and had already published four short story collections and two novels. During the 1980s she has had her champions in Ronald Hatch, Donald Jewison, and John Metcalf. Now with Besner's book comes the first full-length critical study of Gallant's fiction and non-fictional essays, to be closely followed by Janice Kulyk Keefer's *Reading Mavis Gallant*.

Besner's approach subdues thematics to narrative and stylistic strategies, as he takes the story collections and novels chronologically, constructing through them a narrative that sustains Gallant's dialectic between personal memory and social history in the cross-cultural encounters documented by her fiction. Paying close attention to the language and structural shifts within particular stories, Besner focuses on those moments of potential revelation which characterise Gallant's distinctive blend of modernism and postmodernism. It is to these glimpsed epiphanies that 'the light of imagination'

(a phrase from 'The Moslem Wife') ambiguously refers. Besner enacts a kind of reading process which attends to the verbal surfaces of Gallant's narratives, seeing them as radical refigurings of truths which always remain provisional, available to be reconstructed.

This study describes the permutations and combinations of memory, history and imagination in Gallant's work. Besner's chapter titles like "Memory's Fictions Against History's Reports" and "History and Memory in the 'Light of Imagination'" signal continuities and shifts, while the evocation of Paris in his first and last chapters ("*The Other Paris*" and "*Overhead in a Balloon: Another Paris*") measures the distance Gallant has traversed over thirty years in her narratives of imaginative responses to that city and its history. Gallant has been an assiduous chronicler of postwar European culture in her fiction and essays (Could anyone but a foreigner display such detached perceptiveness?) and through determined analysis of particular stories in every collection since *The Other Paris* (1956) Besner charts Gallant's explorations of a Europe haunted by a recent past it would like to forget. While displacement, disinheritance, and fragmentation characterise the European experience, the North American experience of Europe is marked by those same feelings, though engendered through a dangerous innocence of history. Gallant's stories always seem to hinge on the non-coincidence between immediate and remembered experience or between romantic invention and historical reality. Besner traces a development in narrative technique from the early stories where disparities are realised only by the reader to the later ones where such perceptions are shared by the protagonists themselves.

If the weakest chapter is the one on Gallant's two novels, where Besner's methodology so finely attuned to the short

story genre shows its limits when dealing with the longer narrative form, then his discussion of *The Pegnitz Junction* (the book which Gallant told Geoffrey Hancock she liked better than anything else she wrote) is the most resonant. Taking the context of fragmentation and cultural collapse in postwar Germany, Besner studies the shape of this collection as a whole before analysing individual stories with their jolts, shifts and changes of focus. In the process he shows how they form a constellation of narratives where social breakdown is mirrored in individual private dramas of paralysed feelings and atrophied memories at a particular point in European history.

Besner is also attentive to some extent to Gallant's Canadianness, and his biographical details of her *Montreal Standard* days as a reporter in the 1940s are interesting for what they reveal about her knowledge of Canadian postwar literature and society with its war brides, refugees, and other displaced persons. He presents a careful discussion of the Linnet Muir stories (collected together in *Home Truths*), heeding Gallant's warnings about making easy connections between autobiography and fiction, treating them as fictional (or metafictional) statements about coming to terms with the inventions of memory and the psychological necessity for habitable fictions.

Indeed there are other narratives for reading Gallant that might be offered, for instance seeing her stories as being about the elusive search for identity and origins in a world where language reflects only conflicting cultural codes, or a feminist reading of her investigation of women's relation to history and tradition. Besner's critical narrative does not accommodate these possibilities, though Gallant's own narratives do not rule them out. What Besner's reading does offer so ably is one way of interpreting Gallant's historical imagination and her narrative strategies

which enact the dynamics of memory and imaginative invention.

CORAL ANN HOWELLS

MID-VICTORIAN CONCERNS

WILLIAM WESTFALL, *Two Worlds: Studies in the Protestant Culture of Ontario, 1820-1870*. McGill-Queen's, \$34.95; pa. \$29.95.

IN HIS CONCLUSION TO *A Literary History of Canada*, Northrop Frye points out that, until two or three generations ago, religion was, perhaps, the major cultural force in Canada. He adds that this religion stressed doctrine at the expense of imagery. Westfall's study of nineteenth-century Protestantism in Upper Canada confirms Frye's first observation but questions the second. It argues that especially imagery related to time and place reflects mid-Victorian concerns that historians have overlooked. Because of the centrality of religion in nineteenth century culture, this image reveals not only the development of religious thought but also the evolution of a national consciousness.

Before the 1837 rebellions, Protestantism in Upper Canada suffered from division. This division was reflected in a fragmented concept of time, both between and within denominations. Anglicans, who stressed reason, order and the unity of church and state, opposed Methodists, who emphasized emotion, God's saving intervention in human lives, and separation of church and state. Further, from the 1820s into the early Victorian period, pre-millennialism, based on the Revelation of St. John, decried the evils of the present generation and prophesied an apocalyptic end of the world — an end of time. Though Methodist emotionalism especially fostered this dangerous doctrine, apocalyptic thought plagued Baptists, Presbyterians and Anglicans as well.

Social change after 1837 altered cultural alliances. Within the religious structure of Upper Canada, Anglicans and Presbyterians lost their positions of state privilege. With the Baptists and Methodists, therefore, they soon found themselves battling not each other but the growing forces of Mammon. Rejecting the fatalistic pre-millennialism, the mid-century Protestant churches together developed a post-millennialist theology, which projected an evolving Christian society worldwide, a society that would ultimately usher in the Biblical thousand years of peace.

As the interpretation of time moved from chaos to progress, church architecture also reflected the new Protestant unity. As if stressing that, in spite of its theological accommodation with progress, official church dogma opposed a rising materialism built on capitalist greed that fueled the engine of economic development, Protestantism affirmed medieval Gothic forms as uniquely religious. Gothic churches, therefore, rose as architectural rebukes to public buildings constructed in the neo-classical style. (The Gothic cast of Ottawa's parliament buildings would thus suggest the near-religious ideals of Confederation for a new land in 1867.)

Unfortunately, Westfall's study fails to reach its potential, largely because of weak writing. Instead of an initial, carefully crafted introduction that coherently analyzes the relationship of time and space to culture, Westfall offers interesting but essentially isolated examples of religious attitudes. To compensate for the theoretical weakness of his base, Westfall later continually repeats the importance of temporal and spatial images without developing further theory.

Nevertheless, Westfall provides valuable insights for cultural historians. He suggests that, by Confederation, Canadian Protestantism, having developed a progressive doctrine of time, was able to

affirm Darwinian evolution in official theology, thereby averting a break between science and religion. Further, a socially engaged theology symbolized by metaphors of progressive time and idealized space was able to foster the social gospel movement, so important politically in the early twentieth century. Unfortunately, in the very process of incorporating material progress into its vision of the future, Protestantism allowed the secular to replace the sacred and thus undermined its own foundation, thereby initiating its own future failure.

The relevance of *Two Worlds* is underscored by its close relationship to other important analyses of the same period. Westfall offers important background for Ramsay Cook's *The Regenerators*, which also presents the evolution of Canadian religious culture from sacred to secular at the end of the Victorian period. Moreover, Westfall's discussion adds an early dimension to A. B. McKillop's work on the rise of philosophical idealism in the 1870s, an idealism that continued to influence Canadian culture well into the twentieth century. Finally, Westfall's study of Ontario's religious history presents a new approach to the secular history of Canadian culture, an approach that locates in Ontario's Victorian culture the roots of modern attitudes as well as a national cultural uniqueness that many historians have, until now, overlooked.

HENRY HUBERT



ALTERNATIVE THEATRE

Dangerous Graces: Women's Poetry on Stage from "Fire Works!" Scripted by Susan McMaster. Balmuir Book Press, \$9.95.

McClure: A Play in two acts, Scott Munroe. Pierre Press, \$8.95.

WITH THESE TWO SCRIPTS Munroe Scott and Susan McMaster remind us that English-Canadian theatre has shown tremendous vitality and variety in recent years. *Dangerous Graces* was scripted from contributions by seventeen Canadian women poets, including the work of well-established poets such as Bronwen Wallace and Ronnie R. Brown and of relative newcomers such as Patricia Rowe, Nadine McInnis, and Sylvia Adams. The script of "Dangerous Graces/Saving Sins," it was composed as a poetry-in-performance piece for Ottawa's month-long festival of women's theatre *Fire Works!*, produced by the Great Canadian Theatre Company in 1987. Munroe Scott's *McClure* was commissioned by Theatre Aquarius of Hamilton, Ontario. First performed in March of 1986, it has also played in Toronto in October, 1986 and at the Guelph Spring Festival in May, 1987 and has recently completed an eight-month tour of Canada. The appearance of *Dangerous Graces* and *McClure* in book form further enriches the repertoire of contemporary Canadian drama available for both performance and study.

The affinity of feminist theatre for poetry-in-performance dramaturgy was demonstrated as long ago as 1976 in the landmark New York production of Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf*. While not as overtly politically charged, like Shange's work the poems in *Dangerous Graces* work through the manifold frustrations of women's experience in patriarchy in order to realize

women's empowerment through spirituality. Embodied by three actors, archetypal voices speak to the five thematic divisions of the play: "Original Courage," "Dangerous Love," "Saving Curiosity," "Dangerous Wisdom," and "Saving Care." The speakers are represented in the text by symbols of the moon: "the new moon for the Maid, or young woman; the half moon for the Matron, or middle-aged woman; and the full moon for the Dame, or old woman." Sign language is called for at one point in the script and a "wordmusic" score is provided at another, indicating only two of the challenges to performance conventions offered by the play. In addition to the script, the book includes valuable commentary on the development of the original production by the director of *Fireworks!* Barbara Lysnes, the director of the show Jennifer Boyes, and the composer of the score Andrew McClure. McMaster's script affords well-varied pacing, at times playful, provocative, contemplative. Her skilful interweaving of woman-oriented themes and performance art makes *Dangerous Graces* an innovative example of alternative theatre.

Munroe Scott, a long-time writer and director in Canadian films, television, and theatre, gleaned material for *McClure* from his two-volume biography of Doctor Robert Baird McClure, *McClure: The China Years* and *McClure: Years of Challenge*. The play ranges over McClure's twenty-five years in China as a United Church missionary doctor and surgeon. Opening in 1926, the play documents his early encounters with war-lords and bandits, and his later role as Field Director for the International Red Cross for Northern China during the conflict between Chinese Nationalists and Communists and the Sino-Japanese war. In this one-man play, the actor, a role originated by Wayne Best, plays not only McClure but also several other characters, including

Mao and Norman Bethune. A set placement diagram, properties lists, reviews from *Performing Arts* and the *Financial Post* are included in the book as well as three black and white photographs from the original production. Robert McClure's own brief introduction and a chronology, covering the period from the appointment of Robert McClure's father to China by the Presbyterian Church in 1880 to McClure's return to China in 1981, provide historical and biographical background for the events of the play. The rapid pace of *McClure* contributes to a sense of the hero as a missionary Indiana Jones, with many ethical issues briefly touched upon, ranging from the imperialist presence of Western nations to McClure's dislike of a drunken Bethune, left unexamined.

Regrettably, although original music was composed for each play, neither score has been reproduced. However, both books (attractively printed and bound) attempt to give a sense of the overall original production through other material. The differences between these two plays, in approach, subject matter, and theatrical experience offered by each production, demonstrate the variety of alternative theatre activity currently taking place in Canada. It is to be hoped that much more of this activity will be made available in book form.

HEATHER JONES

DÉJÀ VU

KENNETH RADU, *Distant Relations*. Oberon, \$29.95/\$14.95.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE ethnic novel (Ukrainian this time) set initially on the prairies and offering a vivid if often violent picture of the conditions of early homesteading; a novel in which an obstinate old woman casts up accounts at the

end of her life, the book alternating between scenes set in the present and events remembered from the past.

I have tried in the above paragraph to offer as neutral an account as possible of the contents and effect of *Distant Relations*. Having done so, I can readily imagine two reviews of the novel that would draw opposed conclusions from this same evidence. A thematic critic, if in patriotic mood, might well praise it for its Canadianness, assign it a central place within the Canadian tradition, and theorize about its social and cultural significance. A grumpier critic would probably jib at the derivativeness of the conception (*another* ethnic novel; *another* rendition of dour life on the prairies; Hagar Shipley recycled once again).

What both critics are likely to ignore — and what for me is of the utmost importance — is the style, the author's conspicuous control over the rhythms of his sentences, the flow of his paragraphs, his capacity to move smoothly between the narrative voice and that of his protagonist. So far as I am concerned, it is his ability as a stylist that distinguishes Kenneth Radu from the majority of his contemporaries. While it is obviously impossible to illustrate such qualities in the course of a brief review, the fact that he is always in full control of his prose needs to be emphasized. For the serious reader, his stylistic sophistication represents a considerable part of his creative achievement.

Nonetheless, the novel has its problems. While "Hagar Shipley recycled" would be unfair, an uneasy sense of *déjà vu* hangs over the book. While it is absorbing to read, it does not earn high marks for freshness of conception or formal originality. Above all, while at its best *Distant Relations* is impressive and moving, at its worst it becomes infuriatingly repetitious. The seventy-four-year-old protagonist, Vera Dobriu, is the vehicle for a devastating attack on the state of the contempor-

ary world, and at first the scathing references to contemporary violence and phoniness, the offensiveness of the world of cheap plastic, seem refreshing and even exhilarating. But as the list lengthens and the absurdities are reiterated again and again, the law of diminishing returns sets in. If her unsatisfactory husband had been described as a fungus one more time, if I were reminded once again that she was in the arms of her black lover at the time of the atomic explosion over Hiroshima, I might well have screamed.

Oberon Press policies do not favour the spreading of authorial information. Clearly, however, Kenneth Radu is no fledgling writer. To my knowledge he has published two children's stories, a moving book of poems (*Letters to a Distant Father*, 1987), and a collection of short stories (*The Cost of Living*, also 1987) that I found impressive indeed. *Distant Relations* may have its snags, but the talent behind it is unmistakable. It is clearly a very respectable first novel, and Radu is a writer to be watched.

W. J. KEITH

COSTUME PARADE

MICHELLE GADPAILLE, *The Canadian Short Story*. Oxford.

88 Best Canadian Short Stories, ed. David Helwig & Maggie Helwig. Oberon, \$25.95/\$12.95.

Coming Attractions, ed. David Helwig & Maggie Helwig. Oberon, n.p.

IT HAS BEEN CLAIMED often enough that Canadian literature excels in the short story, a genre which gains its strength from its steady development over almost a century and from its more recent growth in productivity and diversity. The relatively long tradition, the thriving present and the promising future of the English-Canadian short story form the basis of the three books under review.

All in all this survey is a useful introduction to the English-Canadian short story providing, within its scope, a considerable amount of information through the discussion of paradigmatic texts and summary assessments of the authors in a succinct, straightforward style. Gadpaille relies heavily on the canon of realist, modernist stories — a recurrent criterion for a story's importance is how frequently it has been anthologized — and only occasionally does she draw attention to unduly neglected stories (as in the case of Hugh Garner's "Our Neighbours the Nuns"). There are gaps in her account — Henry Kreisel, for instance, is missing — but these may be as unavoidable as the reductive labels attached to some of the briefer references. Still, one could argue that Malcolm Lowry, once included, would deserve fuller treatment, and the capsule characterization of Timothy Findley as a gentle, leisurely teller of tales strikes one as far off the mark. In the long chapter on Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* is passed over presumably because its author has, hesitatingly, classified it as a novel. But how does it differ structurally from Laurence's *A Bird in the House*, which as a sequence of linked stories is properly dealt with? Gadpaille's reluctance to take such borderline cases into consideration probably has something to do with her general avoidance of genre theory, which is most conspicuous at the beginning and towards the end of the book, where questions of defining and stretching genre boundaries are constantly implied rather than explicated. Similarly, she refrains from comparative approaches. Apart from occasional references to the American short story, there are no comparisons with developments in French-Canadian or other post-colonial literatures. In all of these respects the lack of a bibliography, which could have guided the reader to further sources, is particularly deplorable.

Gadpaille mentions the Oberon antho-

logies as an influential forum contributing to the present flowering of the Canadian short story in its more "conservative and modernist" mode. Therefore, the latest batch of these collections invites close inspection as it should indicate the present trends within an established tradition. A moderate version of modernism in post-modernist times is, indeed, what gives the majority of the stories assembled here their stamp, and it may be said at the outset that the best stories and the most promising writers of 1988 as chosen by the Helwigs do not yield a particularly good vintage. While *88 Best Canadian Short Stories* is advertised on the blurb as a "rich and varied collection" and announced in the editors' introductory note as a selection of unique stories taken from a great bulk of deserving texts on offer, one feels rather let down by the narrow range of thematic concerns and the conventional methods of presentation which by and large inform the actual stories. The anthology opens with a slight piece by Carol Shields which strikes the keynote of much that follows by lining up a costume parade of people posing images of their selves in everyday situations and prompting the final question: Who does he/she think he/she is? Variants of this question in the Munro vein recur in a number of stories and are asked, more often than not, rather overtly, patronizing the reader even when uttered by a character or an authorial persona. The limits of the stories' world become evident in conspicuous absences: the focus is exclusively on the common tribulations of people's private lives, especially the intricate relationships between individuals of different sexes and generations, to the total neglect of the more public sphere in political affairs and social problems, even at the level of working life, or of the more fundamental dimension of relating one's existence to the world at large. What we have here is an endless array of men or women and their

lovers or friends, of mothers and daughters, fathers and families entangled in critical situations which throw their lives into relief and shade their self-images with irony yet remain bound up with the Me writ large. Technically, these stories follow the conventions of psychological realism with a noticeable preference for adolescent or female angles of narration, for a structural linearity interrupted only by shifts to the reporting of past events and for an equally straightforward style.

There are stories like Ernest Hekkanen's "The Violent Lavender Beast" and Tom Marshall's "The Other Mexico," which venture near or cross the boundary of fantasy to present obsessive visions and apparitions. We come under the spell of a few striking images as in Davy James-French's "Heaven Full of Astronauts," where the attempt of a small-town community to attract the attention of an early space flight comes across as a pathetic gesture towards recognition by the outside world. Some stories lead up to a final ironic twist or a double-edged open ending: Joyce Marshall's "Blood and Bone" confronts a woman with her daughter, whom she had to give away for adoption under painful circumstances and who returns with all the obstinacy of a religious zealot.

The stories concentrate on Canadian characters of the urban middle class, especially the world of the arts and academia. Where small-town life comes into focus it is either as an adolescent experience, and as such a matter of the recollected past, or as an encounter with an unfamiliar territory in the present. Settings in foreign countries are seen mainly through the eyes of Canadians abroad. The one exception is Rohinton Mistry's "Facing the Precipice," which describes the shattered self-confidence of a Goan in Bombay faced with loss of control over his grown-up daughter and the dilapidation of the neighbourhood, a story which

only by implied parallel may also say something about the immigrant's experience in Canada. International events or internal multicultural tensions do not impinge on Canadian life as depicted in these stories. Only the rumbling of world War II and its disrupting impact on family life are registered in Jane Rule's "War's End," whereas more recent developments like the conflict between Anglo-Canadians and Franco-Canadians or that most topical fear of an increasing dependence on the United States are not even hinted at.

The story that deserves to be singled out is Timothy Findley's "Bragg and Minna" because it surpasses the rest of the collection on most accounts. Its title characters are two opposing kinds of personalities and writers, the man worried about the future and devoted to meticulous craftsmanship, his wife full of indomitable vitality and committed to writing on behalf of the underprivileged and inarticulate, both of them involved in the birth of a severely handicapped child and entangled in a triangle with a homosexual friend. The story touches upon the complexity of life and death, reason and compassion, self and society, writing and reality, and links the archetypal imagery of Australian aborigines with the ominous times of AIDS in order to provoke a shock of recognition in the man which brings him closer to his wife after her death from cancer. The story is told in a terse style and marked by a segmental structure of time shifts within a retrospective frame.

Findley's "Bragg and Minna" opens a series of linked Stories in *Stones* (1988), which is going to be continued beyond his latest book. In this respect it is much more promising than the samples anticipating the future of the genre in *Coming Attractions*. This anthology contains three stories each by Christopher Fisher, Carol Ann Wien and Rick Hillis, all newcomers at least to the short story. Fisher's stories are

about life in the fictional prairie town of Dolguard and, in striking contrast to the other anthology, present glimpses of a rural microcosm with working class or even marginal characters dramatized in a suitably sparse style. Fisher obviously joins the tradition of realistic prairie fiction but, unassuming as his pieces are, he may well have the edge over the other, more sophisticated, writers. Wien's recurrent theme is the encounter in transience: Canadians abroad (Brazil, Mexico) or in an unfamiliar region (Nova Scotia) have to face challenging situations which bring their whole being under scrutiny. The James-Gallant tradition is as important for the narrative mode as it is for her thematic interest. Hillis comes closest to the other two in a lengthy story about the ordeal and self-assertion of a boy during a holiday on a farm, whereas his shorter pieces concern the world of the rodeo and football enhanced by popular mythologizing and approached here in a rather more deviant way.

One does not have to share John Metcalf's reservations about the self-conscious nationalism and naive provincialism of Canadian literature to find these anthologies largely disappointing. Even within their self-imposed thematic and technical limitations most of the stories fall short of the standards set by the better stories of Munro and Atwood.

EBERHARD KREUTZER

ARTIFICIAL PARADISE?

BRIAN BARTLETT, *Planet Harbour*. Goose Lane
\$8.95, pa.

PHIL HALL, *Amanuensis*. Brick Books, n.p.

HAROLD RHENISCH, *A Delicate Fire*. Sono Nis
\$6.95, pa.

FOR ALL THEIR DIFFERENCE in outlook, experience, and aesthetic, these three writers share a serious engagement with many of the same questions. Bartlett,

though the most obviously delighted in the play of poetry, knows the dangers to which absorption with the self and the play of words may lead: it is in keeping with this awareness that both Donne and Stevens echo through his pages. Hall, much less willing than Bartlett to let words merely play, makes play with words his means of questioning formalist aesthetics. And Rhenisch, though generally more serious in tone than the other two, holds a vision of language that only fails of Bartlett's practice by his awareness that language outside the poem ever fails to approach his vision: how, ask many of Rhenisch's poems, can the poet remain long satisfied in an artificial paradise?

Tom Wayman, for one, cannot: "I find it discouraging that the literary arts — which are touted (and funded) as epitomizing the human spirit — should help perpetuate the taboo against accurately depicting daily work and thus contribute to human pain." Nor can Hall: "When we handle things and then write words / we speak of that interchange of prayers / but when we handle only / pens / we begin to pray to our pens / for words / that are solid / excuses for having let go." But though Wayman's insistence on bringing work — *real work* — into poetry is the dominant theme in Hall's *Amanuensis*, his first book of poems, anarchy is its chief impression, as if it sought to resist, *sis* (his first book of poems), anarchy is its unsettling mix of poems and graphics — the graphics themselves unsettlingly mixed, ranging from the German classic painter, Anselm Feuerbach, to sketches by Hall of office workers, to photographs of a chair's shadow — by its mostly untitled, fragmentary poems, and by its practical jokes. This unsettledness is one of the volume's strengths; another is its frequent precision of perception: "A chickadee / imbeds itself / in the fog." Like Edward Thomas, whom he praises along the way, Hall can be a "meticulous listener."

A Delicate Fire, Rhenisch's third volume of poems, suggests a different distrust of language. His poems seem constantly alert to man's pride before nature. Poetry becomes not so much an artificial paradise, as it threatens to become for Hall, but rather a place of authority from which the poet can both pronounce on the deficiencies of language beyond the poem and perfect that humility before the non-human world that itself seems to corrupt daily speech. "It's not *purity* we ask for," he writes in "The Drive Home from Calgary," "but to be able to live with our words — which means, in part, to facilitate exchange between men, / but does not mean profit, / and does not mean to lie." Some judgements called forth by his observations seem based on slight evidence. In "Bella Coola (Komkotes), 1873," the poet scrutinizes the members of the expedition of Dr. Israel Powell, Indian Commissioner, in an old photograph. Selecting the details by which to characterize Powell — "out-thrust belly, fat, / supporting himself / stiffly on a cane" — Rhenisch concludes that he could not "sit down for a drink" with him: "in some lace-windowed bar / in Victoria. He looks a fool."

Planet Harbour, Bartlett's first book of poems, by indulging itself in the world of words refrains from larger judgements. "A Distant Stream on Madonna Mountain" pardons the vagaries of human perception: "who's pure enough / to stop comparing?" A similar conceit appears in "Out There": "Tempting to say my blue ink flows out / from here, turns black, then coats / all the shapes and forms out there, / leaving a night or a nothingness / in which I can create what I want. The anchor — or "harbour" — of his wit is the relationship between two intimates. His poems seem written first for that intimate other, and only secondly for a larger audience. The feeling, then, is often that the private world so displayed is delight-

ful, but that its delight is bought at the cost of ignoring its fragility and relative slowness in the world. Donne's example, among others', returns with a vengeance at this complaint: do we feel cramped and confined in love poems? Perhaps Tom Wayman or Phil Hall, among others, may. But Rhenisch, for one, would agree with Bartlett that the expression of the bond between lovers adds something to the larger world. Why is it, then, that some of Bartlett's poems diminish rather than magnify? The problem may lie in his pronouns, "I" and "you," which seem to enforce, when they should unsettle, the roles of gifted maker ("I") and grateful reader ("you"). The effect is to confine the poem to its small world, walled-in by its pronouns.

DARRELL LAIRD

(UN)FRANK: DAVEY

FRANK DAVEY, *Reading Canadian Reading*.
Turnstone, \$14.95.

IN THIS COLLECTION of sixteen essays on various aspects of Canadian literature and criticism, Frank Davey identifies himself as someone deeply committed to all the right issues aligned with current theory. He would (1) concern himself with "theories of 'interest' or 'conflict'"; (2) be upset about our continuing ignorance of critical theory and about our unwillingness to realize that "every critical act . . . assumes at least one theory of criticism"; (3) argue against those who are "blind to the implications of their own approaches" (those who don't see that "there can be no absolute values" in critical texts — only "ideological positions"); and (4) valorize those critics who celebrate their ideological positions and who insist that criticism is a political act.

This is all very *au courant*; the problem is that Davey speaks as if he had just discovered the relation between ideo-

logy and theory. He seems impressed by this discovery, though he never really clarifies what the nature of his involvement is. Perhaps this is because his own role and political status as a critic remain unclear. The "discourse theory" Davey endorses makes it easy to get around this problem of self-definition because "Discourse theory avoids the metaphysical difficulties of positing a freestanding and consistent self but, by positing that all utterances are mere rhetoric, appears to give all hortatory or political expression equal standing."

While Davey might argue that ego is relative to rhetoric, his book demonstrates that his own development as a critic has quite a bit to do with the recognition of his aims as an ambitious, freestanding young academic. His accounts of how his various critical books evolved are embarrassing because they suggest that Davey received contracts for some of his earlier studies because he spoke to the right party at the right time.

Davey's confessional mode suggests that he is trying to justify his career, to explain why he lacks canonical status as a poet, to excuse his participation in an ideologically corrupt and sickening bourgeois university superstructure, to distance himself from previous associations that now strike him as politically incorrect. In other words, Davey is trying to rewrite his life. No wonder he sounds like someone trying to be someone else.

This brings me to explain why reading Davey's book made me feel sad. I liked the old Davey, when he was just plain Frank. His books broke new ground. They were fresh, and Frank was frank. But in *Reading Canadian Reading*, it's much harder to find Frank. Davey has betrayed Frank's faith. If Davey tells us that his study of Birney now seems questionable because it is organized chronologically around Birney's life as a historical subject, then how can I credit *Reading Canadian*

Reading, which is framed by a chronological analysis of the texts that seem to focus Davey's historical (and presumably "real") life? If Davey argues that certain Canadian writers are selected for study in schools and universities because they do not provoke "significant theoretical discussion" we must ask how it is that Davey considers a writer such as Atwood to be easier to "consume" than, say, George Bowering. The answer is not hard to find: Davey devalues Atwood's intellectual and ideological import because it is in his *interest* to do so. Davey's entire study attempts to argue that literary value ("interest") is radically contingent. If this is so, then he wastes his time trying to determine why one author is or is not the subject of study in the schools. And if value is *not* radically contingent, then the anti-essentialist stance that Davey adopts is worthless.

But Davey wants it both ways. This is why he is able to include several essays (on such figures as Atwood, Audrey Thomas, Pratt, and on such topics as the long poem and prairie poetry — to list a few) which are, despite a few deconstructive trimmings, written in the voice of Frank. There's some directness here. Fresh insights turn up. And though most of the essays *are* thematic and new critical in orientation, that does not stop Frank from drawing our attention to interesting details and connections. What a relief from the book's opening pieces, in which Davey's discourse-ridden ego is flashed in front of us at every turn. But the relief is short-lived. Davey seems to be growing bigger in his mirror. Frank is shrinking. The old excitement is getting harder to find.

ROBERT LECKER



LECKER'S BLAISE

ROBERT LECKER, *An Other I: The Fictions of Clark Blaise*. ECW, \$16.00.

REFRESHINGLY UNCONVENTIONAL and highly appropriate in its approach to its subject's self-absorption, *An Other I* is both a perceptive reading of Blaise's texts and an intriguing contribution to the discussion of the relationship between author and critic.

Lecker argues that over the course of his career Clark Blaise's work becomes "increasingly preoccupied with the autobiographical and self-reflexive impulses that form his shaping vision," and that it shows him searching for what James Olney calls "metaphors of self." Lecker approaches Blaise's work in its own terms, embroils himself in it, and gives an account of it from within. Clark Blaise, Lecker writes, "is all that I want the Author to be, and he is all I know the author can never be. He is my (critical) dilemma and the story I will read and write." This, in other words, is not only Lecker's reading of Blaise and Lecker's writing of Blaise; this is Lecker's Blaise. "My project: to enter an other I, to speak into his otherness, to let his otherness be mine."

After his own prefatory remarks, Lecker allows Blaise to introduce himself in his own autobiographical "Chronology of Salience." This was a good idea, but it turned out to be disappointing because Blaise has written more interesting accounts of his own formative experiences in almost everything he has published. Though the introduction of Blaise's own voice here at the outset of Lecker's study does help dissolve the distance between author and critics, the "Chronology" adds very little that is new to the familiar stew of Blaise's early life, and it collapses into a matter-of-fact list of the jobs he has held, the books he has published and the places he has lived over the past 30 years.

Lecker's discussion of the fiction is organized chronologically, and it shows how Blaise feeds not only on himself — on his own life — but on the selves he has created through his writing, as if a Frankie Thibault, a Norman Dyer, or another of his fictional alter egos, were more real to him than his actual self. The kind of intense autobiographical (also "autohagiographical," "auto-erotic," and "auto-cannibalistic") self-reflexivity that Lecker discerns in Blaise's fiction raises questions about its value: "Can such self-reflexive fiction," Lecker asks, "ever go beyond self to embrace a reality that is larger than the speakers', or does his narcissism doom him to gaze perpetually upon himself?" Blaise has discussed these questions in terms of a "tragic dilemma," and he has wrestled with them in his fiction, most obviously in his novel *Lusts*, in which the writer Richard Durgin ultimately fails to go beyond himself. And although Lecker wants to argue that *Lusts*, in portraying Durgin ironically, "must also be seen as a partial condemnation of self-serving art," this is also Lecker's (critical) dilemma. For the questions implicate Lecker too, and to his great credit he does not shy away from recognizing this situation. "Why support the obvious narcissism that seems to motivate these texts? Why write about an author who persists in telling us about his own fundamentally uninteresting life?"

Lecker concludes interestingly by commenting on how thoroughly Blaise's existential project seems to fail. If we want him to resolve the conflicts that define his life, we will inevitably be disappointed in Blaise. This is a writer who quite deliberately refuses to resolve his own dilemma.

Limiting himself as he does to the terms of reference that Blaise sets for himself, Lecker is unable — as Blaise is unable — to accommodate an other truly as an Other. A critic less embroiled in Blaise's own world might comment on his treat-

ment of women, who are either subsumed as part of himself (as his wife Bharati is subsumed in *Days and Nights in Calcutta*) or are shabbily caricatured (e.g. the pipe-smoking McGill professor Ella Perleman in "North"), and might be less satisfied with an *oeuvre* that is only attempting to move beyond self-referentiality and that evidently refuses, finally, to make that very move. Such limitation notwithstanding, Lecker's approach enables him to understand Blaise as only a sympathetic reader can, and to send us back to his fiction with renewed interest.

LINDA LEITH

APPROACH

JOHN HAYMAN, ed., *Robert Brown and the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition*. UBC Press, \$29.95.

IN THIS BOOK John Hayman gathers together three articles by Robert Brown: "The Land We Live In," "A Guest at a Potlatch" and "A Collection of Indians Myths and Legends," plus the 100-page "Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition." Illustrations are plentiful and fall into four categories: contemporary photographs; maps; sketches and watercolours by Frederick Whymper, a member of the VIEE; and maps drawn specially for this book. The editor supplies a Preface, Introduction, copious notes, and two appendices.

The dust jacket informs the reader that "Robert Brown, a twenty-one-year-old Scot, arrived on Vancouver Island in 1863 for the purpose of collecting seeds, roots, and plants for the Botanical Association of Edinburgh. It soon became apparent, however, that he was not content with being a mere gatherer of specimens, and his relations with his sponsor rapidly soured. So when the opportunity

arose in 1864 to head the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition, Brown eagerly agreed to be its commander." To put Brown's work into perspective, we must know Vancouver Island is barely 280 miles long and is at its widest only some 85 miles. Its coast was explored with some thoroughness by the Spanish in the 1780s and 1790s; through to the 1820s this same area was a marketplace for the maritime fur trade; after 1843 there were permanent trading posts on the island. In the 1840s and 1850s few Europeans had reason to cross the island (there being no trade worth the name on the west coast); those who did found it crisscrossed by Indian trails. No one, Indian or white, to pass through the interior reported anything worth a second look.

In contrast, Brown did his job and did it thoroughly. He led this expedition east and west, north and south; he mapped the "unknown interior" (the attempted reproduction of Brown's beautiful map in this book resulted in a Rorschach blot); he and his men kept journals of varying value; and he published a series of newspaper reports followed by *Vancouver Island*, an account of the VIEE.

However the real point here, and it is one never drawn by the editor, is not that Brown did his work so well, it is that no one really cared. The VIEE's purpose was economic: in 1864 Victoria needed a financial boost, so the city fathers sent the VIEE out to find gold. His expedition found gold, copper and coal, but only the gold had immediate, though fleeting value. For Brown the summer-long expedition led to nothing. He mapped the Island but the result was published in Germany and had no local effect; his newspaper articles were never reprinted and his *Vancouver Island* is, for practical purposes, unreadable. Two years later Brown returned to Britain and a life on Grub Street.

The value of this book is to be found in the editor's annotation; his notes are wide-ranging and up to date. Brown's texts are stimulating, as I have found repeatedly while working with his coastal writings; typically what he does not say is more to the point than what he does say, and it often leads the researcher off along byways.

Comparing Brown's published work to J. Despard Pemberton's *Facts and Figures Relating to Vancouver Island and British Columbia* (1860), Matthew Macfie's *Vancouver Island and British Columbia* (1865) and G. M. Sproat's *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life* (1868) proves Brown a dilettante, one so interested in being an authority he rarely wrote perceptively about anything; had the editor attempted to put Brown into perspective, he might have discovered Brown was only one of a dozen or more English writers working on Vancouver Island in the 1860s. Learning that Brown was not working in isolation, that Victoria was then something of an international community — and one in which Brown, it seems, was not well thought of — might have forced the editor to deal more thoughtfully with his subject.

Before putting together a collection of this nature, an editor must decide whether the material can speak for itself. If so, then notes and commentary should be held to a minimum. Quite another approach is required when a work is episodic. The contents of *Robert Brown* demand a third approach. The material in this book, along with all of Brown's uncollected writings, could have been better used as the primary source material for a monograph or biography. Because the editor did not consider the available approaches he created an anthology, a weak one at that, for Brown's style lacks the vitality to make his various articles cohere.

CHARLES LILLARD

LOYALIST

CYNTHIA DUBIN EDELBERG, *Jonathan Odell: Loyalist Poet of the American Revolution*. Duke University Press, \$24.95.

ONE OF THE PERSISTENT cultural differences between Canadians and Americans lies in their respective attitudes to those who supported the losing side in the American Revolution. Tory traitors on one side of the border become Loyalist heroes on the other; a War of Independence in one country becomes a revolutionary rupture in another. Cynthia Edelberg's subtitle is a statement of her subject's position — Jonathan Odell was a "loyalist poet of the American Revolution."

As an American scholar, conscious of national perceptions, Edelberg works hard to be fair to Odell in explaining his worldview, its effect on his political attitudes, and its effect on his writing. To establish the philosophical basis for his thought she begins by analyzing that part of Odell's library which still exists in the New Brunswick Museum. Her conclusion that his writing was greatly influenced by the Augustan ideas of order, virtue, and the imperfectibility of man is undoubtedly correct, but since there is no indication of a purchase date for the books it is difficult to know whether they are ones which influenced his thinking as a young man, or whether they suited his personal taste and public image as a New Brunswick official in later years. T. B. Vincent's emphasis on the influence of the satirical writing of the Augustans, Butler, Pope and Swift on political satire in post-revolutionary Canada in *Narrative Verse Satire in Maritime Canada* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1978) is a more secure starting point for the analysis of Augustan influence on Odell's work.

Edelberg proceeds chronologically on three intertwined lines: the political

events of the period from a loyalist perspective; Odell's documented activities between 1766 and 1784; and an analysis of the ideals contained in his published literary work of the same period. She has been particularly successful in outlining the Loyalist view of events — on the one hand a sense that a few unprincipled demagogues were leading the unwitting colonists to destruction, and on the other a frustration with the incredible stupidity of British policy both before and during the revolution. Having initially defined the Loyalist ideology, her analysis highlights its elements in each successive work. She is not concerned with subtleties in Odell's attitudes, nor in his poetic abilities.

A few initial pages of biography take us to 1766, when Odell's first poems were published, a few concluding pages deal with his New Brunswick career after 1784. The remainder of the book is devoted to his writing and activities in that eighteen year pre-revolution and revolutionary period. While this approach is completely defensible, it does give a rather distorted impression of the life and works of a man who had lived to be over eighty and whose publications extended over almost sixty years.

In most instances, Edelberg has been careful not to resort to unsupported hypotheses in order to round out her subject. Where biography and bibliography are concerned, she generally sticks to the documentation which she has unearthed in a wide variety of American and New Brunswick sources. She does not seem to have investigated holdings in Great Britain.

Yet, for all her scholarly care, her neutrality fails her in one important respect. She evidently did not find Odell an attractive person and, without adducing supporting evidence, repeatedly ascribes motives of expediency and greed to him. Motives are always difficult to analyze

because people rarely put that information in writing, but surely it is possible for someone to be genuinely motivated by what he perceives to be duty and loyalty. If Odell did not hold his beliefs strongly, why did he not take the easy way out by giving them up and seeking preferment from the winning side, as others did? Just in case the reader should still think of Odell as admirable, Edelberg's final chapter shows him job hunting in England, winning a plum appointment thanks to his patron Sir Guy Carleton, oppressing black Loyalists in New Brunswick, and expounding out-of-date political philosophy to an antagonistic assembly. Yet all Loyalists made claims to the Loyalist Claims Commission and Odell, who had done considerable service to the Crown and had seen all his property confiscated, had a legitimate claim. He was certainly luckier than many in the reward he received for his services. New Brunswick Assemblies were almost always hostile to office-holders, regardless of ideology, and one wonders, also, just how out-of-date at least part of the Loyalist ideology was and is. Her final quotation, intended to prove that Odell's ideas were anachronistic, could, with the deletion of a reference to the King, be incorporated verbatim into the speech of any conservative U.S. Senator today. Nonetheless, she concludes "Loyalist ideology supplies answers, but they are not the right ones."

For Canadian readers Edelberg's book will be most useful in its correlation of events with the content of Odell's "American Revolutionary" poetry, and in its gathering of available North-American biographical information about Odell's life in the revolutionary period. T. B. Vincent has already published a complete annotated bibliography; perhaps someone will now write a biography which takes into account Odell's entire life and work.

MARY LU MACDONALD

NIAGARA

TOM MARSHALL, *Voices on the Brink*. Macmillan, \$14.95.

TOM MARSHALL SETS HIS third novel, *Voices on the Brink*, in his native Niagara Falls. The Battle of Queenston Heights, the Natural Wonder of the New World, Love Canal, two towns with one name, the quintessence of wild North America for nineteenth-century European connoisseurs, the Great Lakes mecca for kitsch and sleaze — Niagara is redolent of these, and thus of Canadian history, and of an identity fraught with confusion, shame, and degeneration. The richness of associations and symbolism, a potential virtue of this novel, is ultimately one of its weaknesses. Marshall summons so much of this material that the effect is a literary phone-booth-cramming stunt of seeing how many allusions can be accommodated in one narrative, though the narrative does not accommodate them very well. Marilyn Monroe, in town to film Henry Hathaway's "Niagara" in 1953, is supposed to counterpoint, in her allure and fatal sexuality, the novel's *femme fatale* Lisan. It is a nice conjunction, but, less nicely, we get told that it is. The rhetorical equivalent of winking neon Niagara Falls lights surround and announce all the symbols; the implication is that most readers will be too thick to notice them otherwise. This is too bad because the idea of Niagara as a metaphor for the violent yet seductive border between banality and evil is potent enough without pedantic glossing.

The novel is told by, and about, Ron Benson, who grew up partly in Niagara Falls, partly around nuclear research sites in the United States, during World War Two. Like the protagonists of many of Clark Blaise's Florida fictions, Ron is uncertain how he feels about Canadians and Americans. Mainly he feels dull. The novel begins as a *bildungsroman*, and it

carefully evokes both the extraordinary physical presence of the Escarpment landscape and the ordinary sexual obsessiveness and bragging of adolescent boys. Ron and his three closest boyfriends wonder what it would be like to have a crack at Marilyn Monroe, while she is in town, and they compare notes on sexual initiations. Mostly they run over to the American side of the border, where the action is better. Marshall succeeds in accurately realizing the dreary uneventfulness of their cruising. Then one night in a bar in Buffalo, Ron meets Lisan, and his life for the first time partakes of both ecstasy and disaster.

The process of relieving Ron's naïveté is the main movement of *Voices on the Brink*. Through Lisan he discovers that the price of having an emotional life is that it may become unstable and complicated. Lisan's gangster brother has probably abused her sexually, she is estranged from her parents — her shadowy existence tinges the banality of Ron's. The novel's radical thesis: bad things happen even in small-town Ontario. Ron's father dies of cancer, and environmental crimes are invoked; Lisan makes Ron witness to the aftermath of a murder, for reasons that are neither explained nor very important in the end; the boyhood quartet of buddies breaks up, and Ron tries to rescue his friend Carl, who betrayed him by heading west with Lisan, from the San Francisco heroin scene.

I am afraid that I read *Voices on the Brink* much as I watched David Lynch's celebrated film "Blue Velvet," which Marshall's novel closely resembles in theme, structure, and tone. The news that squeaky-clean America (or Ontario) is really a freakshow is scarcely news at all. Treating the revelation of this truth as shocking requires an implicit assumption that most readers or viewers believe the squeaky-clean surface.

Even granting that Henrik Ibsen's work

of shocking the bourgeoisie from their complacency needs doing over and over, *Voices on the Brink* has technical weaknesses which blunt the sense of horror. The narration alternates between Ron's first-person voice and another third-person point-of-view which is sympathetic to Ron's. Why? The narrative wobbliness is more annoying than ingenious — an experiment looking for an effect. The shift to dramatic monologue in Chapters Ten and Eleven is also pointless, for Marshall has done nothing to prepare for a truly polyphonic narrative.

The style is dull, wooden, awkward, because Ron Benson is. Marshall's insistence on making Ron's adult personality the only truly mysterious object in the novel means that a reader cannot understand the results of his suffering, nor readily connect the stylistic ungainliness of the narration with the narrators' struggle against the chill that experience has set upon their feelings. By default, too much of the writing feels poor, and this poverty transfers from the narrators' emotional deficits to the author's technical incompetence. Mark Twain would not have let Huck Finn do that to him.

In very rare winters, the falls at Niagara freeze. The awesome power then seems all the greater for being so strangely suspended. Experimentation-for-its-own-sake blows a chilling wind through *Voices on the Brink*, leaving readers on the brink of a powerful metaphor yet ultimately unmoved by its senseless, arrested downward rush.

MARK MADOFF

POSTCOLONIAL ANGUISH

NEIL BISSOONDATH, *A Casual Brutality*. Macmillan, \$22.95.

THOSE WHO ADMIRE Neil Bissoondath's first book, the collection of short stories

entitled *Digging Up the Mountains*, will be delighted to read his second — a novel this time: *A Casual Brutality*. Carefully crafted, it demonstrates the writer's command of narrative technique. It also confirms him as an accomplished storyteller, whose characters are impressively well delineated, at time mystifying, but always engaging.

The novel is set in a West Indian, newly-independent island-state called Casaquemada, which bears similarities to Trinidad, Bissoondath's native country. The concoction of such a name is quite suggestive: its Spanish roots, as the text reveals, mean a "house that is burning"; this choice, together with a title that indicates frightening, gratuitous violence, augurs the bleakness of life in the postcolonial Caribbean. After two portentous epigraphs from Jacques Brel and Jacobo Timerman, the novel thus ominously opens:

There are times when the word *hope* is but a synonym for *illusion*: it is the most virile of perils. He who cannot discern the difference — he whose perception of reality has slipped from him, whose appreciation of honesty has withered within him — will face, at the end, a fine levied, with no appeal, with only regret coating the memory like ash.

The narrative shifts between Toronto and Casaquemada, with the chronology following the perceptions and recollections of its narrator-protagonist: Raj. He comes from a middle-class Hindu family, whose status has evolved from indentured laborers — brought to the island in hordes from India during colonial days — to influential businessmen and government officials. Despite this happy twist in his family's fortunes, Raj does not see Casaquemada as a paradise, for there exists a subculture of racial tension between the Indians and the Blacks, who too were imported in hordes to the island but as slaves. According to the narrator, the

cause of this racial crisis is rooted in the resentment the Blacks feel for not achieving a fair share of economic and political success as the Indians, some of whom — like Raj's cousin, Surein — are contemptuous of Blacks.

The novel opens with Raj's second and *final* departure from Casaquemada towards Canada, severing all ties with his cruel, native land. The first departure occurs years earlier when Raj leaves the island to study medicine in Toronto, where he marries Jan, the smart waitress in a strip club. Finishing his studies, he settles in Toronto, content both professionally and familially. However, family pressures and hope for wealth cause Raj to return to Casaquemada. Ironically Jan, who by now has turned cynical and apathetic, agrees to move with her husband to the Caribbean because, as she puts it, "I could use some adventure in my life." Indeed, the adventure turns too risky in a land where "life . . . is a lottery" and where the oil boom has turned to bust, precipitating a bloody political conflict that has strong racial overtones; arson and assassination become norms: two victims of this "casual brutality of collapse" are Jan and her child from Raj.

Here the novel becomes subtle, demanding careful delineation of the novel's ideological stance. There are constant hints of corruption at high places in Casaquemada, of promises broken and dreams betrayed, and of a state of chaos, cruelty and social disintegration in the postcolonial island-state. Significantly, given the narrator's Indian identity, the discourse suggests that Black activists and/or the Leftists are mostly to blame; yet the racial conflict does not totally polarize the novel's characters. Wayne, a sympathetically-drawn black figure who represents Raj's alter ego, undertakes to protect the physician's family during dangerous nights; on the other hand, the unscrupulous Surein constantly pronounces racist

slurs against Blacks, even in the presence of his Black employee, Lenny. It is the latter who eventually avenges himself by participating in the ruthless killing of Raj's wife and son.

One wishes at certain points in the narrative that Raj's political ambivalence and hesitancy had been rendered more lucidly and that the counter-argument had been more fully formulated. Despite this ambiguity, or perhaps because of it, *A Casual Brutality* remains an impressively readable novel.

AMIN MALAK

EXPLORATIONS

NICHOLAS CATANOY, *Amanita Muscaria*; *Car-net*, 1980-1988. Collection Jalons, Barré et Dayez, n.p.

YVES GOSSELIN, *Connaissance de la Mort*. Triptyque, n.p.

JOËL POURBAIX, *Le Simple Geste d'Exister*, avec six tableaux de Michel Casavant. Noroît, n.p.

GUY CLOUTIER, *Beau Lieu*, avec douze dessins de Valère Novarina, Noroît/Cismonte é Pumonti, n.p.

CÉLYNE FORTIN, *D'elle en elles*, avec trois dessins de Dominique Blain, Noroît/Bremond, n.p.

MARIE SAVARD, *Les Chroniques d'une Seconde à l'Autre*, livre et cassette. La pleine lune, n.p.

THE *Amanita Muscaria* is a deadly poisonous fungus and a powerful hallucinatory substance. It is greatly sought after by the Lapps who are reputedly prepared to trade a reindeer for a single large specimen. Those who have tasted a small amount have slumbered for fifteen hours in a deep and pleasant sleep. Nicholas Catanoy has written a kind of commonplace book under this title containing quotations and aphorisms from the years 1980-1988. Catanoy's previous publications in various languages have appeared in New York, Canada, India and finally

Europe. This 60-year-old La Rochefoucauld has the world weariness of the globe-trotter, the calm stoicism of a Buddhist, the gloomy fatalism of Schopenhauer, his favourite philosopher. Death and melancholy recur frequently in his musings and, rather disturbingly, he favours artists such as Montherlant, Mac-Orlan, Berlioz, Wagner, Lawrence, Mahler, prophets of blood and apocalypse. All of these yearn for some heady Nirvana and not infrequently are tainted with misogyny.

The cover of Yves Gosselin's *Connaissance de la Mort* reproduces an allegorical picture of three ages of woman and death by the Alsatian engraver Baldung Grien, showing the baby, the beauty, the crone, and death with scythe and hour glass. The tone of this meditation on the death of a mother is clinical, detached, a kind of stifled passion. I translate the climax of the emotional response to her death to convey something of this detachment:

Scarcely assembled, note the extreme age of the arsenal of grief. The purest weapons already break their watchfulness. Incapable any longer of protecting himself in this place against the obvious, a man unlearns life.

Albert Camus, quoted in an epigraph, is a good guide to this laconic tribute, a confession that the death of a well-loved woman puts us suddenly beyond the limits of our powers of expression.

Joël Pourbaix lives in a deconstructed, fragmented world where the "seams of time no longer hold." Harassed by the "atrocious presence of meaning in our world," he seems to favour the persistence of desire and "surrender to the mysteries of his material being." The extravagant vocabulary: 'au-delà,' 'indéchiffrable,' 'informulable,' 'abîme,' 'irréparable,' 'inapaisé,' 'archarnement,' 'répation,' calls for a tragic lyricism this generation of poets seems incapable of and belies the plea implicit in the title, *Le Simple Geste d'Exister*. Barely 1,000 words in this ele-

gant plaque, laconic phrases timidly claw at 'un silence dévasté' and ask plaintively but neatly: '... et si l'univers rêvait l'oeuvre.'

Guy Cloutier's *Beau Lieu* is coedited in Corsica. The title alludes to Corsica's other name, Ile de beauté, and the work was completed in Muro, central Corsica. It was inspired by the news of the death of the poet Michel Beaulieu (the other reference in the title) in 1985. Cloutier had been on the point of writing to invite Beaulieu, a personal friend and one Cloutier regards as amongst the greatest in Québec literature, to come and enjoy the peace and seclusion of the island. *Beau Lieu* is a reflection on the 'rapport dynamique que l'on peut établir entre écrire l'espace et écrire l'amitié.' Cloutier's poetry is an intertextual celebration of literary indebtedness. The poems are adorned with epigraphs, dedications, quotations in the text, indicating his poetical preferences for Guillevic, Valère Novarina, René Char, Paul-Marie Lapointe, Paul Bélanger, Pierre Morency. Michel Beaulieu's presence is supreme. He is identified by the reference to *Lettre des saisons* as the 'Tu' of the dialogue proceeding through the poems of *Beau lieu*. *Beau lieu* is above all a powerful and highly expressive evocation of place. Michel Beaulieu would have savoured this tribute however remote from the humdrum world of 'la rue Draper.'

The last two volumes of verse to be presented here are from established women writers. Célyne Fortin in *D'Elle en elles* begins with a quotation from Lise Gauvin and ends with one from Gaston Miron. Both raise the crucial question of the subject pronoun in modern verse. This series of short poems starts in fine style, 'à mesure le récit psalmodie,' and the writer seems not to be overwhelmed by the excesses of life or the fragmentation of the self. The section 'Je cherche elle' has the syntactical clumsiness of this title, but

soon the writing improves when Fortin seeks her true genealogy in female forbears whose resonance she feels in herself. 'Vues d'elles' contains fine poems examining the portraits of women in the art of Europe from Cranach to Vermeer to Monet, just as an earlier section summons Mozart and Mahler to lend their power to poetry. 'Sensuelles,' Célyne Fortin concludes with some lively erotic poetry, delicate but unrestrained.

Marie Savard performed for Radio-Canada and wrote for the ONF a prize-winning play and protest songs in 1970. She also published feminist tracts later in the 1970s. Her latest collection is accompanied by an audio-cassette on which she sings and recites the complete text. Her rich and attractive voice, adds greatly to the impact of this poetry, and we wonder why this dual presentation is not adopted more frequently. *Les Chroniques d'une Seconde à L'Autre* ends with a list of references to authors quoted; these include the erotic Old Testament poem *The Song of Solomon*. In 1975 the versatile Marie Savard founded the Editions de la Pleine Lune which publish this work. The poems and prose form a rather disjointed, dream-like fable set in the dark streets of night-time Montreal. Underlying it all is a very serious preoccupation. How do women achieve a consensus and a sense of common heritage and purpose if the essential line of transmission for cultural, social and human values that passes from mother to daughter is broken? The healing process, says Marie Savard, begins within the individual, and she follows this dark path of reconciliation.

CEDRIC MAY



ANTITHESSES

CARY FAGAN, *Nora by the Sea*. Shaw Street Press, 1989. Limited edition of 150 copies. \$15.00.

W. P. KINSELLA, *Five Stories*. William Hoffer/Tanks, \$17.50.

DON MURRAY, *The Fiction of W. P. Kinsella: Tall Tales in Various Voices*. York Press, \$12.95.

MARIUS KOCIEJOWSKI, *The Machine Minders*. William Hoffer/Tanks, \$5.00.

CARY FAGAN SHOWS a masterful control of narrative technique in *Nora by the Sea*: regulating the pace through descriptive pause and scene and juxtaposing conflicting image clusters Fagan creates an "elegant and quietly powerful story."

The setting is a hotel in France where Nora and her artsy film industry husband are at Cannes for the festival. They have also brought along their children and Nora's artistic father, all delightfully portrayed. The text is focalised largely through Nora, an aging Jewish ex-hippie, now yuppie, who, although she keeps a Krishna next to her menorah nevertheless forces her children through Hebrew school "to learn about being Jewish," and keeps "a kosher house" in order that they may acquire some "cultural definition."

Playing with the hermeneutic code Fagan introduces an enigma that motivates the plot: Will Ananda, Nora's 15-year-old son, have his first sexual experience with the hotel maid? And can Nora be as liberal as she thinks she is and let things go as they might, or will she interfere? Be forewarned, this tale has a *very* surprising ending.

Five Stories is a delightful volume showing Kinsella at his best. Considering the tenderness of the subject matter, the fine illustrations by Carel Moiseiwitsch and the quality of the print and binding, this collection would make a fine gift. Kinsella combines the postmodern presence of the writer as self-conscious narra-

tor with the humour and fantasy of the tall tale, and shifts in the order of the referential worlds of his stories from the "real" to the surreal. "Frank Pierce Iowa," the first tale, is a reworking of a story Kinsella wrote when eighteen and concerns the disappearance, or rather mogrification of a town in the middle of a baseball game. "Oh Marley," is a moving love story between two losers: a writer, and a woman who was stabbed 73 times but survived because she was so fat that the knife couldn't find any vital organs. "Diehard," my favourite, exhibits a feel for the ordinary person and the ordinary situation. It is based on "a news item about a woman who planted her husband's ashes on the fifty-yard line when they were building B.C. Place" although Kinsella transfers the scene to the "Metrodome in Minneapolis." It is, of course, about baseball. "A Hundred Dollars worth of Roses" is one of Kinsella's Indian tales told by Silas Ermineskin. The mixing of tenses, ellipsis, iteration, and use of dialect do make for interesting narrative, but the moralizing lacks a convincing voice, and makes Kinsella's Indians seem too Hollywood. The last tale, "Homer," about a white prospector who has married an Indian, is perhaps also spoiled by moralizing dialogue that is inconsistent with the characters themselves, and that, as a result, appears intrusive.

Although the extremely small print of *The Fiction of W. P. Kinsella: Tall Tales in Various Voices* makes the book difficult to read, and the "discussions" of Kinsella's works are previously published and not sufficiently edited this monograph does have its good points. The bibliography is extremely useful, as well as the excellent interviews. We find that Kinsella doesn't "read much humour," and considers "Leacock kind of juvenile," gets much of his material from tabloids, reworks his material interminably, considers Calgary "the asshole of the earth,"

puts a disclaimer to his being a Canadian, and states that "If it weren't for the medical insurance thing, I guess we would live in the U.S." When asked if the "artist has a social function, perhaps a moral role to play in society?" Kinsella replies: "That's like getting involved in politics. I don't see the writer or artist meddling in such areas. . . . The fiction writer's role in life is simply to entertain." Elsewhere, he simply says he's in it for the money.

The epilogue of *The Machine Minders* tells us that this series "has been published in objection to the continued creation of State Literature through government subsidies to the Arts. The first volume of TANKS will consist of five books, all of which share the characteristic of being objectionable to the government." *Machine Minders* is short, well-written, and comes with fine illustrations by Maureen Sugrue; it is, however, a very troublesome book. Focusing on the work of Craig Raine, Kociejowski claims that the only reason some artists are in the public arena is that our age is "an age which is incapable of poetry," because we have lost "the idea of Original Sin," and "recourse to a larger orthodoxy."

The "values" Kociejowski wants us to embrace are those of the Right, his "orthodoxy" the tradition of the elite — poorly defined and *not* ecclesiastical. "Bad taste," "moral authority," the belief that "no atheist can be a great artist," all harken back to a critical position inimical to the modern mindset, and to many writers antithetical to creativity. I think this provocative volume is a giant step backwards.

C. D. MAZOFF



HIDDEN POWERS

ANN DIAMOND, *Snakebite*. Cormorant Books, \$10.95.

ANNE CAMERON, *Daughter of Copper Woman*. Press Gang, \$9.50.

ANN DIAMOND IS AN anglophone writer from Québec best-known for her prose poem *A Nun's Diary* (1984, 1989) and for her novel *Mona's Dance* (1988). In *Snakebite* she has, with one exception, put together ten stories set in Québec. There is no narrative link between the sequence of the stories, yet her idiosyncratic voice where realism and the fantastic are blurred connects them all.

The cover depicts twin-like figures, similar yet opposite. This image is in harmony with the binary oppositions dominating the stories. The title story "Snakebite," to some extent autobiographical, is a distinctive example for this kind of composition. It is the story of a young child: she suffers from all the contradictions that she acutely observes in her surroundings. Her mother is Catholic and her father Presbyterian. She is not encouraged to speak French and is very much discouraged, from making friends with a Jewish girl next door. Thus she lives in a spiritual exile which causes her to have nightmares full of devilish creatures. Diamond wonderfully penetrates the soul of this tortured child.

Diamond's characters are mainly women, both English and French. They are more powerfully depicted than men in the stories. Some are artists, involved in the women's movement and trying to place themselves in this world. Others have magic power and misuse it. Others yet are under the influence of supernatural forces of some sort, against which they feel defenceless. There are also witchdoctors, vampires, criminals, mermaids, androgynes, individuals whose identity is half human and half animal.

One of the most successful of the stories is the carefully constructed "Roses," a fictional representation of Ann Diamond's critical observation: "Québec is Canada's unknown 'Other,' where all evil is to originate. We're like the wife in an extremely patriarchal marriage. Our concerns have never really been incorporated into the mainstream consciousness. And if you're English here your situation is even more ambiguous." Joan, a writer, goes to Montréal, because she wants to discover "the real Québec" and assimilate into its fascinating intellectual milieu. She tries hard but it is difficult for her because she remains basically an *anglaise*, because of the "language thing," because of the differences between *love* and *amour*. Ann Diamond has proved again that she is certainly among the most promising anglophone writers in Québec. Her stories are set in a concrete milieu yet they surpass these boundaries and can be read as perplexing tales for adults.

Anne Cameron is best-known for *Daughters of Copper Woman*, but among her other acknowledged works are *Dreamspeaker* (1979), *The Journey* (1982), *Stubby Amberchuk and the Holy Grail* (1987). *Daughters of Copper Woman* ran into its thirteenth edition in 1989. In this collection of tales the legends of the Nootka Indians are told. Anne Cameron transmits to us what she received from the Secret Society of Women and was allowed to share with outsiders.

The first half of the book familiarizes us with the creation myth of the Nootka Indians; our common ancestor from the dawn of time is the omnipresent and omniscient Copper Woman: "With the loom she weaves the pattern of destiny," and she will never abandon us. Indeed, her presence is felt all through the book. We are all related to her from either of the two genealogical lines: the children of happiness or the children of the four couples.

The second part of the book is much closer to us in time; before it reaches the present, however, two important events are pointed out which shattered the harmony of the matriarchal society. First, hundreds of years back, men started to dominate women and thus violate the peace of the society. Second, the white men arrived and tried to destroy and wipe out the community. Life became fragmented and moral degradation followed. But wisdom survived.

While reading the book, we too, gain wisdom. Unnoticed, we become part of the community listening to these legends. We hear different voices: the first part is in the third person narrative, then we hear Granny and her granddaughter talking in turns, and thus producing tales within tales. We also hear the monotonous rain, the crackling of the fire, Granny knitting, the kettle boiling. Eating is often mentioned, reminding us of the potlatch festivities. The descriptive passages and Granny's talking flow into one another. In the end, it becomes clear that actually all the narrators are inspired by the Old Woman.

This again is a book about women written from the viewpoint of women and for women. The book is a moving remythologization of women's spiritual, mental and physical universe. The women we read about testify to the hardships and joys of womanhood, the experience of love and solitude, the challenges women have had to face even as warriors, and the ways they "Endured and Survived." They have educated younger generations; this they regard as one of their obligations. Real virtues are taught to us: ability to love, friendship, sharing, accepting, listening to each other. One wonders to what extent Anne Cameron shares the apprehensive feeling of Ki-Ki, the grandchild, concerning the future of the book. Ki-Ki and Anne Cameron have much in common. Granny's, and thus Copper Woman's en-

couraging words are addressed to Anne Cameron, too: "There's gotta be a reason that you been scratchin' stuff on paper since you was eleven years old. There's gotta be a reason that your writin' happened at a time when women everywhere was standin' up and sayin' they want to know woman's truth, no more longrobe bullshit."

We are fortunate that such a talented and sensitive writer as Anne Cameron has undertaken the task of sharing the tales. She has done it so successfully that further reprints may easily be required.

JUDIT M. MOLNÁR

CRAFT & FRIENDSHIP

BRIAN DEDORA, *With WK in the Workshop. A Memoir of William Kurelek*. Introduction by Ramsay Cook. With photographs, drawings and paintings by William Kurelek. Aya/Mercury, \$9.95, pa.

IN TORONTO in the 1960s, Brian Dedora worked with William Kurelek in Av Isaacs' framing shop. Dedora acknowledges the painter as his mentor, and a teacher in the craft. He makes no pretensions to biography. His insights are scattered and sketchy, but valuable.

Why so? The significance is two-fold. On the one hand, framing meant a great deal to the prairie painter, and Dedora extends our understanding of his intimate connection to Kurelek's life and art. On the other, Dedora is a skilful creative writer, and many passages of *With WK in the Workshop* are prose-poems of considerable beauty and strength.

After leaving the British psychiatric hospitals which had sheltered him for several years in the early 1950s, Kurelek lived for a time by executing small, incredibly detailed *trompe l'oeil* paintings.

He then found work in the Blue Ball Yard, a prestigious framing shop owned by an artist. He was hired because of the skill which the *trompe l'oeil* demonstrated. It was there that he learned many of the skills which he later used in his paintings, skills such as gesso application, colour mixing, and gilding. The work promoted healing, and he wrote that he "really loved" it.

Dedora makes very brief references to the London scene, but quotes at length from Kurelek's autobiography, *Someone With Me*. However the memoirist shows that the camaraderie in the Isaacs workshop created a second family for the deeply introverted Kurelek. His anecdotes catch the artist's humour, his generosity, and something of his inner pain.

Ramsay Cook's biographical Introduction orients the reader with regard to the larger life. The three-page Introduction sketches the painter's Ukrainian heritage (Dedora is also a Ukrainian-Canadian), his passionate religious faith, and the anomalous friendship with Av Isaacs which gave Kurelek his first chance in the Toronto art market and underlay his rapid rise to prominence in the Canadian art scene in the 1960s and 1970s. Cook concludes that Dedora's evocation of the workshop brotherhood and his emotional recreation of mood and place lead to a new understanding of the painter: "Like Kurelek, Dedora has translated memory into art." Justified praise.

The family atmosphere of the setting nurtured occasional frictions and frequent practical jokes. The memoir highlights the painter's humour and love of pranks. On one occasion Dedora reached for his sanding block only to find it nailed to the bench. Clawing it off, he found Bill's note, "April Fool." A drawing presented to Isaacs when the latter was hospitalized in the early 1970s shows a cat confined to a hospital bed while mice run free in the workshop, scampering over benches and

making all manner of mistakes in the framing process.

Dedora's poetic language is at its best as he catches the smells, the look and the tactile memories of the workshop. Take, for example, Kurelek's lesson on gilding: "He almost thwacks the gold in place: thwack, thwack, thwack. The gold in the light rippling, swooning into place, forming itself to the contours of the frame to catch light and hold shade, the glow of it in our faces: Bill excited, me in awe." Or Dedora's description of his regular arrival at the back door of the shop: "The yellow light shining in the morning gray through the door. Into the warmth, the white of the gessoed benches and walls, smells of wood, shellac and glue."

The memoir includes seventeen photographs taken by Kurelek in 1971, six coloured illustrations of Kurelek paintings of framing tools, and several drawings in pencil and mixed media. Dedora writes that Kurelek's gift of the negatives of his photos of the workshop became his incentive to write the book. Some of the photos resemble Kurelek drawings, and one (a sheaf of work orders clipped to a board) could have been the subject of one of his own *trompe l'oeil*. The paintings evoke emotional and tactile experience and carry (like all of Kurelek's work) symbolic overtones.

With WK in the Workshop is a small book with a very short text, since illustrations take up a large portion of the space. It is nevertheless a significant contribution to literature, to Kurelek studies and to our understanding of the intimate bond between craft and creation. We need that reminder. Dedora's memoir is an elegy, and a poetic meditation on friendship, art and the artisan.

PATRICIA MORLEY

QUEBEC DRAMA

JEAN-RAYMOND MARCOUX, *La grande opération ou quand les rêves refusent de mourir*. VLB éditeur, \$10.95.

LA NOUVELLE COMPAGNIE THÉÂTRALE, *En scène depuis 25 ans*. VLB éditeur, \$25.00.

LE THÉÂTRE DE CARTON, *Les enfants n'ont pas de sexe?* VLB éditeur, \$15.95.

THESE THREE NEW TEXTS prove that VLB éditeur is fast becoming the major publisher of theatrical works in Québec. Marcoux's play belongs to the collection "théâtre"; *Les enfants n'ont pas de sexe* is part of the collection "Théâtre pour enfants" started in 1986; *En scène depuis 25 ans* celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of La Nouvelle Compagnie Théâtrale. Theatre lovers of all ages should thank VLB for these three volumes so beautifully presented with photographs of stage productions.

La grande opération was first performed at the summer theatre l'Escale in 1984 and it continues to be popular with summer theatre crowds because it deals with the subject of marriage in the 1980s with humour and understanding. Marcoux's work is part of a larger phenomenon in Quebec drama: the reconsideration of sex roles which reflects social changes and responds to the feminist critique of patriarchy. Marcoux's first published play, *Bienvenue aux dames, ladies welcome* (VLB, 1985), examined a group of construction workers facing individual life crises which challenged them to make compromises between their male egos, financial realities, and emotional needs. In *Les Mensonges de papa* (1985), Marcoux dealt with a middle-aged divorced father trying to understand his teenage son and adjust to the sexual liberation movement. *La grande opération* also explores new male roles, this time in the context of the middle-class, middle-aged couple.

As the play opens the couple is celebrat-

ing their fifteenth wedding anniversary, but it quickly becomes apparent that the honeymoon is over and the mid-life, mid-marriage crisis has begun. Richard Castonguay is a forty-year-old engineer temporarily on leave from his job at Hydro Quebec where they don't seem to need engineers anymore. He is a witty, romantic dreamer, not afraid to show his vulnerability. His wife, Michelle Lanthier, is a thirty-seven-year-old nurse exhausted by the strains of her job, her union activities, her three children, and her slightly alcoholic mother. Michelle responds irritably to all of Richard's romantic advances because she does not want any more children and they don't use any birth control precautions. When she asks Richard to have a vasectomy, he balks, unsure of how "la grande opération" will affect his masculinity. Richard and Michelle love each other, but their relationship is suffering from the boredom of habit, from stress and the lack of fulfilling work. As they reach forty and contemplate the prospect of "the empty nest," they must renegotiate their priorities, their sex life, and their roles in order to renew their marriage. Michelle's demand provokes a crisis: Richard quits his job, takes a separate apartment, sees a psychiatrist, and has a vasectomy. He explains that he needs to reassess his life before it is too late, before the dreams have all died. The personal and professional crises of Act I are all resolved in Act II during which Richard and Michelle begin a new courtship leading to bed and to reconciliation. Despite the predictability of the happy ending, the amused spectator/viewer applauds the dénouement because Marcoux's protagonists are believable and likeable. While dealing with serious issues facing many couples, Marcoux never forgets that he is writing light entertainment in the tradition of romantic sex comedy. He has a gift for writing comic dialogue and his laugh lines use sexual innuendo

and double-entendres without vulgarity.

Contemporary attitudes toward sexuality, gender roles, and family arrangements are also the main topics of Le Théâtre de Carton's *Les enfants n'ont pas de sexe?*, but here the target audience is pre-adolescent school children. In the "Présentation" preceding the text, Jacinthe Potvin of the Théâtre de Carton traces the history of the play. She explains that in 1978 Professor Hélène Beauchamp, a specialist in children's theatre who teaches at UQAM, asked the Théâtre de Carton to adapt *Sex is not for kids*, Jack Zipes' translation of the Berlin theatre collective Rote Grütze's play, *Darüber spricht man nicht*, for presentation during an international symposium, "Enfance et sexualité," scheduled for September 1979. The success of the collective creation performed ten years ago led to more than one thousand performances in theatres and school auditoriums all over Quebec and the French-speaking countries of Europe. The text was first published by Editions Québec/Amérique in its "Jeunes publics" collection in 1981. The text of this new edition differs from the first version, reminding us of the dynamic nature of collective creation. The new edition also includes numerous performance photographs and a "Dossier pédagogique" intended to reinforce the educational value of the play.

It was inevitable that a sex-education play for children would provoke controversy and *Les enfants n'ont pas de sexe?* has stirred up some lively debate! Despite attacks and censorship attempts by conservative critics, the overwhelming consensus among educators, teachers, parents, and schoolchildren is that the play deals with sexuality and reproduction in an honest, amusing, and affectionate manner which is both informative and entertaining. The four members of Le Théâtre de Carton (two men and two women) play multiple children's roles and sing a num-

ber of songs. They wear funny costumes, carry props, use large anatomical drawings and puppets, and make exaggerated gestures — all calculated to keep the attention of their juvenile spectators. The play suggests that despite the old prohibitions and taboos on dealing openly with sexuality, parents should talk about it in order to create healthier attitudes. The success of *Les enfants n'ont pas de sexe?* over the past ten years guarantees it a permanent place in the growing repertoire of Québécois theatre for children.

The target audience of the Nouvelle Compagnie théâtrale since 1964 has been high school students. Founding members Gilles Pelletier, Françoise Graton, and Georges Groulx defined what continues to be the primary mission of the N.C.T.: to make the classics of world drama accessible to student audiences. *En scène depuis 25 ans* is a handsomely illustrated and documented collection of essays, reminiscences, and personality profiles which pay homage to what has become one of Quebec's most enduring theatre institutions. With the financial support of the Ministères des Affaires culturelles and Education, the N.C.T. has presented almost 4300 performances of 130 productions, reaching over 2,800,000 spectators! This volume was conceived and edited by N.C.T. general and artistic director Jean-Luc Bastien and administrative council member Pierre MacDuff. Its list of contributing authors reads like a Who's Who in Montreal theatre: playwrights, directors, production specialists, actors, critics, and scholars.

The volume is organized chronologically, taking the history of the troupe in five-year periods. In addition to descriptions of the company's productions season by season, there are essays which examine other activities of the N.C.T., for example its publications (*Les Cahiers de la N.C.T.*, *Acte 1*, *En scène*), new play competitions, workshops, public readings, co-productions

with "jeune théâtre" and avant-garde groups. Reading these retrospective chapters in the first part of the volume, it becomes apparent that the history of the N.C.T. parallels the history of Quebec theatre in the last 25 years. Over the years, the names Dubé, Gélinas, Barbeau, Tremblay, Laberge, *et al.* began to take their place alongside the names Corneille, Molière, Shakespeare, *et al.* For technical theatre people, there is an article which describes the space of the N.C.T.'s first home, la salle du Gesù, and the renovation of the old Granada Cinema into its new home, the Théâtre Denise-Pelletier and the salle Fred-Barry. There are also chapters on scenery, lighting, sound systems, costumes, and administrative organization. The text ends with thumbnail sketches of the permanent company members, congratulatory letters from various dignitaries, and an excellent index of all productions from 1964 through 1988. Like all collections of this nature, the essays of *En scène depuis 25 ans* are occasionally repetitious and of uneven quality. However, minor failings do not distract from the interest of this volume.

JANE MOSS

MAELSTROM

HRANT ALIANAK, *Lucky Strike*. Playwrights Canada, \$8.95.

JANET FEINDEL, *A Particular Class of Women*. Lazara, \$7.95.

Lucky Strike by Hrant Alianak starts at decibel level 80 and, incredibly, goes up from there. The audience is assailed by the cacophony of rising and falling police sirens, amplified heart beats, waves, strident music, and human screams (they average approximately one per minute of playing time). Alianak reinforces the stunning effect with glaring or flashing lights alternating with frequent and sudden blackouts. The feeling of anxiety that

results is accelerated further by having huge fans blow full speed at the audience. With the play starting at such a pitch, one wonders where the playwright can go from there. But on he does go with the maelstrom rising to a climax of violence, noise, and hectic light in the fourth scene (act) which gives shape to the whole play. And when it is all over, it is clear that Alianak has done something more than rape the senses of his audience; he has written something serious about betrayal and something very funny about the cliché-ridden way we see and think.

Lucky Strike is largely mime. The actors parody gangster films as far back as the 1920s — clutching bullet wounds, dangling cigarettes (Lucky Strikes) from cynical lips, gulping slugs of Jack Daniels. The stage directions even suggest that the gestures imitate Lee Marvin's, Richard Widmark's, Robert DeNiro's, and others. In fact, the whole play is a construct of gestures rather than action. Scene one establishes five or six stereotypical "stances": tripping, dropping the loot, pressing bloody guts, searching for a cigarette, etc., which are repeated in scene two with only the slightest variations and more or less the same order. From there the play edges forward, repeating, repeating with variations, overlapping, backtracking these same minimalist gestures, and adding bits until the two climactic fights in the fourth scene — the first between Eddie and Charlie described as an orgy and the second between Charlie and Lolly as an orgasm. Played straight, the violence and cacophony of both these scenes would have been unendurable but Alianak transforms the beating into rituals, parodying movie violence. Both scenes have a wild black Kafkaesque humour. Alianak has carefully built up this effect. The play is almost entirely stage directions which he has written not in the usual laconic mode of conventional playscripts, but in a rich plummy style:

Will this ever stop, he wonders as he feels a chill and remembers Kafka and Munch. Deep in the grip of fear he begins to yell unceasingly as he holds his about-to-explode-with-vertigo head and with extremely frustrated fear hopes that his senseless scream will help clear the equal senselessness of the situation. But to no avail he feels himself sink deeper and deeper into pure fear. He truly feels trapped and truly feels there is no exit, no way out in sight. The wind screams with the lush despairing MUSIC, blowing the drapes away.

This richness contrasts vividly with the gangster movie clichés of the five or six short exchanges which make up the entire dialogue of the play.

Lolly: Maybe . . . maybe I better leave.

Eddie: You're not going anywhere. Nobody's leaving this place till Charlie gets here. (He stares at her a long time.) That is, of course, if he gets here.

Lucky Strike is great fun to read, but in a way its readability constitutes the chief problem of the play as a vehicle for the stage. How, for instance, does the actor produce Eddie's "existential expression" for an audience, or the "memory of Kafka and Munch"? At the same time the play is paradoxically, intensely theatrical with its very effective use of claustrophobic sets, sound and light equipment and parody of film and stage conventions. In the end *Lucky Strike* is two plays, page and stage, like fraternal twins, not identical but both astonishing, ugly, effective and funny in their own ways.

Where *Lucky Strike* has only a half dozen short dialogic exchanges in 110 pages, *A Particular Class of Women* by Janet Feindel is exclusively talk for its whole 59. It is the raw, funny, human, authentic-sounding talk of eight strippers in their dressing room and on the ramp, not as dialogue but as a series of monologue character sketches held loosely together by the manager's firing of Lil, the oldest stripper. Each woman reveals her-

self through her attitude towards Lil's fate, her affection for or rivalry with the other strippers, and judgements about the various men in her life. It is a tidy piece of work, efficiently designed to be played by one actress and an M.C., with a clever use of music and extravagant costume changes to emphasize the differences between the eight characters as they emerge from a "particular class" of sex objects into human beings like ourselves.

DOROTHY PARKER

HUMAN NEGLECT

JANICE KULYK KEEFER, *Constellations*. Random House, \$12.95.

JANICE KULYK KEEFER's first novel examines the effects of long-term, self-imposed human neglect in a small Acadian fishing town in Nova Scotia. Keefer's novel succeeds in conveying the brutal consequences of extended loneliness and isolation. However, the self-consciously literary writing tends to overshadow the story, slowing (sometimes even dragging) the unfolding of an interesting plot.

The novel begins and ends in the first person using the main character's point of view. For 15 years Claire Saulnier has been teaching music at the local college by day and keeping company with cognac by night, bolting the doors and windows of her house to secure herself from "human possibilities." She spends her modest salary importing books, classical records and fine chocolate, having committed herself to a life of sexless solitude.

After Claire's first-person introduction, the narrative voice shifts to third person and jumps among the central characters of the novel. The events leading to Claire's eventual self-destruction are dependent on her (successful or unsuccessful) attempts to manipulate, punish, and

help others. The most interesting, albeit romantic, character is the poor and beautiful Mariette, a little madonna who cares for her sickly toddler brother instead of attending school. She was the victim of rape at puberty, followed by a botched home abortion which left her infertile. At seventeen she is abused again, emotionally this time but with even more dramatic consequences. The violator in this case is the man from whom she seeks redemption for her alleged past sin; his crime is his insensitivity to her desperation. Claire sees to it that this abuser, a visiting lecturer from France, pays for his offense by arranging for one of his students to seduce him, thereby upsetting his well-planned future of marrying into French aristocracy and securing a post at the Sorbonne.

Although Claire can avenge the wrong (even at great cost to herself), it is her failure to help Mariette that finally destroys her. She has become such an expert at manipulating other people's lives and denying her own needs that she is helpless trying to develop an ability to love and to alleviate someone else's suffering. Mariette and Claire have in common a loveless, psychologically isolated life, sealing themselves off from the possibility of painful human interaction. However, while Mariette's solitude and eventual breakdown are expected given the combination of her experiences and her naivete, Claire's behaviour is more difficult to explain. That the emotional scars of her childhood could overcome her emotional needs as an adult is difficult to accept. She suffers from years of self-inflicted neglect, never having loved or been loved. One might wonder why such an intelligent woman can't come to terms with her past, her parents' unsatisfying marriage and the link between sex and death (her mother had suffered repeated miscarriages before finally dying in labour). Also, what was it that she wanted but

failed to obtain as a young woman? If we knew the "human possibilities" she sacrificed in an attempt to silence her parents' voices inside her head, perhaps it would be easier to understand her unhappiness.

Although Keefer's writing, brimming with visual imagery, does justice to the enchanting landscape, sometimes the focus of the narrative is lost in the mannered style. For instance, a waitress is described as having "hair like a senile poodle's." With the exception of Mariette's section, written in a simple, naive voice, the story often takes a back seat to the eloquent but self-conscious prose. Perhaps if the writing were more relaxed it would not drag its heels in the development of the well-structured and interesting narrative.

ELIZABETH PARKINSON

MESSIANISME

RÉJEAN BEAUDOIN, *Naissance d'une littérature*. Borel, \$19.95.

LA PARUTION D'UNE ÉTUDE sur la littérature canadienne-française du dix-neuvième siècle, encore trop peu explorée, est toujours bienvenue. Réjean Beaudoin veut nous conduire à sa source dans *Naissance d'une littérature: Essai sur le messianisme et les débuts de la littérature canadienne-française (1850-1890)*. Les premières tentatives sont associées à l'idéologie dominante de l'époque. L'effort concerté du Canada français de 1860 culmine dans le projet de créer une culture et une littérature nationales et "il semble qu'il faille y voir l'effet de l'idéologie qui s'impose au même moment et qu'on s'accorde à désigner sous le nom de messianisme canadien-français."

Les deux premiers chapitres traitent des principaux définisseurs et du discours tenu sur la littérature nationale. Ils réfèrent à une panoplie de textes dont certains étaient peu connus. L'abbé Casgrain

aura nécessairement la vedette. Une attention particulière est aussi accordée aux deux formes du romantisme européen qui imprègnent notre pensée et notre littérature naissantes. Place est faite aux légendes associées à l'âme du peuple. Il semble à l'auteur que "la mode des légendes populaires constitue ... un aspect important de la poétique du texte national." Ce courant traverse aussi plusieurs genres littéraires et manifeste son importance tant au point de vue moral que nationaliste.

Dans les quatre derniers chapitres, Réjean Beaudoin analyse dans le texte cinq oeuvres en particulier: *Les Légendes canadiennes* de Casgrain, *Forestiers et voyageurs* de Taché, *Les Anciens Canadiens* d'Aubert de Gaspé (père), *Jean Rivard* de Gérin-Lajoie et *La Légende d'un peuple* de Fréchette. Il s'attache à démontrer la féminisation du discours du père (incarné par Lafèche et Labelle): "c'est lui qui est altéré, contrefait, travesti par le travail de la fiction." Pour lui "les traits virils du héros, qui est censé garantir la grandeur prédestinée de la nation, demeurent le masque souffrant d'une mère éplorée."

Les deux chapitres initiaux sont bien structurés et présentent un ensemble de textes convergents qui établissent efficacement les liens étroits entre le messianisme et la littérature. Les chapitres consacrés à l'étude des textes offrent une analyse détaillée et originale qui permet de les relire avec un regard neuf. L'hypothèse de la féminisation du discours littéraire est bien défendue par l'interprétation de l'auteur. Sans doute y aurait-il lieu, dans une autre étude, de pratiquer une approche similaire sur le corpus du roman historique de la même époque pour vérifier encore l'hypothèse. Ce genre romanesque prend aussi racine dans le romantisme nationaliste importé par Garneau.

L'auteur conclut que le messianisme canadien-français est "l'idéologie d'un

groupe social particulier (le clergé).” Le clergé a un rôle fort important dans sa définition. On gagnerait peut-être à vérifier s’il s’agit surtout du haut-clergé. Le groupe n’est pas monolithique comme l’ont démontré ses réactions variées à la Rébellion de 1837. D’autre part le discours “libéral” ne semble pas non plus étranger au courant messianique, à commencer par celui de François-Xavier Garneau. Comme le signale Maurice Lemire (1970), Garneau n’est certes pas l’initiateur du messianisme canadien-français, mais l’influence de ses maîtres “l’incite à voir dans l’histoire canadienne une expression nouvelle de la destinée quasi providentielle de la race française.” Notons aussi que Louis-Joseph Papineau ne se montrait pas insensible à une dimension religieuse de l’histoire du Canada. Dans un discours prononcé en 1849, dans le but de favoriser l’établissement des Canadiens français dans les Cantons de l’Est, en présence de Mgr Bourget et également de personnages comme Dorion et Doutre, il évoque le souvenir de nos pères qui “furent les martyrs volontaires de leur piété et de leur patriotisme.” (L.-O. David, 1924).

L’auteur fait maintes allusions à “ce qu’on appelle le mouvement de 1860,” à l’importance de son rôle dans l’implantation du messianisme et littérature. À aucun moment il ne définit ce “mouvement de 1860 qui travailla à la mise en oeuvre du projet de création d’une littérature nationale” et qui “allait ouvrir au messianisme le champ du discours poétique.” Dans le contexte de l’analyse institutionnelle, à laquelle Réjean Beaudoin est sensible, il eût été important de préciser en quoi consistait ce mouvement et ce qui en faisait un véritable mouvement. Ceci aurait contribué à solidifier encore plus les assises de sa thèse. Le dit mouvement est problématique. Le dix-neuviémiste David M. Hayne pose le problème dans un article intitulé: “Le mouvement

littéraire de 1860: mythe au réalité?” Roger Le Moyne met même son existence en doute dans son article intitulé: “L’École littéraire de Québec, un mythe de la critique.” Hayne conclut dans son étude: “L’existence d’un mouvement littéraire de 1860 est réelle et doit être admise, mais ce mouvement n’avait ni l’originalité ni l’importance dont on l’a paré depuis.” Il invite alors à poursuivre les recherches sur le sujet.

En dépit des quelques questions soulevées, l’essai de Réjean Beaudoin demeure une très sérieuse et originale intervention dans les études sur l’histoire littéraire du dix-neuvième siècle. Une écriture brillante contribue également à l’intérêt de sa lecture.

ANTOINE SIROIS

UNPALATABLE TRUTHS

JAMES WIELAND, *The Ensphering Mind: History, Myth, and Fictions in the Poetry of Allen Curnow, Nissim Ezekiel, A. D. Hope, A. M. Klein, Christopher Okigbo, and Derek Walcott*. Three Continents.

ARUN MUKHERJEE. *Towards an Aesthetic of Opposition: Essays On Literature, Criticism, and Cultural Imperialism*. Williams-Wallace.

JAMES WIELAND’S *The Ensphering Mind*, an ambitious comparative study of six poets from six Commonwealth countries, demonstrates the inherent weakness of using a political/historical term like “the Commonwealth” as a basis for literary study. Assuming their “Commonwealth” similarities as a basis for comparison, Wieland attempts no less than an inclusive and comprehensive account of “history, myth, and fictions,” and the relationship between them, in the work of these widely disparate poets. Underlying this assumption of Commonwealth commonality is another, more dangerous one that informs the entire study, namely that in their examination of history and the poetic fictions which enable understanding of, and

access to, the "eternal truths" of myth, these poets believe in, and are trying to articulate coherent, unitary visions which have "universal" meaning. Interestingly, the forefather of these poets is, according to Wieland, Wallace Stevens, whose ancestral voice echoes throughout the text, without regard for historical, cultural, national, racial, or ethnic difference.

This is not to suggest that Wieland's own text does not at times recognize the speciousness of his task. His chapter divisions make explicit the split between his discussion of Hope, Klein, Curnow and Ezekiel, Walcott, Okigbo: the "white" poets are always treated separately from the "non-white." Indeed, it is precisely in his discussion of history and myth that Wieland's all-encompassing rubric most often reveals its fault lines. Despite his efforts, Wieland grudgingly acknowledges that Curnow's poetry, for example, rejects any notion of mythic transcendence, and is rooted in the local and particular, while he imposes on Walcott's anti-mythic rigorous re-examination and re-vision of history as process the eternal qualities of myth. The following quotation reveals the process by which Wieland effects this magical and presumptuous transformation throughout his book:

But Walcott's Adam-Crusoe . . . now serves as a paradigm for universal man facing his [*sic*] destiny. The fragmentation of the Caribbean, its sense of history-in-transition, its continual process of growth and decay through time, stands as a type for an ever fragmenting world, as the great monolithic societies of the past . . . break up; and individual man faces the isolation and cosmic loneliness of Walcott's figures on the beach. But out of the loneliness, the poets of this study suggest, may come wisdom and faith, and a stay against a submission to a seemingly hostile and chaotic world. For, by making fictions which strive to make sense of reality out of their very act of naming the presences and absences of society, and out of their variations on particular themes, the poet rises toward the mythic and he gives to the mundane and the ordinary an illumination.

This insistence on making these poets into spokespeople for a questionable and a contextual universalism creates a peculiar and somewhat blind reading of A. M. Klein, whose Jewishness — an identity that Wieland fetishizes in his discussion of Klein and, to a lesser extent, Ezekiel — is seen to be a stumbling block to his development into the maturer artist who in his more inclusive "Canadian" poetry was instead concerned with "society as a whole." With Canada as a paradigm for "the whole of the Western cultural tradition. . . the mark of these last poems is their universality." In his earlier discussion of Klein's "Indian" poems, Wieland quotes uncritically Klein's "'braves' of yesteryear, 'the feathered bestiarities,' 'the chief who spoke with his throat'" and approvingly compares Klein's poems to Duncan Campbell Scott's "Half-Breed Girl" and "The Forsaken," thus revealing his characteristic blindness to, in this case, the prevalence of the stereotyped indigene in Canadian literature.

Despite his references to "presences and absences," to the role of the reader in re-creating the texts of history, fiction, and myth, and to the notion of process, Wieland's study is essentially a conservative one which overlooks, even denies, history and the creation of fictions to affirm the omnipotence and transcendence of myth, Truth, and the universal.

Ironically, Arun Mukherjee's title takes its cue from A. M. Klein's "Towards an Aesthetic," and opens with an essay attacking "The Vocabulary of the 'Universal': The Cultural Imperialism of the Universalist Criteria of Western Literary Criticism." Concise where Wieland is compendious, Mukherjee's text is an essential companion volume. All of the essays, reprinted from various journals, indict cultural and academic imperialism and complacency. As if in direct response to Wieland, here is Mukherjee:

And yes, there were some other themes: modern sensibility, i.e., the pain of living in a Godless universe . . . and, finally, the celebration of complexity that perpetually wrings its hands in the face of the grandeur and the terror of the universe. . . . Obviously the themes of history — conquest and subjugation, anti-colonial struggles, racism, sexism, class conflict — are all absent from this world view. Hence the works that deal with this world view are also largely absent from the curricula of departments of English in Canada. The shrines at which they worship are to be seen in their course offerings. T. S. Eliot, Henry James, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens dominate modern literature curricula.

Unfortunately, even Commonwealth scholars apparently engaged in such curricular change contribute to this hegemonic and imperialist world view. To combat this tendency, Mukherjee offers readings of Michael Ondaatje and Neil Bissoondath that are substantially different from mainstream critical views of either author. Part of Mukherjee's project as well, in her essays on South Asian Canadian poetry and on poets Rienzi Crusz and Cyril Dabydeen (here, effectively contrasted to Ondaatje), is to gain marginalized writers a place and some visibility in the study of Canadian literature.

But Mukherjee's best, and most needed, polemic is found in her essays on the forms of cultural imperialism found in cinema, literary criticism, and in the Canadian undergraduate English course. (In "Ideology in the Classroom: A Case Study in the Teaching of English Literature in Canadian Universities," Mukherjee provides a radically different reading of, and approach to, teaching Margaret Laurence's "The Perfume Sea").

I suspect that Mukherjee's book is not likely to be popular, particularly in Canada, where national, and literary, self-definition is one of cultural tolerance and pluralism. Mukherjee's frontal attack on a great deal that we hold dear, and her

consistent and overt political and personal investment in all of her writing, is going to be unpalatable for many. Mukherjee's articles have in the past provided me with much-needed ammunition in a resistant academy; I, for one, am thus delighted to see her essays finally in collected form.

ARUNA SRIVASTAVA

STRUGGLE

MICHAEL ESTOK, *A Plague Year Journal*. Pulp Press, \$8.95.

DEBORAH GODIN, *Troubling a Star*. Penumbra, \$9.95.

TONY COSIER, *Landsinger*. Penumbra, \$9.95.

A Plague Year Journal is a record of Michael Estok's coming to terms with his impending death: "the point of this is simple: / to tell you what it's like" ("let's get this straight,"). The poetry is heavily punctuated by anger as well as despair of the human enterprise, although there are a few moments of tender reminiscence. Throughout the volume, images of war and political tyranny are used as metaphors for AIDS as well as social malaise. In fact if there is anything questionable about this volume, it is not its candid depictions of homosexual love, frank treatment of AIDS, or its philosophy of despair; rather, it is anger. The almost relentless anger overwhelms both the poetry and the reader alike, and unfortunately at times even comes across as trite and clichéd, distanced from, rather than involving, the reader ("dog days", "codes," and "symptoms").

Estok's vision of AIDS is symbolized in the association of AIDS victims with Jews in the Nazi death camps ("the historians"), the innocent victims of foreign exploitation in third world countries ("the troops"; "meanwhile out in the country"), and the continuing corruption of our already fragile environment. He also

reminds us of the ugliness of a latent homophobia that erupts all too often in violence ("in the parks and cemeteries"; "back then").

Occasionally, Estok does break through to convey a sense of impending finality:

what's left are sums more manageable:
the apples on our leafless tree
eggs nesting coolly in their own smug shapes
in the refrigerator door
the essays I have left to mark
the days till spring
the pages in this book
potatoes in a dusty bag.

("counting")

Or he does engage the reader's empathy, as in such poems as "killing the porcupine," "the children," and "night again," where man's inhumanity is revealed in all its hideousness.

Mercifully, the anger sometimes ceases long enough for the peace of some poetic insight to be shared:

like them, we find nothing
but our own wild, whooping hearts
for a moment stilled in the centre
of an expanding ring of water
a vast mournful O that moves to fit any
darkness
any crazy horizon

("the loons")

In *Troubling a Star*, Deborah Godin asks the reader to try a new way of seeing: to let go of conventional labels and perspectives. But her poetry, for the most part, offers no paradigms of newness that could lead the reader beyond the conventional, nor do her typographical deviations suggest any meaning or sense that could not be conveyed through words more poetically crafted. At times, however, she does accomplish what she sets out to do, manifesting the technical polish and lyricism characteristic of her earlier volume, *Stranded in Terra*:

This is a raw unnameable season
neither winter nor spring
rank with its own civet, smell of

thawed compost, rotten ice
and blackened greasy snow

("March")

The trouble is that the rhythm, language and imagery so perceptible here are confined to only a few poems in the volume, and to those found mostly toward the end, poems based on traditional religious themes from both the East and West. Most of the poems that do not work either rely on difficult similes, typographical oddities that attempt to affect the phenomenology of reading, or allusions whose referents are so cryptic, eclectic, and ultimately reductive, that unless the reader is of the same persuasion (Nu-Age?), little of import is conveyed: "you find, you are / the on-going answer which pervades / the entire question" ("The Dance of Shiva"). As for the volume being, as the blurb on the back says, "philosophical autobiography," there is, unfortunately, little here in the way of clear structured thought that any serious philosopher would recognize.

Landsinger, by Tony Cosier, is a joy to read. Apart from some weak poems in the third section, "Mountains," the poetry is punctuated by a diction that is consistently musical and rhythmic, engaging the imagination:

And what of the subtler, deeper voice
hushed
Beneath moss that slides
Through breathing pores, hisses through
sediment,
Trembles along the grain?
To the one who listens, the rocks speak.

("To the one Who Listens")

The volume is divided into four sections, each reflecting a geographical theme, and moves from an almost Whitmanesque lyricism,

I have been told not to eat the berry of the
honeysuckle.
I have plucked two by mere chance bound
A larger and a smaller
Both red

Deep red
Both round
But for their joining . . .

("Honeysuckle")

to a celebration of nature both passionate
and transcendent:

O earth, great earth,
Close under solid deepdown roller, move
and take me turning crosswise.

"Fool's Dance"

Where Godin *tells* unclearly, Cosier
shows the reader of his poems a world of
colour, texture, passion and sublimity:
Where Godin's verse *struggles* to find the
source, Cosier's lyrics *manifest* presence:

There are relics that tell of the old time.

And fjords that tell of the power
that squeezed the height into place
spilled down the waterfall
like a coin for the dazzling sun
flattened the lake at its foot
and the clear high stars.

("Summering North")

The poems are not, despite the title, con-
fined to the merely terrestrial, but map
out the geographies of the heart and soul
as well, ranging in their scope from the
elegiac ("Wavebeat, Ottawa River"), to
the dramatic ("The Widowmaker"), and
the metaphysical ("Not This Leaf Haunts
Me").

C. D. MAZOFF

BEST OF INTENTIONS

ROO BORSON, *Intent, or The Weight of the
World*. McClelland & Stewart, \$9.95.

THE LASTING IMPRESSION Roo Borson's
Intent, or The Weight of the World leaves
is that it is a book of remembrance,
loss, and mourning. It creates an over-
whelming sense of nostalgia. In a note on
the text, Borson herself describes the work
as "a collection of whatever's been on my
mind the last few years," and says that

the "point to be taken" is "to preserve the
dark in the light and the light in the
dark." The light does appear in these
poems, but the darkness is ever-present.
Such issues as change, ageing, and death
seem to have been on Borson's mind;
however, she succeeds in crafting out of
troubled and troubling poems that are
simultaneously disturbing and enlivening.

In several of the 81 poems in the col-
lection Borson does come dangerously
close to trivializing her thoughts by
making the past a golden age of fun and
friendship now lost. These poems do seem
intimate, letters to friends and family
whose first names appear in the poems.
But Borson's concern with "the old high
school crowd" ("Tracy") or "that dinner
party, one of the last / of a certain era"
("Some Thoughts and a Letter") seem
too much like arrested adolescence. Yet
even in these overtly nostalgic poems, es-
pecially "Toronto," Borson succeeds by
making her particular past a part of the
culture of a generation:

Along Bloor, toward one end of the Annex
or another,
or up Yonge, half-eclipsed already,
or Kensington before a storm —
in all kinds of weather, it seemed, we kept
walking toward dinner,
bouquets for friendship, a bottle to unlock
the night,
to report, while our lives stood still,
the snubs, infatuations, gossip
we called it
but really it was our common life.
("Toronto")

And what seems more important is Bor-
son's recognition that the past is not lost
but takes the form of memory. The ten-
sion between memory and loss permeates
the poems that are the most moving in
the collection, the many elegiac works
such as "And," in which Borson says
"goodbye to memory" but finds that
"much / stays with us," although at times
memory is not enough to bring back the
dead. Borson's accomplishment is in being

able to give voice to that grief which is almost beyond expression.

For Roo Borson, then, the light and the dark are never far away from each other, perhaps no further than thinking makes them, yet each has its power. In an image from "From the Island," one of several poems in *Intent, or The Weight of the World*, Borson sees the city, "incandescent against thunder-bearing skies which admit, now and then, briefly, beams whose apparent purpose is to cauterize excessive beauty from the grass and then move on." While the weather has "an inscrutable intent," ever simultaneously forboding and promising, Borson, in "On the Island," recognizes that even something that is now dead "still casts its shadow. Things that have lived have this light in them." It is perhaps this acknowledgement of the spiritual being that allows Borson, in "Leaving the Island," to conclude the collection with what she calls "our image of happiness."

ROBERT ATTRIDGE

REFERENCE

RECENT BOOKS include the *Gage Canadian Dictionary* (Gage, n.p.): excellent because of its clarity and its inclusiveness of Canadian words and usages, though some users may well be puzzled by a few of the definitions. This is the first place I have even seen "skookum-chuck" spelled as two words; and the leap between the definition of "skookum" ("powerful, big, or brave") and the example provided ("a skookum bacon-and-egg breakfast") raises unintended questions, surely, about food additives. The 1200-page encyclopedia compiled by Virginia Blain et al., *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (Yale, \$49.95), provides brief lives of scores of women writers from the Middle Ages to the present day, including numerous writers outside the USA and the UK. Data is generally up-to-date, though occasional errors creep in: Katherine Mansfield's mother is listed as Annie Burrell, instead

of Burnell. The commentaries focus on each writer's attitude to the position of women in society and on their literary evocation of sensibility and psychology. It is a valuable resource book. David Cairns and Shaun Richards' *Writing Ireland* (Manchester Univ. Press/McClelland & Stewart, \$17.95) reflects on the impact of English colonial policy on the construction of Irish nationalism and culture, with a useful bibliography. Alan F. J. Artibise's *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Canadian Society* (McGill-Queen's, \$34.95; pa. \$16.95) assembles six useful bibliographic essays on the current state of enquiry into such issues as labour, ethnicity, religion, immigration policy, and Native studies in Canada. The British Library's Occasional Papers No. 12 (£25) is devoted to Women's Studies; edited by Albertine Gaur and Penelope Tuson, it gathers papers delivered at a 1989 British Library colloquium, on such issues as Mansfield's British Library manuscripts, European resources for women's studies, oral history, the life of Asian women in illustrated manuscripts, newspaper resources, 19th century black American women writers, suffragettes, missionaries, and little known novelists such as Emma Robinson.

W.N.

AMONG THE HANDSOME Poetry chapbooks issued by Ecrits des Forges are: *Petits formats* de Donald Alarie; *Dans la distance des liens* de Côme Lachapelle; *Par la peau du cri* de Huguette Bertrand; *L'Oeil de l'idée* de Serge Mongrain; *Portraits du souffle possible* de Dominique Lauzon.

Paperbacks for teenagers by La courte échelle include: *Quatre jours de liberté* de Sylvie Desrosiers; *Le père d'Arthur* de Ginette Anfousse; *Une tempête dans un verre d'eau* de Marie-F. Hébert; *L'Idole des inactifs* de Denis Côté; *Sauvez ma babouche!* de Gilles Gauthier; *Awa dans le désert* de François Pratte; *La course à l'amour* de Bertrand Gauthier.

Reprints from Bibliothèque québécoise include: *L'Appelante* de Yves Thériault; *Le sorcier d'Anticosti* de Robert Choquette; *Kesten* de Yves Thériault; *Andante* de Félix Leclerc; *Allegro* de Félix Leclerc; *Adagio* de Félix Leclerc.

Penguin editions of Canadian works feature: *A Dedicated Man* by Peter Robinson; *The Goldfish Bowl* by Laurence Gough; *In Transit* by Mavis Gallant; *The South Will Rise at Noon* by Douglas Glover; *The Middleman* by Bharati Mukherjee.

AUTHOR AND CRITIC

A correspondence between novelist George Payerle and scholar W. J. Keith. Edited by John Munro.

In the spring of 1989, the Toronto scholar and critic W. J. Keith published a review of George Payerle's novel *Unknown Soldier* (Macmillan, 1987) in *Canadian Literature* #120. Mr. Payerle responded with a somewhat outraged letter, and thereby initiated a lengthy correspondence (approximately 40,000 words) touching on some of the larger issues of the art of fiction *vis à vis* the art of criticism. The following are excerpts from that correspondence, edited for publication by John Munro of UBC's Creative Writing Department. His credits include editing the memoirs of both John Diefenbaker and Lester Pearson.

PAYERLE TO KEITH, 21 September 1989

... I have profound respect for the human integrity and professional astuteness you evince in your review, but I am at once dismayed and disgusted that the first major review in a major journal should refuse to read the book the way it is written, but instead expect it to be like a book by Mr. Davies or Mr. Findley ...

[Ultimately, I fear your honesty is self-protective, your thoughtlessness limited by an apparent unwillingness to look into your own closet and discover why, for instance, you feel like an embarrassed voyeur. "Supposed 'realism' of the final sex scene"? "Inevitably sex (of the damp-and-spongy variety)"? You also seem to find bars beneath the dignity of literature, as indeed drinking and pissing. So your astuteness turns against the book. I feel

like a fool, or at least that I have been made out to be a fool, with little recourse. I feel that you have taken the position taken by some veterans holding down "responsible position[s] in society": that they do not wish to be identified with a socially marginal asshole like Collister. You object to the fact that a character without "any powers of reflection" should be represented as having "poetic" thoughts. You say you wonder, "unfairly perhaps," if I had fully worked out what kind of man Sam is. I am offended.]*

... I did think Sam through, having known him in many men (many of them "successful," one, for instance, a bank manager and painter of portraits and landscapes) over a period of at least fifteen years. During the nine years of writing I "became" Sam Collister to the extent that my wife remarked, not unkindly, "No wonder you're worn out. You're living your life with us, your life as a writer, and Sam's life." In that sense, I have no doubt whatever that the "poetic" material arose from Sam's consciousness. One of the finest, and most lyrical, lectures on James Joyce that I have heard came, in a bar, from a big brute of a vet of whom I had never previously thought that he would read anything beyond Mickey Spillane. ...

For a long time, I resisted writing battle scenes in this book. Not because I didn't know how (I've been told ad nauseam that I should write war stories to make money, which I refuse to do) but because I'd never been there. I thought of it as sacred ground upon which I could not transgress, ethically. But there was a growing demand from readers of the work in progress that I write such scenes. "No one will understand what you're talking

* This paragraph is a reasonable, although much reduced and modified, representation of an enclosure to Payerle's original letter to Keith.

about otherwise," they said, civilians. So I essayed the battle scene in which Sam uses his bayonet. . . .

This, I think, has something to do with the role of imagination: to know what one would otherwise not know. And thus, in this case, to serve as a bridge between those who know what it's like to kill in war, and for that reason don't talk about it, and those who "can't know because they haven't been there." Although it's bound to happen eventually, I've never had a veteran tell me I didn't know what I was talking about. I wrote a preface to the book, which has not been published, in which I speak of Sam Collister as a real man made of real words. Collister is the thing itself, not ideas about the thing, and I abjured a narrator who would impose such ideas on him. Insofar as possible, the book *is* Sam, a man one meets in the street. Or in a bar.

I see the artist (writer) as Stevens's "Man with the Blue Guitar." If I were to write about a man who stutters, the *book* would stutter a lot. To read *Unknown Soldier* is to know Sam, not intellectually, but as experience. Swearing. Drinking and pissing. *Not* every time, but selectively often enough that it *feels* like all the time. Which is how it feels. The imagined pine. The imagined jay.

"I am a native in this world / . . . And like a native think in it." Whether or not the "poetic" in *Unknown Soldier* is "self-conscious" is in the eye of the beholder. Certainly it wasn't so in the writing, at least not any more so than any of the other "carefully worded prose," which is all of it, believe it or not. To me, for the most part, it is not at all self-conscious because it wasn't. But, if the reader finds it so, it isn't working. "If it does not seem a moment's thought, / Our stitching and unstitching has been naught." I can hardly gainsay Yeats. The whole question is fascinating, especially since so much contemporary prose (not Findley's) is

self-consciously unselfconscious to the point of synthetic aridity.

. . . Despite my crankiness here, and despite what I perceive as your crankiness there, I like your mind, and you seem to like much of what I did in *Unknown Soldier*. I thank you for your thoughtfulness, your professional acuity, and your willingness to place these in the context of your personal experience. A generous, "unacademic" thing to do. At the same time, I think that with the best will in the world, you read the wrong book. My hope is that we might in fact engage in some dialogue on the issues raised in your review and here, in their larger dimensions as well as in relation to my own work. . . .

KEITH TO PAYERLE, 29 September 1989

. . . One problem when one is reviewing a book like *Unknown Soldier* is that one knows that other reviewers will be puffing lesser books with unjustified superlatives and that, by contrast, one's own response will seem ungenerous — or won't be understood. I do a lot of reviewing, and I have always made a point of attempting two things: (a) giving as accurate an account as I can of the kind of book it is (or seems to me to be), and (b) giving as honest an account as I can of my personal response to it. (When this last is complex, I always try to lay my own cards on the table by explaining my own viewpoint and so revealing my possible prejudices — as I did in your case, and as I'm glad you acknowledge.)

. . . In the jargon of literary criticism (which I try to avoid), what I've been talking about is, as you probably know, called "the affective fallacy." A similar term, "the intentional fallacy," warns against evaluating a work according to what the author is known to have intended rather than by what he actually produced (which may not be the same thing). You have told me, impressively

and convincingly, what you intended in *Unknown Soldier*, and I think I understand that. But when you claim that I "read the wrong book," all I can reply is that I made every effort to read the book in my hands and find out what was there. God knows, I may be wrong, but I still think that I gave an accurate representation of what is there on the printed page. Between the conception and the execution (to misquote Eliot) falls the Shadow.

... [With regard to] the treatment of sex scenes: I don't think it's fair to say I should "look in my own closet" to discover why I feel like an embarrassed voyeur. This is everyone's closet. It's virtually impossible in this day and age to question sex scenes in art without sounding like some life-denying and sick "Puritan." But it does seem to me that a real artistic difficulty is involved here. The sexual act, we know (or at least most of us know, and I am confident that that includes both of us), can be a beautiful, even supreme experience. But it is only so within a context of privacy (*not* secrecy, but privacy). The same act (physically), performed in public, becomes something very different. This is most obvious in films (*Woman of the Dunes* was, in part, about this) — and it's exaggerated on the screen by the magnification (I am invariably reminded of Gulliver in Brobdingnag), and by the fact that we are all, I think, at least partly conscious of: that these are actors "performing" within a commercial contract. The effect in literature is not so extreme, but I think it's very definitely there. The more vivid and immediate such a scene is — the more "realistic," if you will — the more this "voyeur" effect is there. This is a basic problem that the serious artist must, I believe, acknowledge and come to terms with. Of course, there's no answer — but I'm convinced (unfashionable as it may be) that "directness," "honest openness," etc. are not adequate defences in themselves. Here is

an instance where one must "by indirections find directions out." Very few novelists find a way around this problem; rightly or wrongly, I don't think you did.

And here is another major problem: the inarticulate hero. Let me say at once that I don't believe in the impossibility of presenting such people successfully in fiction, but I do think that it's extremely difficult. If someone hasn't got the sufficiently precise words in which to express his thought, then how can one know that such thought exists? I mentioned Davies only because I find his discussion of the matter (*A Voice in the Attic*, pp. 343-4 in the NCL edition) one of the best I know. Incidentally, while I am unashamedly an admirer of Davies at his best, I do *not* want everyone else to write like him. I don't want "much more" of him — nor, for that matter, do I want less "real life," as you suggest. But I do think that a sense of real life can only be communicated in art through artistic means and artistic effects. Your letter has a lot to say about the real life you wanted to convert into fiction, but remarkably little about the artistic problems that are involved in this conversion. These were what I was trying to indicate.

Another point. I do *not* "find bars beneath the dignity of literature." ... What I do say is that enough is enough, and that, if a novelist has a protagonist who spends much of his time in bars, then he must take special care to avoid being boring by repetition. Bars don't guarantee real life. The same with pissing. I just get tired of being told about it all the time. We all do it, and there's nothing shameful about it, but it just isn't very interesting.

So there we are. . . . I'm genuinely sorry that you felt "offended" or "like a fool." I assure you that I didn't intend that response and I honestly can't see how it's justified. If I read the wrong book, you certainly read the wrong review! I've re-

read it, and I think that it's a balanced review. Obviously, you believe that you've written a major book and I don't think it quite makes it. But I have surely made clear that it was an admirable attempt (that sounds a bit condescending, but it's not meant to be). I paid the book the compliment of judging it by the highest standards, and the majority of novels in any age don't even try to qualify. I endeavoured to make that clear. If the other reviews you get are all more responsible than mine, then I think you'll be lucky. I didn't insult your book with the usual chitchat that so many book-reviewers resort to. I spoke out — because the book stimulated/provoked me into speaking out — on what I believe to be the large critical questions that lie behind it. Hence this correspondence. . . .

PAYERLE TO KEITH, 3 October 1989

. . . I note that you find my letter to "have a lot to say about the real life [I] wanted to convert into fiction, but remarkably little about the artistic problems that are involved in this conversion," and that you were trying to indicate these problems in your review.

. . . I suppose I "have" a theory of art, as I have a way of being and perceiving. But I have seldom attempted to *develop* such a theory because it feels like alien, and for me rather barren, ground. Theory occasionally pops out in discourse, but has never been written down or worked out in a thorough way, and is not readily available on demand. This was essentially the way in which I became a writer rather than a scholar. . . .

At the moment, I regret to say, I don't have ready access to various theories about my novel which have popped out at various times as secondary sunspots in the process of creation. I do know, for instance, that the "utterance" of the book is based on a structure of four "voices" or

four voiced perspectives. These can also be seen as a point-of-view structure beginning in the region of Sam's bowel, working up through his chest/voice box to his head/mouth and beyond to a perception he can, in effect, touch but not grasp — a point-of-view and consciousness sitting like a camera on his shoulder, informed by his consciousness, but beyond it. This last is the "voice" or "point-of-view" of the *book*. (Part of this rumoured "theory" of mine is that a work of art has, embodies, its own point-of-view, or perspective, or way-of-being, which is the thing greater than the sum of its parts, including the "creator's" contribution or perspective as a "part.") Trying to determine, or at least see, how this totality of perspective comes to be, or "works," is my chief interest in critical analysis. It has a great deal to do with the relationship of parts, from micro to macro. . . .

Insofar as possible, *everything* in that book is not only there for a reason, but works with everything else to achieve "artistic effects." Ideally, everything would, but despite the fact that the thing took nine years from inception to realization, I don't believe in the perfectibility of a work of art. In terms of books, I think that the version published is simply the version that happens to be published. One hopes that it is the best version possible at that time, but I do like your misquotation of Eliot.

When I say "everything," I mean it literally. Including, for instance, swearing and drinking and pissing. The word "fuck," for instance, is often used, but its intonation, context, and echoes vary. Its use, and the use of all the other "repeated" elements, are variational and developmental. . . . I hold the view that these "parts," small or large, are, if you will, the atoms, molecules and bricks of the edifice. So we have the notion of repetition-and-variation, cumulative and "progressive" or developmental. "Bricks"

of varying size, shape, colour and density. There's also mortar in there somewhere, but as I said I'm not in top theoretical form. (Things like the "flat" or "toneless" attributives "he says/she says" are probably small instances of mortar, used "rhythmically" rather than "melodically" — to thoroughly mix my theoretical metaphors.) I'd rather there didn't have to be mortar, but I haven't achieved the technology of the ancient masons of Egypt and the Americas.

... Whether or not one finds the book, or aspects of it, boring, depends, I think, on whether or not one (a) perceives the sort of thing I've been describing, and (b) likes the results. Most people deal with (b). You deal with both (a) and (b), but not, I think, with a perception of the way the thing works "as it is written." I don't mind accepting that that could be my fault, since you are not by any means imperceptive, but that's what I mean, or one of the sorts of things I mean, when I say you read the wrong book. Why, for instance, do you not wonder, if you think the book is worthy of judgement by the standards of a major work, why things are as they are in it? Why, for instance, the repetitions of swear words and details of drinking and urinating occur? To say simply that the skilled novelist doesn't do these things is to say simply that I am not a skilled novelist. You suggest in fact that I am simply following "1980s fashion." Is that how one writes an almost-major work? By being unskilled and following fashion? Perhaps, but to me that sounds more like a possible definition of mediocrity....

I didn't read the wrong review. Your gracious apology for unintentionally leaving me offended and feeling like a fool is welcome, and accepted. The fact that you were judging the book by the highest standards in a way that you wouldn't accord to most books *does* come through, and is appreciated. That's why I could

write to you as I did. ... But the tone, and much of the substance, of your rejection of *Unknown Soldier* as a major novel is stinging in allusions such as "Supposed 'realism' of the final sex scene"... The thing I was really offended by was the suggestion that I hadn't fully worked out what kind of man Sam is. It was in aid of answering that accusation (not much softened by the "unfairly perhaps") that I wrote much of the "real life" stuff in my last letter. That together with the business about Sam being "intellectually limited" — without "any powers of reflection." There are "thoughts" (ideas), but there also "visions," within or extending from intuitive vision. And he does think about, reflect upon, a lot of subjects, including history, time, place and human relationships. He just does it, often, not in intellectual/conceptual terms, but in terms of perceived experience, employing all five senses plus "the sixth," but most often the (viscerally?) visual tending toward the visionary.

... I am most interested in the issues of "affective" and "intentional" fallacy that you raise. And the issues of "direct" sexuality, and whether or not you were "seriously affected" by your own experience/perspective. ... For instance, in what sense, or with what significance, is your perspective "very different" from mine? Is your view of artistic means and effects, or your view of representations of sex, significantly informed by your being "old enough to remember" the War? Is there a societal perspective implied that has standards of acceptable social behaviour and success... which Sam doesn't meet? That would imply a kind of class bias.... I think that could be taken to constitute a "serious effect" on your response....

Which leads by the low road to the second aspect of the question of the affective fallacy. What *does* it mean to "see a novel as a novel and not as something

else"? You say that you're the last person to believe that anyone can be objective, and yet if you're *not* calling for objectivity, what are you calling for other than the sort of (self) consciousness that permits one to place one's literary judgement in a personal (affective) context? This is something like the distinction between cant and honesty. The affective fallacy would seem to be a fallacy if it is indeed fallacious, i.e., "cant." The term seems rather like "murder," defined as "wrongful killing." To equate killing with murder is, at best, inaccurate. It all depends on how one defines "wrongful." To equate the affective with fallacy either depends on how one defines "fallacy," or it's an error in logic.

... So to representations of sex ... if this is everybody's closet, Bill, then I very much think everybody should look in it. ... I do not offer "directness" or "honest openness" as a defence. I don't really think a defence is necessary. But some semblance of understanding is. I am suspicious of indirection in sexual matters, artistically, for the same reason that I refused to present Sam from the "outside". ... I am no more willing to trust the audience an inch in this regard that I am in assuming that their view of Sam will be perceptive of the real character rather than their preconceptions about veterans. Both in the sex scenes and in my representation of Sam from the inside, I took the risk of putting people off, but I far preferred that to putting them on, or allowing them to put Sam on as a kind of debased icon to place comfortably amongst their existing shibboleths. ...

This is perhaps a confrontational attitude, but it is not finally an ungente or unkind one. I simply believe, artistically, that one must have the thing itself. That's not the same as arguing "directness" as a kind of socioethical imperative transplanted into art. In fact, a lot of what I've done is so bloody indirect that hardly any-

body's *seen* it yet, much less grappled with it. What I'm saying is based in Stevens, noted as an aridly intellectual poet, which I think is another major misreading of things. I do not believe that seeing or feeling is believing. But I do believe that believing without seeing and feeling is abstract and dangerous. That is not so much a notion of "felt thought" as it is a fairly mystical notion that "thought" is physical, and it's not unrelated to Einstein's famous equation. ...

KEITH TO PAYERLE, 1 November 1989

... In using the phrases "intentional fallacy" and "affective fallacy," I wasn't underwriting them, as it were, but using them as ways to define a problem. Personally, I don't think one can be rigid in these matters. ... Ultimately, one can only (legitimately) judge what is there, but to explore an author's intention is, for me, thoroughly legitimate as an initial critical procedure: it can help one to *understand* a work of art, though one's evaluation should not be dependent upon it. As for "affective fallacy," it *can* be a fallacy, as in the case of a radio station being flooded with wreaths when a character dies in a soap opera. ... On the other hand, as Thomas Hardy saw, the death-bed of *anyone* is the fifth act of a tragedy. Of course we are affected by the stories of Lear, Tess, etc., and our "literary judgment" cannot but contain this response. But I am reminded at this point of how moving *Death of a Salesman* seemed when I first saw it, but how disillusioned I felt recently when I saw a seemingly competent performance — because the whole construction and writing seemed so tawdry.

... The matter of monotony in art is a very complicated one. (I would prefer to say "monotonous" rather than "boring," and should have made the distinction in my previous letter.) Polonius is a

bore, but is he boring in *Hamlet*? Obviously not. . . . At best, I suspect, monotony is an effect to be used with caution and restraint. I confess I did find the drinking and pissing in *Unknown Soldier* monotonous because, after we'd had several such scenes, I couldn't see that anything additional was being communicated. (Why not mention every time Sam blinked?) . . . When I referred to "1980s fashion," I merely meant that the so-called "age of permissiveness" allows a novelist to employ these references if he (or she) wants to, and thus does not require the exploration of possibly more subtle ways of representing our bodily repetitions. My own experience in reading is that, after the initial sense of refreshing shock has worn off (at least fictional characters piss just as we all do!), the law of diminishing returns sets in with depressing rapidity.

. . . The next point I need to take up is what you say about my possible "class bias." In part, I'm prepared to plead guilty here, but only in the sense that we are all inevitably affected by such matters (yourself as much as myself). But I can't agree that I don't "wish to be identified with a socially marginal asshole like Collier"; I might well not wish to be identified with the asshole, but the "socially marginal" is irrelevant. The reservations would be moral ones, not social ones. But "identified with" is the wrong phrase anyway — other veterans might "identify with" him but it would be arrogant of me even to try, since I lack the experience you give him. What you mean, I assume, is "empathize with" or something like that, and here I would plead not guilty. I am prepared to empathize with such characters in art — I think of Shakespeare's Pistol, Defoe's Moll Flanders, Dickens's Magwitch, Cary's Gulley Jimson, Beckett's tramps, etc. — in varying degrees depending on the effect aimed at and achieved by the writer. . . . With Collier, I'm split — I understand his bitter-

ness (itself an inadequate word — "hatred," perhaps, but that's not quite right either), but I'm still uncertain why his experience should have affected him more than similar experiences must have affected others. . . . Does this sort of experience absolve one from the responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood? If that sounds quaintly old-fashioned, so be it. I can only report that a reading of *Unknown Soldier* didn't make me clear about these points, and I feel that I need to be clear in order to come to an adequate understanding. In addition, I was a bit uneasy about where you (as author/narrator) stood. I got the uneasy feeling that I was expected to respond more positively than, given the evidence I was confronted with, I could. (And *degrees* of positiveness are involved here — I don't mean that I was wholly negative.) I sensed, rightly or wrongly, an attempt to exalt this figure into a kind of heroic stature that I wasn't convinced he could sustain.

One place where we may find ourselves disagreeing on more general grounds is the matter of "the perfectibility of a work of art." I agree that it is ultimately unattainable (if one doesn't happen to be God), but I do think that every artist should work to that end. I don't follow you when you go on from there to say that "the version published is simply [simply?!] the version that happens to be published." Shouldn't one be able to do more than "hope" that it's "the best version possible at that time"?

. . . "Finally (at last, he says)" — ! I find it difficult to reconcile your statement . . . "I simply believe, artistically, that one must have the thing itself" with your statement . . . "I wasn't attempting 'real life,' I was attempting real art." I don't see how you can have "the thing itself" in art. Perhaps one of the things we are arguing about is the possible paradox that, the closer one gets to trying to present "the thing itself," the more the chasm

between the thing itself and the artistic approximation to it becomes a problem.

... All this will sound dryly academic, and I know you will find yourself resisting it vigorously, but I write out of a conviction that I can think of no extended work of art that has survived to become a permanent part of the world's literature that does not have a challenging appeal to the mind. Of course, this has to be melded with feeling and emotion; a creative writer does not think like a philosopher, but the mind is always conspicuously involved. What I'm impressed by in your letters are your hints concerning the "fairly mystical notion that 'thought' is physical." My point is that, if genuine, it remains recognizable as thought, and provokes further thought. Another of the shibboleths of our age that makes it a difficult age for major art is the simple-minded notion that art is "self-expression" — the opening of the floodgates and all that crap — that there is a democracy of feeling by which everyone's reactions are as valid and interesting as everyone else's. And I *know* in my bowels (as D. H. Lawrence suggested, in "inner-light" Puritan fashion, on another occasion) that it is false. To challenge it is to be called an elitist, but I no longer care. Art is an elitist activity, so why should we be embarrassed about the label? ...

PAYERLE TO KEITH, 6 & 7 November 1989

... You say I seem defensive regarding "the academic," and I am. It is not my métier, and yet I feel subject to it as a writer in a way similar to my subjugation to the vagaries of publishing. Publishing suffers from a cynicism which you have never betrayed, and which I strongly believe you are incapable of harbouring. But, Your letter I feel gives me unlooked-for justification in my defensiveness.

... Sam is a real man made of real words. That is an inspiring paradox. The

lion in the lute, not the lion locked in stone, to paraphrase Stevens, "As if a lion knelt to kiss a rose, / Astonished into passionate repose," to quote that good man Ted Roethke.

... I can say that I "hope" that the version published is the best version possible at a given time because I've earned the right to do so. *Unknown Soldier* took nine years from inception to publication, and the final revisions were done within four months of publication (the publisher's hard deadline). The first five years of that time were, essentially, first draft. During the following four years there were about five more drafts, although I can't recall accurately without recourse to files that are now obscure. ...

You say it's impossible to prove a negative. Well, I feel as though I've been a stunning failure at demonstrating *or* proving a positive — for instance, the possibility of using relatively "meaningless" words in a meaningful and revealing way. ... The fact that this remains impenetrably invisible to you troubles me greatly. I find myself *most* uncomfortable cast in the role of critic of my own work saying "Look what I've done, huh? Ain't it good?" I want someone else to do that. Critics, namely.

I don't gainsay your abilities and wisdom. Quite the contrary. But we seem to be in a ... standoff. I had hoped you would be able to say, "Ah, *that's* what he means by four levels of voice, or a developmental/variational technique". ... As it stands, you seem to have subsided into agreeing with yourself. And together we seem to be a pair of conjurers with an alarming lack of rabbits.

Do you really think I would agree that "this is boring, but it's art"? I am not Andy Warhol.

"Identified with," as I used it in context, means "by others," not by your self. I know and respect your reluctance to "identify with" combat veterans, as I ex-

plained at some length earlier. But I did not mean "empathize with"! Goddam language. I meant what the Catholics used to call "human respect," meaning, by bizarre inversion, the fear of social disapprobation.

I am somewhat offended by the "age of permissiveness" argument, . . . as I was by the original "1980s fashion." Likewise "the simple-minded notion that art is 'self-expression.'" Is that what you think I did in *Unknown Soldier*? Is that what you think I'm arguing for? . . .

KEITH TO PAYERLE, 3 December 1989

. . . After the exchange of several letters, in which the genuine George Payerle came across in a way that he couldn't possibly in the novel (I'll spare you an academic lecture on the difference between the implied author and the name on the title page), I reread the novel and came to the conclusion that, whatever your intentions and whatever the whole history of writing the book, and whatever blood and guts went into it (and I do recognize that), my opinion as a reader, and so as a reviewer, hadn't changed. I *can* only express an opinion on what is there — or rather what I can recognize as there. You ask for "an appreciation of *Unknown Soldier* based on the terms in which it is written" — but I honestly don't see how I can do that.



AMONG RECENT publications on photography, Robert M. Levine, *Images of History: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Latin American Photographs as Documents* (Duke, US\$72.50) presents remarkable deconstructions of colonial tropes. Levine analyzes formal portraits of masters and slaves, family pictures, snapshots of visiting anthropologists with their "objects," and so on. He probes manifestations of overt and covert culture, comments on perspectival choices in landscapes and cityscapes and analyzes the conventions of "posed decorum." After *Images of History*, Stefan Richter, *The Art of the Daguerreotype* (Viking, \$29.95), is difficult to tolerate. The reproductions are very good, but too many of them are pornographic and too many are merely described as "charming," "playful," or "amusing." The author seems to be little disturbed by the information that the models for these pictures were "washerwomen, needlewomen, housemaids, messenger-girls and prostitutes." After stating that their "names are not known," he comes to the startling conclusion that in "the daguerreotype, as in the brothel, class barriers were transcended." By contrast to Levine and Richter, Mike Weaver, ed., *Photography in the Nineteenth Century: The Fine Art Tradition* (Cambridge, £25.00), pursues neither social nor prevalent concerns. The book presents a series of scholarly essays on pictorialism and other Victorian photographic styles and themes. The book is good on the naturalist tradition (there are three essays on the work of P. H. Emerson), but there are also noteworthy contributions on topographical and architectural photography. Of related interest to Levine's book is John F. Bauman and Thomas H. Coope, *In the Eye of the Great Depression: New Deal Reporters and the Agony of the American People* (Northern Illinois, \$25.00/9.50).

E.-M.K.

THE FOLLOWING NCL EDITIONS have been received: *Hetty Dorval* by Ethel Wilson, afterword by Northrop Frye; *The Innocent Traveler* by Ethel Wilson, afterword by P. K. Page; *The Equations of Love* by Ethel Wilson, afterword by Alice Munro; *Swamp Angel* by Ethel Wilson, afterword by George Bowering; *Mad Shadows* by Marie-Claire Blais, afterword by Daphne Marlatt.

E.-M.K.

HUGH MACLENNAN (1907-1990): IN RECOLLECTION

WHEN *Canadian Literature* began to appear in 1959, Hugh MacLennan was one of the first writers to appreciate the contribution it was likely to make to our literary life, and he wrote me a letter of congratulation immediately the first issue came out. It was perhaps his own peak year as a novelist. *The Watch That Ends the Night*, his best novel and one of the best Canadian novels yet written, had appeared, and in many ways he seemed to hold that symbolic relationship to his time which Wilde has declared a writer should sustain. In an age of rising nationalism his earlier and more polemical novels, *romans à thèse* like *Barometer Rising*, *Two Solitudes* and *The Precipice*, gave voice in memorable ways to current anxieties about the condition of Canada as an emergent nation, with its problems of internal (*Two Solitudes*) and external (*The Precipice*) relations. And his appeal seemed perfectly fitted for the thematic criticism which began to flourish at that time. But, apart from these ideological and critical considerations, MacLennan seemed to have a stature which — with Callaghan in decline and Margaret Laurence only rising to the zenith of her achievement — made him seem par excellence the novelist of the 1950s, which started off with his dark second-best novel (in terms of sheer writing), *Each Man's Son* (1951), and ended with his best, *The Watch That Ends the Night*.

I had actually known MacLennan for almost a decade by the time he wrote to me regarding *Canadian Literature*. When I returned to Canada in 1949 John Sutherland sent me a parcel of MacLennan's novels with the request that I write an essay on them for *Northern Review* from

the viewpoint of a critic from London. In England by that time, with a few exceptions like George Orwell and Arthur Koestler, we were in retreat from polemical fiction and poetry, but in MacLennan I found an old-style preacher-novelist who combined exciting accounts of disastrous or perilous action with political lessons. I admired his set pieces, like the evocation of the Halifax Harbour explosion of 1917 in *Barometer Rising*, and I found his male characters satisfying. But his women seemed softly outlined and sentimentally conceived, and eroticism of any kind he handled with a strangely communicable embarrassment.

I said all these things in my essay and very soon, out of the blue, came a letter from MacLennan, thanking me for the piece, granting my points with reservations, quietly explaining his intentions. It was the beginning of a cordial, courteous, and cautious relationship, with letters exchanged whenever I wrote on his books. He contributed several articles to *Canadian Literature*, more about the financial and publishing problems of writers than about the craft of writing; he rarely discussed the work of another writer. Occasionally he came to Vancouver and we had genial lunches in restaurants looking over the unique mountain-and-sea-scape of Vancouver, which MacLennan appreciated for visits (I remember one spring when he got very excited over the azaleas blooming early in March on the University campus), but which never led him to desert Montreal, his conflict-ridden adoptive home.

There was a particular burst of letters when I published my little book on him, *Hugh MacLennan*, in 1969, and I developed my idea of the parallels to Odysseus to be found in his leading characters. MacLennan claimed he was surprised when he read what I said but had concluded I was right; it was all, he main-

tained, an unconscious process, and he also was probably right.

I very soon encountered the opinion that MacLennan was really an essayist who had found his way into fiction, and I partly subscribed to it. He wrote some very fine essays and helped to keep that fragile art alive in Canada; the kind of stately and slightly pompous prose he developed had much in common with that of the Augustan essayists, while in the sense that they carried very obvious messages his first three novels and his 1960s work, *The Return of the Sphinx*, could all be considered as extended essays as much as novels. But it might also be said that MacLennan was best as an essayist when he kept away from fiction, as in *The Rivers of Canada*, and that his fiction was best the more he distanced himself from the *roman à thèse*. He never abandoned the development of issues, philosophical, social, or political, but he was best when he treated them most broadly and allowed the archetypes that haunt every true novelist's mind to take control, as in *Each Man's Son*, that tense and vivid study of the tragic effects of Calvinist guilt, or *The Watch That Ends the Night*, that monumental book about people involved in the great world issues of the 1930s.

MacLennan showed a curious and not always happy mixture of vanity and insecurity, the latter particularly shown in the massive revisions and rewritings he found himself forced to do for each book. I have never known another writer who actually boasted, as MacLennan did, about the thousands of pages he would discard to get the 300 or 400 pages of the final book. It was not perfectionism that led him to this so much as a nagging sense of imperfection. He reacted deeply to criticism; he was quite aware of the unchallenged position he held for a period in the Canadian literary world, but he seemed to see it as precarious, and reacted emotionally to negative reviews. He was,

I remember, particularly mortified when most of the critics found *The Return of the Sphinx* both polemically and fictionally inadequate.

I last heard from MacLennan early in the 1980s, and I assumed when letters no longer came from him that, like me, he was becoming more reclusive as he grew older. Now I gather that he felt lonely and neglected in his last years, and I am sad at the thought that I might have done more to keep in touch with him.

I feel sad in a different way because the clock of public opinion has made an extraordinary turn, and in the year of his death we are back again heavily involved in the two cultural solitudes of Canada, the essential unity of the nation, Canada's relations with the United States. To these preoccupations, one might say, MacLennan sacrificed his art during his first decade as a novelist, only truly fulfilling himself in his second decade. But, considered apart from fictional virtues, what he had to say was honest and deep and important. As we turn back to our renewed and often despairing debate on the future of our confederation of regions and peoples that once offered so much, we miss his voice. But at least books like *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes* should be read again, and particularly by the young; as tracts for the times, they have maintained their vitality and their point.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

THE *Dictionnaire des auteurs de langue française en Amérique du Nord*, eds. Réginald Hamel, John Hare, Paule Wyczynski (Fides, \$125.00) is more than an update of the authors' 1976 *Dictionnaire pratique des auteurs québécois*, because it now also includes entries on non-Québécois francophone authors. The result is a remarkable reference work distinguished by the catholicity of its selection. The book documents literary canons in the making: the bibliographies for Marie-Claire

Blais, Nicole Brossard, Hubert Aquin, Anne Hébert, Antonine Maillet speak for themselves, as does the entry on Emile Nelligan which provides new information on myths woven around the poet's life and work. Authors who had not yet come to public attention in 1976 receive appropriate entries, among them Louky Bersianik, Denise Boucher and Marco Micone. At the same time, nineteenth-century authors whose work has become interesting again against the background of recent developments are included, such as the Curé Labelle. As its predecessor, this dictionary lists informative entries on historians, essayists, and linguists, and the reader will find much information in the contributions on authors as different as Trudeau, Vallières, Léandre Bergeron and Pierre Savard, particularly since these updated versions also reflect on the business of history in the post-referendum age. A few minor quibbles: the updated entries do not always appropriately shift the focus in an author's work. Thus, Tremblay's *Chroniques de Plateau Mont-Royal* is given only scant attention. And the editors seem to frown on criticism written in English. With few exceptions, the latter has been ignored and that, considering available excellent work on Aquin, Brossard, Hébert and others, is a pity.

E.-M.K.

Re(dis)covering our Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers, ed. Lorraine McMullen (U. of Ottawa) will be an important source for anyone interested in early Canadian women writers. The contributions range from detailed practical advice such as Marion Beyea's "Archival Sources for Research on Nineteenth-Century Women Writers" and cogent diagnoses such as Frances G. Halpenny's "Problems and Solutions in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography, 1800-1900*" to programmatic essays such as Carole Gerson's "Anthologies and the Canon of Early Canadian Women Writers" and analyses of individual problems and literary figures, including women journalists (Marjory Lang), travel narratives (D. M. R. Bentley) and autobiographies (Helen Buss). Much emphasis is predictably placed on the Strickland sisters and Sara Jeanette Duncan, but none of the pieces is redundant, and editor and contributors alike are to be congratulated for performing the rare feat of turning a series of symposium papers into a substantial collection. Barabara M. Freeman's *Kit's Kingdom: The Journalism of Kathleen Blake Coleman* is a felicitous choice for the first volume in the Carleton Women's

Experience Series. The book documents the life and achievement of a woman whose energy, wit, and unorthodox views and behaviour have attracted attention in several previous books. Freeman sketches the fullest picture we have of Coleman to date, drawing on her papers in the Public Archives of Canada and on the testimony of her descendants. "Kit," as she signed her famous column in the *Mail and Empire*, was an even more complex person than has been acknowledged so far, and researchers interested in women's studies will be intrigued by her various attempts to create different personae for herself, which kept her readers guessing as to her real age, gender, and marital life. Also new (although not surprising considering the elaborate rope-dance she had to perform between conventionality and intellectual independence) is the revelation that Coleman suffered from severe bouts of depression which left her incapacitated for weeks. Freeman is much to be commended for her effort to place these phenomena within the larger cultural and social fabric of Coleman's times. Particularly good is the assessment of Coleman's much-touted coverage of the Cuban War as the only accredited woman journalist, an achievement for which she was only in recent years admitted to the Canadian Journalists' Hall of Fame. Freeman readily acknowledges the quality of Coleman's work, but this is no hagiography: she also points out the publicity motivating her expedition and the inaccuracies in her reporting. Freeman's writing is perceptive, vigorous, and *engagé*; this is a fine book, a few misquotations notwithstanding. "Kit" observed places, characters and events with the keen eye of the flâneur, and her efforts to classify the social types among the urban masses gained much from the contemporary "science" of physiognomy. Mary Cowling's *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge) offers welcome insight into the Victorians' fascination with human appearance and its alleged correlation with personality and behaviour. If James Fenimore Cooper provided Eugène Sue, Dickens and others with the metaphor of the city as jungle, then physiognomy suggested that criminals substituted for savages, "'as worthy of study in an ethnological point of view, as those of the people of other countries,' as distinct from average law-abiding citizens 'as the Malay is from the Caucasian tribe.'" Cowling pays special attention to the work of the painter William Powell Frith, whose panoramic paintings purport to depict the full range of Victorian humanity. M. Jeanne Peterson, *Family*,

Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen (Indiana UP, \$14.95 paper) sets out to do for 19th-century British women what Peter Gay's *The Education of the Senses* (1984) did for their American counterparts, namely to correct their image as frail, submissive, and inactive creatures and, instead, to emphasize their role as resilient, productive and passionate members of society. Many of Peterson's findings are intriguing and her descriptive approach to her sources will provide researchers with much useful documentary material, but her sample is too small to "revise our understanding of women's relationships to their families and their work," as the information accompanying the review copy claims. Of related interest is Frances B. Cogan's *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (U. of Georgia) which undertakes to correct the view that "the majority of American women [were] mindless consumers and drudges of a male-dominated capitalist world." Cogan's chief sources are advice books and manuals which advocated health, intelligence, and resourcefulness in women. One of the areas in which daring women attempted to prove themselves was in criminal investigation. Kathleen Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (U of Illinois) explores the adaptation of a notoriously gender-specific genre to female protagonists, or rather the adaptation of the protagonist to the genre. Chapter after chapter of this thoroughly researched volume comes to the depressing conclusion that "the golden age of detective fiction which codified so much of the genre's structure reaffirmed the old rules for women's behavior and kept its priorities firmly in place." Klein is good on the contradictory codes attached to identical behaviour in male and female detectives. The book comes with an extensive bibliography. An essay on detective novels also appears in *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study of the Novel of Manners*, eds. Berge W. Bowers & Barbara Brothers, a recent addition to UMI's "Challenging the Literary Canon" Series. "The Detective Novel of Manners" by Carolyn Heilbrun *alias* Amanda Cross is, however, less a scholarly study of the subject than an angry manifesto, and a similar tone appears in other contributions (on Austen, Trollope, Eliot, James, Woolf, Pym, and others), including the introduction. The result is a provocative, if not always fully informative, book, although there is a detailed bibliography. Like *Reading and Writing Women's Lives*, *Women's Writing in Exile*, eds. Mary Lynn Broe & Angela Ingram (U of North Carolina) originated in an MLA

panel, but the result is somewhat more substantial. Besides exploring various forms of exile, the book also presents a number of moving personal testimonials by Annette Kolodny, Esther Fuchs, Sneja Gunew, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose passionate rhetoric may well make them the most valuable parts of this volume. Last but not least: from Edward Arnold comes a series of compact introductions to women writers. Available are volumes on Virginia Woolf by Susan Dick, on Doris Lessing by Jeannette King, and a book on Contemporary Women Novelists by Flora Alexander with chapters on Drabble, Weldon, Carter, and others.

E.-M.K.

Le Premier quartier de la lune (Leméac, n.p.) concludes Tremblay's five-volume *Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal*, a monumental achievement which sustains the imagination and historical sweep initiated by *La Grosse Femme d'à côté est enceinte* from beginning to end. The cover of *Le Premier Quartier* is adorned by a child's drawing of a cat, smiling craftily like the Cheshire Cat. The similarity with Lewis Carroll's feline is not accidental; Marcel, who reassures himself of his friend's elusive presence by drawing his portrait over and over, suddenly finds his works riddled with holes. Together with Duplessis, the Fates are about to disappear and leave the apparently abandoned house which has been Marcel's refuge for many years. Marcel himself has evolved from the enchanting four-year-old in *La Grosse Femme* to a sweaty adolescent unfit for school and tormented by the other children. He is also given to epileptic seizures, an illness which his family shamefully tries to conceal from the neighbours. At the same time, he partakes of a world of fantasy and dream which remains largely closed to his cousin, "l'enfant de la grosse femme" — Michel Tremblay himself. A star student, "l'enfant" still senses his limitations, and the day covered by this book, June 20, 1952, painfully reveals some of them as he writes his end-of-year examinations. As in the previous books, *Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Anges* in particular, school is above all the place where the power of language is taught, but also often abused. As her son agonizes over his French test, "la grosse femme" graduates from reading to television, an invention she considers capable of breaking through the reader's and radio-listener's solitude, particularly extreme in her sister-in-law Albertine, "renfermée, buckée, bougonne." Here, Tremblay may locate the origins

of his own fascination with television as a potentially effective popular art form: recent statistics have confirmed that popular serials are the top-ranking shows in Québec, compared to sports broadcasts in English Canada. This day in 1952 may also be Tremblay's awakening to the importance of *joual* as he watches his classmates yawn at their teacher's assurance that "le français . . . c'était une langue passionnante dont il fallait être fier, que les règles, compliquées au début, se simplifiaient au fur et à mesure qu'on les comprenait . . ." This book is a chronicle of despair then, as Marcel and "l'enfant" relinquish their childhood dreams, and Marcel attempts to mark his grief with an apocalyptic burning of the Fates' abandoned house. At the same time, this day marks a beginning, "le premier quartier de la lune," and the book concludes with a brilliant evocation of the images of flight which permeate the *Chroniques* as a whole, whether it be the "chasse-galerie" in *La Grosse Femme* or the little hanging angel in *Thérèse et Pierrette*: "Au creux du croissant de lune, un petit garçon était étendu, bras dernière la tête, jambe croisées; il semblait rêver; au bout, suspendu dans le vide par le col de sa chemise qui risquait de déchirer à tout moment, était accroché un adolescent qui se débattait."

E.-M. K.

I READ BARRY MILES'S *Ginsberg: A Biography* (Simon and Schuster) in the hope of finding out more about Ginsberg's participation in the Vancouver Poetry Festival in 1963, but there is little beyond the announcement that the "poets all lived together, and many of the students spent nights with them." The book as a whole is a loosely sewn together series of quotations with little analysis, and the few comments offered on Ginsberg's poetry are jejune paraphrases. The most valuable item, to this reviewer, is the photograph of Ginsberg's parents as young and very beautiful lovers; the image makes Ginsberg's lament for Naomi in *Kaddish* so much more poignant. Students of Canadian poetry will find much of interest here, especially in the chapter on "Open Form." Unfortunately the book does not have a bibliography; some of the questions only cursorily raised here have surely been analyzed in some detail elsewhere. One of the central linguistic strategies of the Ginsberg era was repetition, the legacy of Whitman and Stein. Explorations of repetition interesting to critics of the short story and poetry alike, appear in Susan F. Beegel, ed., *Hemingway's Neglected Short Fiction: New Perspectives* (UMI), par-

ticularly in the two essays by Michael S. Reynolds and Erik Nakjavani on "Homage to Switzerland." Another book, Thomas Gardner's *Discovering Ourselves in Whitman: The Contemporary American Long Poem* (U of Illinois P), does what the title promises, by taking a close look at John Berryman, Galway Kinnell, Theodore Roethke, Robert Duncan, John Ashbery, and James Merrill.

E.-M. K.

Canadian Travellers in Italy, ed. Barry Callaghan (Exile, n.p.), is an anthology of poems, short stories, the occasional scholarly piece, collages, drawings, and photographs. The volume traces a journey from northern Italy to the South, with excerpts from Anna Jameson's *Diary of an Ennuyée* interspersed throughout. Besides Jameson, there are also older works by Sara Jeannette Duncan, James deMille, William Withrow (not quite as unknown to the world as Callaghan would have it), and a few contributors to *The Week*, but the emphasis is on contemporary authors. The texts are well chosen for variety of tone, ranging from Jane Urquhart's languid "Hotel Verbano" to Ralph Gustafson's satirical "On the Top of Milan Cathedral" and Alice Jones's Ruskinian "Florentine Vignettes." The reproductions, both in black-and-white and in colour, are superb. Notes on the contributors would have been welcome, as well as a somewhat more ambitious introduction. Although they are concerned with American travellers, the two volumes of William L. Vance's *America's Rome* (Yale, US\$30.00) make excellent complementary reading to Callaghan's book. The chapter on the Colosseum, for instance, discusses topics and metaphors which also dominated Canadian travellers' narratives. *America's Rome* is a good source for the numerous ways in which American politicians ransacked Roman thought, architecture, and city planning to legitimize their own republic. A special aspect of Italian culture to which both American and Canadian travellers responded extensively is its Jewish population. *Gardens and Ghettos: The Art of Jewish Life in Italy*, ed. Vivian B. Mann (Univ. of California, US\$55.00), presents historical essays and beautiful illustrations. Of particular interest to literary historians is Allen Mandelbaum's "A Millenium of Hebrew Poetry in Italy" and his comments on the artistic scene in Trieste. The book comes with a moving preface, published posthumously, by Primo Levi.

E.-M. K.

AMONG THE MANY publications spawned by the Bicentennial of the French Revolution, *L'Image de la Révolution française au Québec 1789-1989*, ed. Michel Grenon (HMH, \$25.95), is probably the most interesting to Canadian readers. The cover reproduces Jean-Paul Mousseau's painting *La Marseillaise* (1956). To François-Marc Gagnon, in his contribution "La Révolution dans la pensée automatisée," this work embodies an important change in Quebec's perception of the Revolution from a destructive to an inspiring event. Other essays also chronicle the significance of the year 1789 for Quebec art, such as Laurier Lacroix's account of the Desjardins collection — paintings saved by two French priests from vandalized churches and museums and shipped to Quebec, where they formed one of the first important art collections in the country, providing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century models to local painters. Claudette Hould's "La Gravure révolutionnaire et son impact sur les consciences" discusses images of a different kind, opening a potentially intriguing source of comparison with contemporary political comic-strips and cartoons. The enormous resistance among Quebec conservatives to the ideas represented by the Revolution is discussed particularly well in Pierre Savard's account of the Centennial, when French-Canadians (and the British!) boycotted the world exposition in Paris. Literary allusions are the subject of Réginald Hamel's thorough "Révolution française et littérature québécoise: Paroles gelées et idées gelées." Besides other illuminating contributions, the volume contains a meticulously prepared annotated bibliography by Serge Leroux. The reader's understanding of the issues raised in Grenon's collection is much enhanced by consulting general works like Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (Yale UP, £35.00), or *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, eds. François Furet and Mona Ozouf (Belknap P, US\$69.95). The former ranges through a wide selection of topics, such as "Paris Milieu and Cultural Institution," "Popular Culture," "Enlightenment and Christianity," literature, the fine arts, and education, while the latter is divided by the headings "Events," "Actors," "Institutions and Creations," "Ideas," and "Historians and Commentators." Particularly engrossing were the sections in both works on the rhetoric employed by the revolutionaries. Kennedy's discussion of "vandalism" (a word coined during the Revolution) is exemplary and, unwittingly or not, evokes alarmingly close parallels with recent and present political prop-

aganda. Both books are richly illustrated and well documented.

E.-M. K.

THERE HAVE BEEN several reminders that the collage is a central technique in avant-gardist Canadian art and poetry: a new edition of jazz musician-artist Al Neil's *Changes* (Nightwood, n.p.), an autobiographical account of a junkie's life in 1960s Vancouver; "Rezoning," an exhibition of assemblages and collages by Neil, Bill Bissett, and others at the Vancouver Art Gallery; and a special issue of *The Capilano Review* on "Six West Coast artists whose work is often concerned with the literal and metaphorical reconstruction of the fragmented." Important discussions of the collage have been collected in *Collage: Critical Views*, ed. Katherine Hoffman (UMI, n.p.), a particularly tightly edited volume in which individual contributions extensively respond to, and often challenge, each other. Predictably Schwitters, Picasso, and Ernst receive much attention, but there are also essays on "femmage" and "montage" and general discussions, such as Gregory L. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," and Donald B. Kuspit, "Collage: The Organizing Principle of Art in the Age of the Relativity of Art." Marjorie Perloff's metaphorical use of the collage in her work on modernist poetry is not acceptable to Harry Polkinhorn, who insists that the term is only legitimate and useful if applied within a specific historical context. The collage also features in John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis 1907-1914* (Harvard, US\$39.95/19.95), now into its third edition, and in *Dada/Dimensions*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (UMI, n.p.). Collage is often the work of outsiders whose work cannot be subsumed under established categories. Two seminal texts on the art of outsiders are Jean Dubuffet's manifesto on "art brut," *Asphyxiating Culture* (Four Walls Eight Windows, \$17.95), now available in a translation by Carol Volk, and John M. MacGregor's *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton, US\$49.50), a richly illustrated work written from a Jungian perspective.

E.-M. K.



ON THE VERGE

***** CHARLES TAYLOR, *Sources of the Self*. Harvard UP, \$37.50 cl. *Sources of the Self* is written by the McGill scholar Charles Taylor, who combines professorships of Political Science and Philosophy, an appropriate pairing in view of the scope of his book. It is an important work of a stature that one is rarely able to welcome from a Canadian scholar, and it comes at an appropriate time, when outdated concepts of historical determinism are being challenged repeatedly by events created by human beings acting in freedom. *Sources of the Self* is not a book about the contemporary world *per se*, but it searches back for the causes — or perhaps sometimes for the anti-causes — that over the centuries since Plato have helped to produce that world and its attitudes. Ranging historically over the fields of philosophy, politics, sociology, artistic creation, Taylor comes to the defence of the modern concept of self and its attendant subjectivity. He hails the “essentially modern predicament” that has left “Most of us . . . still groping for answers about what makes life worth living or what confers meaning on individual lives.” The need to question rather than the hope of answering has always guided the great philosophers, and Charles Taylor shows very convincingly how modern life, for all its faults, leads us towards identifying the possible rather than becoming obsessed by the fear of the impossible. A major book of fascinating detail and grand simple concepts that wholly defies summary in a single paragraph.

G.W.

*** J. L. GRANATSTEIN and ROBERT BOTHWELL, *Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy*. U of Toronto P, \$35.00. *Pirouette* is a curiously mixed study on the wavering course of Canadian foreign policy in the years immediately following the Pearson period of honest brokerage. But it is also a partial biographical study of our own small Canadian *roi soleil*, past Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. And rarely in books on recent Canada has there been a more disturbing study of the putting into practice in a democracy of the Bourbon maxim, “L’état, c’est moi!” It seems to trace out accurately and honestly the manoeuvres between governments and within governments that provided the context for Canadian foreign policy, and in doing so it alarmingly shows how little say Canadian citizens or even their parliament have had. For this is really a chronicle of the activities of

persons in power, whether politicians at the ministerial level or high bureaucrats, Canadian and other, and it is strikingly evident that on no occasion did the Canadian parliament play any important role in formulating our country’s foreign policy. As for the public, the ciphers to be counted every five years and then dismissed from mind, they not only had no say in what Canada did abroad, but were never told till afterwards what was happening and then not very much of it. At one time, years ago, there was a great outcry against secret diplomacy and the secret arrangements heads of government would make among themselves. But diplomacy is by definition secret, whether carried on by authoritarian or *soi-disant* democratic governments. And, as *Pirouette* clearly shows, we are kept in the dark about its activities until success or failure becomes evident; in the latter case we are likely to be the first victims of the failure.

G.W.

**** GWYNNE DYER and TINA VILJOEN, *The Defence of Canada: In the Arms of the Empire*. McClelland & Stewart, \$34.95. *The Defence of Canada* is a military history of Canada in two volumes; this, “In the Arms of the Empire 1760-1939,” is the first. Its authors, Gwynne Dyer and Tina Viljoen, are already well-known in Canada for their NFB/CBC series, “Defence of Canada,” and their book, like their television programmes, approaches its subject in a somewhat different way from that of the more conformist military histories. For their thesis is that in all its warlike adventures, costly in human lives and in other resources, Canada has never been truly defending itself, but has been acting as an appendage to other countries and furthering their policies. This makes *The Defence of Canada* a book with a thesis, which is the necessity of neutrality as a prerequisite of true independence. The case is put well, and in the process we are given what is certainly the most interesting and well-written history of our country’s military adventures. One looks forward to the second volume with sharp anticipation.

G.W.

*** BRIAN FAWCETT, *Public Eye: An Investigation into the Disappearance of the World*. Harper & Collins, \$16.95. *Public Eye* is a piece of bright post-MacLuhanism, a group of essays, commentaries and quasi-fictions aimed rather modishly at describing the disappearance of the “world as a recognizable environment in terms

of reality as well as of our conditioned perceptions." It is the kind of book, intricate but not obscure, that could do with more than one reading and doesn't lend itself to one-paragraph summary. But every intelligent reader will be able to pick a gem or at least a plum out of it. What about this, for example, for readers of Canadian Literature? "I'm not sure what most literary writers think they're doing these days, but it's evident that they don't think about it very often beyond questions of how to milk the traditional machinery of literature for maximum effect. It's also evident — by the sheer number of university professors who make their living interpreting literary works — that the primary intellectual interest and energy since the 1940's has been curatorial."

G.W.

**** JOHN RODDEN, *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'St. George' Orwell*. Oxford, \$38.50. John Rodden's *The Politics of Literary Reputation* is a notable pioneer work on literary sociology, analysing with a great deal of intricacy and perception the way in which the media, political interests, literary critics, and even personal friends combined to make a myth about George Orwell so gigantic and so involved that the real Orwell — and even more the pristine Eric Blair — have long been hard to find. Of interest to Canadian readers will be the chapter dealing with the influence wielded by George Woodcock's *The Crystal Spirit* and of his other writings on Orwell. Woodcock, we have heard, believes that Rodden has exaggerated his role.

L.T.C.

* *Towards a Just Society: The Trudeau Years*. Ed. Thomas S. Axworthy and Pierre Elliott Trudeau. McClelland & Stewart, \$29.95. Politicians rarely have the gift of irony, and even when they do they can rarely direct it at themselves, which is why their accounts of their past achievements are usually so smug, self-serving, and unconvincing. *Towards a Just Society* is no exception. Before it appeared it was much touted as Pierre Trudeau's book, but in fact it is nothing of the kind. One essay out of fifteen is written by Trudeau, and with the introductory notes inserted by him and Axworthy before each section, his contribution to the book cannot be much more than 10 per cent. The rest is written, mostly with impeccable dullness, by ministerial colleagues like Marc Lalonde, John Roberts and Jean Chrétien, by old friends like Jacques Hébert and Gérard

Pelletier, by civil servants of the time like Tom Shoyama, and by political courtiers like Axworthy himself and the ineffable Jim Coutts. The Trudeau Old Guard, in other words, with only one woman among them, though there is one person whose presence in this setting raises one's curiosity, the historian Ramsay Cook. "Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?"

G.W.

THREE RECENT illustrated books record a range of interconnections between visual representations of places and persons and the politics of intercultural relationships. *Britain Portrayed: A Regency Album 1780-1830* (British Library, £18.00 cl.), by John Barr, handsomely demonstrates ways in which picturesque conventions, in watercolours of the time, constructed careful images of social contentment and established order. Flocks graze within sight of the shepherd and the estate house; urban dwellers roam freely within territories protected by soldier and cathedral tower; steam serves progress, and the lines of perspective draw an orderly frame within which relaxed individuals pursue leisurely aesthetic pleasures. Something of the same impulse directs the design of the works assembled in J. P. Losty's *Calcutta: City of Palaces* (British Library, £12.95 pa.), but with significant differences of "home" and the exoticism of "elsewhere." Losty selects from travellers' accounts of Calcutta, primarily those from the late 18th and early 19th centuries, recording in this way a history of British-Indian contact and a history of versions of order, disorder, and cultural demarcations. Illustrations reiterate these messages. The fascination with geometrical perspective, as highlighted in Regency architectural design, not only reveals a particular aesthetic taste, for example; it also shows how size and distance, height and space, prospect and vista, can all function as visual determinants of power. John Merson's *Roads to Xanadu: East and West in the Modern World* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £17.95, cl.), based on an Australian Broadcasting Corporation series, pursues this notion over time, using both East Asian and European illustrations to trace the history of East-West cultural contact from Marco Polo to Mao. Partly the contact tells a visual narrative of economics and power: the power of paper, gunpowder, money, and belief. Partly it tells how *yin* and *yang* suggested socially useful and culturally variant versions of harmony and barbarity, how "China" turned into the fashion of "chinoiserie," how car-

tooning propagandizes the politics of race, and how "progress" was invented as a social ideal and marketed to others in order to serve interventionist ends. Merson's own desire is for harmonious global development. This, too, is an ideal born of perspective and time, and may yet find its visual counterpart.

W.N.

LAST PAGE

IT IS SOME TIME since I have read a children's book as captivating as Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (Granta/Penguin, \$19.95). Especially at a time of acute political tension, it's refreshing to be reminded that children have minds and the capacity to wonder — but while Rushdie's fable is, of course, related to current politics, it can't be bound by that interpretation, just as it can't be bound by a single sourcebook. The *1001 Nights* lurks in the background here; so does Carroll's *Alice*; so do The Beatles. The book crosses boundaries. The narrative punningly tells of a storyteller who has lost his gift because he's lost his faith in wonder, and of his son, Haroun, who masterminds the solution to this dilemma by encouraging his father back to the Sea of Stories. The sea is having its own problems; it's being polluted by a tyrant who exercises his control by denying others their inventive voices. To such problems Haroun — with his desire, his imagination, and his love — is more than equal, but not before the narrative embarks on its wonderful, funny, and emotionally engaging voyage. (For information on Rushdie's own recent political experiences, see two recent "instant" books: a popular biography based on interviews, W. J. Weatherby's *Salman Rushdie Sentenced to Death* [Carroll & Graf, n.p.], and an anthology of various people's responses to Khomeini's *fatwa* of 14 February 1989, *The Rushdie File*, ed. Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland [Syracuse UP, \$12.95].)

Children's sense of wonder perhaps provides an appropriate way to comment on several other recent works, of different kinds. It seems to me that the fascination with biography in recent years has something to do with voyeurism (the desire to know secrets) and something to do with a desire for order (which in another sense is also a desire for secret knowledge). Secret understanding also motivates much of the appeal of religious and fantastic systems. The approach of the year 2000 stirs in many people a rage of uncertainty, against

which almost any revealed "truth" will seem acceptable, even miraculous. Interventionism is thus granted indirect approval: interventionism in others' peoples' lives, in their minds, in their politics — some notion of divine approval setting out "sides," and granting to those who operate in this way the so-called "right" to separate the acceptable from the un-

Among recent biographies are Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno's *An Invisible Spectator* (Ecco, \$17.95), which finds that "the real Paul Bowles" was "an individual alone, isolated in his self-involvement, in some way drumming out the music in his own head, for his own benefit." It's an interesting metaphor, one with reverberations: is isolation an unacceptable position? or does the metaphor suggest that individuals should not benefit from their own minds? Or is the *problem*, if that's what it is, that "drumming" can never be altogether silent, nor individuals as isolated as they sometimes like to think? Peter Ackroyd, in his massive and absorbing *Dickens* (McClelland & Stewart, \$39.95), argues that an individual can represent a time, which is the premise that underlies the detail of this work. "Trifles make the sum of life," says David Copperfield. Not trifles but "origins," says Ackroyd: "what do Dickens's own novels tell us, but that a passing gesture, an image, or mood, can form a whole network of meaning. . . . It is a perception into the very nature of the world, and it is one which biography must strive to exemplify. To see Dickens day by day . . . is to turn biography into an agent of true knowledge. . . ." This is not, however, a position all biographers — or autobiographers — willingly adopt. The playwright and poet Dorothy Hewett, in *Wild Card: An Autobiography 1923-1958* (Penguin, \$19.99), is concerned to assert her reputation as sexual, linguistic, and political rebel; writing her life as poetic process, she represents herself in a series of present, tense, encounters. Peter F. Alexander's *William Plomer* (Oxford, \$20.50), by contrast, is resistantly lodged in the past but it, too, constructs a version of a life lived at tangents to "respectability." Precocity and homosexuality are recurrent concerns, perceived as forces governing life choices. Paula R. Bakscheider's dense *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Johns Hopkins, \$29.95) finds religion to be Defoe's chief motivator; in a world where sin is defined as "indifference to God," Defoe constructed *Crusoe* not (solely) as an allegory of imperial expansion, the author writes, but as a Puritan claim that religion can be learned.

Learning "truths" — discovering "the coincidence, the chance remark, the unexpected meeting" that (as Ackroyd says of Dickens'

world) “can change a human being” — can of course be a product as well as an activity; if “changes” can take place “naturally,” argue those who would sell us “solutions” to the world’s (or our own) ills, then why not arrange nature, as it were, and induce “proper” changes for a “better” life? Better for whom, one might ask. Better for those who sell the change, is one answer. Utopias and fantasies are filled with alternative designs, and as many of these are economic plans as they are virtuous dreams — but while many utopias and political fantasies probe interesting rearrangements of familiar forms of social order, most of them discover either the virtues of accepting oneself or the imperfections of the so-called Ideal World (itself a glimpse of the flawed present). Frances Bartkowski’s *Feminist Utopias* (U Nebraska P, \$21.50) examines a variety of these plans, from *Herland* onwards, including *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Euguelionne*, less for the “success” of the designs than for the “gaps” they show in conventional “normal” reality, and for their signs of social desire. (The book could have drawn more on Nan Albinski’s work on utopian intent in women’s writing, but it didn’t; the two writers do complement each other, however.)

And what of the science fiction imagination? There’s a lot of anti-academic snarkiness in the interviews (with William Gibson, Ursula Le Guin, and eight other sf authors) collected in Larry McCaffery’s *Across the Wounded Galaxies* (U Illinois P, \$29.95), and a lot of curious faith in generalizations. The interview with Larry McMurtry observes that religion and technology (technology because it represents, we are told, human beings’ drive for *efficiency* in *Capitalism*) are related to people’s fear of death and their desire for immortality. Some fantasy consequently invents technocratic futures in order to probe religion’s illusions and vice versa. But the choice between these options remains a binary one, apparently, and therefore as limited as anything Defoe could design. For more options, one can at least re-read Dickens, and find multiple possibilities again, in worlds as rich with imagination as utopians could wish: transcending boundaries by insisting on concurrences — good *as well as* bad and middling and ordinary; imaginary *as well as* known and unknown; young *as well as* aged and aging and old.

Finally, there is R. K. Narayan’s recent novel, *The World of Nagaraj* (Viking, \$26.95), which returns to the South Indian author’s favourite invented locale, Malgudi, to tell of a scholar whose commitment to privacy — he calls it his mission — is upset by his nephew,

and by the younger generation generally; forced to accommodate to the new world that is beginning to take over the orderly society he had thought he knew, he realizes that in his old age he has to become more active. He begins, therefore, to take on local politicians, to confront them with values, and (this is a fiction) the politicians shrivel before the force of goodness and worth. It’s a gentle sort of rebellion. But as Haroun reminds us about the Sea of Stories, it is a terrible world we live in if imagination and love are thought fanciful.

W.N.

contributors

Paul COMEAU lives in Coquitlam; Ellen DRENNAN in Richmond, B.C.; Ralph GUSTAFSON in North Hatley; John MARSHALL in Nanaimo; Greg SIMISON in Nepean; Cornelia HORNSTY in Dundas, Ont.; Cecelia FREY in Calgary; T. B. HIGGINSON in Scarborough; Mary Lu MACDONALD in Halifax; and Patricia MORLEY in Manotick, Ont. Barbara PELL teaches at Trinity Western; JoAnn MCCAIG at the University of Calgary; Michael HURLEY at Royal Military College; Tom WAYMAN at Okanagan College; Roger NASH at Laurentian; Anne BROWN at the University of New Brunswick; Lesley CLEMENT at Medicine Hat College; Mary Jane EDWARDS at Carleton; Carol FAIRBANKS at the University of Wisconsin; Blanche GELFANT at Dartmouth College; Tom HASTINGS at York; Coral Ann HOWELLS at the University of Reading; Henry HUBERT at Cariboo College; Heather JONES at Mount Allison; Eberhard KREUTZER at the University of Bonn; Linda LEITH at John Abbott College; Amin MALAK at Grant MacEwen Community College; Seymour MAYNE at the University of Ottawa; Cedric MAY at the University of Birmingham; Judit MOLNÁR at L. Kossuth University (Debrecen,

Hungary); Jane MOSS at Colby College; Elisabeth POTVIN at Malaspina College; Antoine SIROIS at Sherbrooke; and Robert ATTRIDGE at Kwantlen College. Dorothy SEATON, George WOODCOCK, George PAYERLE, and L. T. CORNELIUS live in Vancouver; Mona Elaine ADILMAN, Sonja A. SKARSTAD, and Boyd HOLMES in Montreal; Ricardo STERNBERG and Elizabeth PARKINSON in Toronto; Gwladys DOWNES and Ellen GODFREY in Victoria; and Fred COGSWELL and Jo-Anne ELDER in Fredericton. Basil H. JOHNSTON works at the Royal Ontario Museum. Kathleen WALL and Bruce MACDONALD teach at the University of Regina; Gary BOIRE and Viviana COMENSOLI at Wilfrid Laurier; Vivien BOSLEY, Kristjana GUNNARS, Dick HARRISON, and Paul HJARTARSON at the University of Alberta; Claude BOUYGUES, Richard CAVELL, Jean-Paul GABILLIET, Darrell LAIRD, Iain HIGGINS, Eva-Marie KRÖLLER, and John MUNRO at UBC; Pierre HÉBERT, W. J. KEITH, and Dorothy PARKER at the University of Toronto; Robert LECKER and C. D. MAZOFF at McGill. The late Mark MADOFF taught at Royal Roads in Victoria, B.C.

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