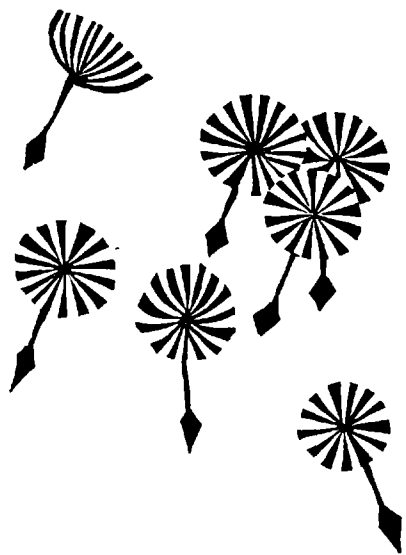


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CANADIAN LITERATURE N^o. 133

Summer, 1992



GEORGE WOODCOCK
AN 80TH BIRTHDAY
CELEBRATION

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1992

Two years ago the committee awarded the medal to Otto Friedrich for his skillful study of Glenn Gould, a book that placed an extraordinary artist against the psychology of relationships and the technology of the times. This concern to read the life of an artistic figure in wider social contexts continues with the 1991 winner. The medal goes to Ann Davis, for her finely drawn work, *Somewhere Waiting: The Life and Art of Christiane Pflug*. This portrayal, which excels in describing the private person in the public world, makes a significant and readable contribution to Canada's cultural history. Pflug, a realist painter who died by her own hand in her thirty-sixth year, is presented in a manner which provides us with a hauntingly full view of a skilled and tortured artist.

In a year which witnessed a number of sound biographies, two other volumes must be noted. Rosemary Sullivan's *By Heart: Elizabeth Smart A Life* and David Lorne Macdonald's *Poor Polidori: A Critical Biography of the Author of "The Vampyre"* are both, like the winner, acute pictures of the inner person set vividly in the external world.

C.H.

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ASSOCIATE EDITORS:

L. R. Ricou

Eva-Marie Kröller

ASSISTANT MANAGER:

Beverly Westbrook

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BALANCING THE YIN AND THE YANG

THE TURN OF THE DECADE between the 1950s and the 1960s was a time node of peculiar significance in the development of the literary world that Canadian writers and readers now inhabit. The Canada Council had been founded in 1957, marking an official recognition of the previously half-organized public support for the arts whose extent Maria Tippet has recently and surprisingly documented in *Making Culture* (1990). The first durable national literary magazine for many years had appeared in the *Tamarack Review* in 1956. It would be followed by *Prism* in 1959 and the internationally oriented *Malahat Review* in 1965, pioneers in a broad flow of literary journals operated largely by writers.

In 1959 *Canadian Literature* made its appearance, the first and for some years the sole journal devoted to considering only writers and writing in Canada. It stepped out, as I remember well, into a bleak morning, derided by old-fashioned academics who still doubted if there were really an identifiable American, let alone a Canadian or an Australian, literature within the grand old English-speaking tradition. But it came at a crucial turning point. Its deriders said that it would find neither enough books to review, nor, if it did, any critics to review them. But with what Northrop Frye called the “verbal explosion” of the 1960s, the books came, and abundantly in every genre, and the critics emerged to discuss them, sometimes poets turning to another precise art, sometimes young academics fighting free of the New Criticism’s pedantry and of thematic didacticism. Over a few years, as writers and their friends founded small and medium-sized Canadian-owned publishing houses, and new magazines appeared in places as far apart as Queen Charlotte City and Seven Persons in Alberta, a literary world was created into which magazines like *Canadian Literature* settled for a long life.

Hardly less impressive than this infrastructure’s appearing as unexpectedly as the ice palace in *Self Condemned* was the emergence of a new fauna to inhabit it. 1959 was the year when Hugh MacLennan, dean of Canadian novelists in the mid-century, published his masterpiece, *The Watch that Ends the Night*, the last of the novels with which he had for a least a decade dominated the field of fiction.

Shortly afterwards, with *Mrs Golightly and Other Stories* (1961), Ethel Wilson signalled the end of a brief but brilliant late-life career in which, with a greatly different sensibility from MacLennan's, she had complemented his work with a series of novels acutely conscious of traditional mores but also of contemporary manners.

The same years saw the appearance of books by authors who would tend to dominate the next and even succeeding decade; a surprising number were by women. One of them, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, stood in pharos-like isolation, since it was the writer's only novel; producing in addition only a few short stories and essays, she was in this respect an editor's despair, with many promises and no delivery. But though it was either condemned or ignored by most critics when it appeared, and has had no direct successors, *The Double Hook* wielded an immense influence on later Canadian fiction. Frank Davey described it justly as a "highly poetic and elliptical work" whose "discontinuous and highly imaginative style . . . reiterates the distrust of discursive language that it embodies." It showed younger Canadian writers that they could go safely beyond the romantic realism that had earlier characterized most Canadian fiction and could shed their themes for fantasies. It was a potent influence in persuading such writers to follow whims and intuitions and to variegate their work. And variegation away from a presumed norm, with each writer finding and following his own muse, is the main characteristic of a young literature moving into maturity and shedding dominating influences.

At the same time the first works of two writers who would be among the most important in the following decade, both of them women, were issued. In 1960 appeared Margaret Laurence's novel of the Africa that was lurching into independence, *This Side Jordan*, in which few readers saw the promise of the great realist novels with which she would create her own parahistorical prairie world. From *The Stone Angel* to *The Diviners*, appearing in 1974, Manawaka would give a local habitation to the Canadian imagination. And in 1961 (year of *The Stone Angel*) Margaret Atwood made her appearance with a modest and hardly noticed broadsheet of poems, *Double Persephone*.

I find much that happened at that time, and a great deal that led us to it reflected at least obliquely in the essays that make up this 133rd (who would have believed it possible in 1959?) issue of *Canadian Literature*. For apart from the poems, it is virtually all about and mostly by women writers, starting with the lively early transient — so annoying to Samuel Johnson — Frances Brooke, and including neglected figures from the generations in between, like Jessie Sime (whom the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* ignored) and Laura Goodman Salverson, who has too often been treated as merely another immigrant novelist and thrown into the outer multicultural darkness.

Not long ago, pursuing my studies of the zoophyte we call Canadian Literature,

I read a fascinating, somewhat eccentric piece of cultural history by Gaile McGregor, *The Wacousta Syndrome*. It was not entirely about women's writing; in fact, as its title suggests, the showpiece on which the book's thesis had been built up was Major John Richardson's melodramatic novel, *Wacousta*, at first glance a tale of masculine conflict in the wilderness of early post-conquest Canada.

McGregor develops what Dennis Duffy has called elsewhere "the novel's strange, perhaps unintended, sexual undertones." She shows *Wacousta* as a novel dominated by androgynous inclination in which the heroic as well as the cowardly British officers alike feel and speak and act in feminine ways and form ambivalent relationships; in this sense they are opposed to *Wacousta*'s "exaggerated masculinity." McGregor remarks: "Instead of Mother Nature versus a paternalistic establishment, therefore, *Wacousta* seems to pit a feminine garrison against a masculine gothic landscape." From this and other literary evidence, McGregor draws the conclusion that the "Canadian symbolic ego . . . whatever the sex of its various literary personae," becomes

feminine in temperament and functions: emotional, passive and vulnerable. As Otto Rank points out, women's psychology — like, it would appear, the representative Canadian's — 'can be designated as insideness, in contradiction to man's centrifugal outsideness.'

Such conclusions may seem to contradict much in early Canadian history that suggests a paternalistic society with macho values. Yet, as I pointed out while citing McGregor in *The Century That Made Us*, Canada as a collectivity has always been vulnerable and hesitant in its relations with imperial powers, and has been forced often into the subordination which characterizes the feminine role in a paternalistic order. Hence it has developed its passivity and inwardness in its relations with the outside world, and also that obsession with national unity which to other peoples, and notably to the healthily disunited Swiss, seems like a hysteria if not a symptom of collective dementia. Of course, Canada has not been lacking in great achievements in which the "masculine" virtues of daring and endurance shine forth. But these achievements have always been consummated within our own territory; we built our great railways ourselves, but we fought our great wars as the willing servants of others, whose interest we promoted and whose orders we obeyed.

Thus McGregor's argument has its quotient of truth, for the patterns of domination within Canada have a distinctly matriarchal quality, whether it is a matter of the Widow of Windsor or the Old Women of politics, the Widow Twankeyish figures like Mackenzie King and John Diefenbaker and Joe Clark who so often end up as prime ministers of Canada. The historical reasons for this are obvious, since Queen Victoria was Canada's longest-living and most loved monarch. Even today, unlike the fickle British, we still take a public holiday on her birthday, and

all over the land, outside parliament buildings and city halls, as young slim queen and buxom matron, her statues stand, green with the verdigris of generations. Such enduring reverence for the great old Queen, mother of her peoples, suggests a matriarchal frame of mind. And such, in feeling, that of Canada has been, though in fact men ruled in the Queen's name, and the women had to struggle for their rights as they have done under all the notable female rulers from Cleopatra to Indira Gandhi.

One can draw interesting parallels here, which perhaps neither side could happily accept, between the more sophisticated native societies and the social structure developing among the dominant white groups in 19th century Canada, particularly those that link with the emergence of Canadian literature as we know it.

It was the mother of mothers in the Iroquois longhouse, just as it was the mother of mothers in Windsor Castle, who chose men for politically responsible roles and even dismissed them when they failed. Just as the women of the Five Nations provided by farming, the means of subsistence for the tribe while the men campaigned or hunted, so among the pioneers in both Upper Canada and the Prairies the women looked after subsistence — garden, chickens, rearing pigs, preserving and cooking food, making cloth and clothes, candles and soap — while the men were clearing and planting the land (and so they acquired a transformative and radicalising role in rural Canadian society long before they won the vote). And just as the Iroquois mothers were guardians of a moiety of tribal traditions and culture (and have continued their role down to the 1990 Oka crisis), so from the Strickland sisters of the 1830s onwards there were always women writers who took it as their task to maintain the literary standards as well as the morals of their community.

In each generation since the Stricklands, women like Isabella Valancy Crawford and Sara Jeannette Duncan created key and almost symbolic roles for women in Canadian writing, as, in different and special ways, have other women — with causes — such as Nellie McClung and Agnes Maule Machar. Later in the 1930s and 1940s, such women as Dorothy Livesay, Anne Wilkinson and P. K. Page, figured among the pioneers of Canadian modernism. But the importance that women have more recently assumed is really a cumulative outcome of Frye's "verbal explosion" of the 1960s and 1970s, which tended to operate qualitatively as much as quantitatively, bringing women in absolutely growing numbers into the literary world more rapidly than ever before, and bringing them into comparison and complementarity with their male companions as never before.

I deliberately reject the word competition at this point, since I do not believe that among writers it exists between the genders. I may have been fortunate, but I have yet to encounter a male writer I respect who has not welcomed the great accesses of vitality and variety that have entered Canadian writing with the

appearance of so many women novelists and poets and *femmes-de-lettres*. The arguments of gender politics—prejudice and lack of opportunity—hardly seem to apply any more in this field. Yesterday I looked through publishers' catalogues, seeking books to discuss in a literary column I am about to begin, and found that four out of the five books I had chosen were by women. Women not only publish nowadays with no more difficulty than men; any writer is likely to find far more often than in the past that the editor he/she deals with at a publishing house or a magazine will be a woman. The Canadian literary world, structure and infrastructure alike, is vastly different from the cautious corporal's guard of men only I encountered on returning to Canada in 1949.

It seems to me that what is happening in the world of Canadian writing leads us forward, as a society's cultural manifestations always should. On all planes, after all, the wonder and satisfaction of existence depend on the true balancing of the yin and the yang, the feminine and masculine principles: not the androgynous unity of the Angels, those impossible beings, or of Tiresias, the perfect wise man, but the everlasting interplay of the forces of life we all carry with us. Anything tending to assure that balance, to continue that interplay, like the growing importance of women in literature, must be welcome and fostered. That is why I value the insights contained in the 133rd issue of *Canadian Literature* and am happy to have been invited to write the editorial.

Having written it, I remember a curious poem by Robert Graves, in which he muses on the problem:

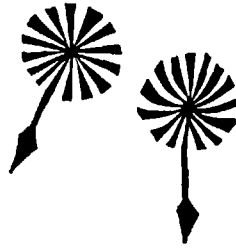
Why have such scores of lovely, gifted girls
Married impossible men . . .

and then asks himself:

Or do I always over-value women
At the expense of men?
Do I?
It might be so.

Like Graves, I find it prudent and pleasant and in some lyrical way just to over-value women at the expense of men, if that is what I do. Wise women, perhaps, reciprocate.

G.W.



The Editors and Staff of
CANADIAN LITERATURE

join with his many friends

in celebrating

GEORGE WOODCOCK'S

80th BIRTHDAY

8 May 1912



AS I PLEASE

George Woodcock

It popped out
without premeditation
in the middle
of a broadcast:
“I loved George Orwell!”
My English pudeur
winced at the echo.

You would have snorted,
dear dour George,
and then laughed,
thin-lipped, almost silent,
and wrapped it up
with some peat smoke
and strong tea
into another As I Please,
talking of Plato
and the real meaning
of platonic love
and saying
that the best thoughts,
like the best poems,
are produced by
nasty fascists —
among them,
possibly,
me.

SALUTING GEORGE WOODCOCK ON HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY

David Watmough

I HAVE KNOWN GEORGE WOODCOCK since the mid-1960s, which is to say, for the best part of thirty years. Not surprisingly our conversation, indeed our friendship, has evolved considerably since that time. In those early days there was much chat and reminiscence about the literary life of London which we had unknowingly shared fleetingly when our time in the city briefly overlapped.

The area we mutually knew is called *Fitzrovia*, that part of North London embracing such literary watering holes as The Fitzroy, The French Pub, and The Wheatsheaf. These pubs saw the patronage of the likes of the poet Louis MacNeice, an eccentric gay couple, the Scottish painters McBride and Calhoun, the Indian dancer, Ram Gopal, Tambimuttu (the editor of *Poetry London*), and the crime-writer and critic, Julian Symons — not forgetting such energetic literary luses as Nina Hamnett and Sylvia Gough.

These nostalgic and somehow always humorous discussions were wont to end with his wife, Ingeborg, upbraiding us and insisting we return to the demands of the contemporary world, of international problems and the challenges of our Canadian present!

From the vantage point of hindsight I can now say I saw George then primarily as an exciting participant in a somewhat offbeat literary demi-monde that had always fascinated me. A world I had only observed latterly and from the fringe, whereas George had been in the thick of the fray from its inception.

I was thus delighted and thrilled to encounter here in Canada the man who had experienced a literary rat-run I had found glamorous in its positive prospects yet scary in its melancholy roll-call of boozy lives and plummeted reputations. After all, it wasn't simply a matter of the George Orwells, Dylan Thomases, and Anthony Powells. There was a lot of failure to be sniffed in that linoleum world of artsy London pubs during the Blitz and through the immediate postwar period.

Here, possibly bloodied but certainly unbowed, was the fabled George Woodcock, known to me by reputation as anarchist standard-bearer, uncompromising pacifist

and intrepid editor of the doughty magazine *NOW* which I read eagerly as an undergraduate. Moreover, this legendary literary figure from the cold and damp of a blighting austerity era could shrug off those ugly vicissitudes meted out to him for being uncompromisingly at odds with a wartime authoritarian state.

It is no exaggeration to say — though I have never told him to his face — that I found him a well of hope. That hope, that uplifting sense of buoyancy, is always present when I am in his company.

The George Woodcock who has wittingly backed losers, encouraged the most equivocal of literary talents, who has laboured unstintingly for those in need in desperate areas around the planet — aware that that is often where corruption blatantly flourishes — remains a reservoir of undiluted idealism.

IF I HAVE ADMIRERD SOME of my literary acquaintances to excessive degree (I think primarily of W. H. Auden and François Mauriac) in the context of George Woodcock I am on safe ground. For here is a man who himself puts no trust in princes and who is keenly aware that all human idols have feet of clay. You hero-worship this man at your peril! My long-term observation convinces me that all excess of this kind is anathema to him.

Another false perception of my friend. I think that not a few younger Canadian literary lights see him essentially as a nice, bookish old gent, who in the balm and beauty of British Columbia, enjoys sitting back in a comfortable (if not quite *rocking*) chair and, with an adult beverage to hand, shares social pleasantries with visiting literary luminaries, while exchanging mildly malicious gossip.

Doubtless he does. Doubtless he loves British Columbia and its perennially threatened “autocephality.” Doubtless he is equally one of the most generous in encouraging youthful *littérateurs* from across the country, and doubtless he is indefatigable in his covert actions for writers in dire need.

But that is only a fragment of the picture. The historical background to which I have alluded, spills certain light on Canada’s most prolific serious author, its most savvy critic, who is also a skilled and patient editor, and — as incredible bonus this — a remarkably resonant poet.

In sum, from the pacifist and anarchist Woodcock who carried such unpopular causes manfully through the dour years of bombarded London, has evolved the professional man of letters of truly renaissance proportions from whom we all benefit today.

The genesis of the doughty warrior who gives praise for accomplishment as prodigiously as he devastatingly deflates the spurious, is further evidence that such critical attributes were honed in one of the most exigent of all writing schools —

that populated by impoverished free-lancers in the literary London of the 1940s and 1950s.

Our veteran of foreign literary wars is thus no instant-coffee phenomenon. On resuming his maple-leaf heritage and settling to the writer's task on these further Pacific shores, he started straightaway to address a dynamically different literary canvas with a pen blessedly informed by a richly substantive past.

BUT HERE I HAVE to give pause. This man of whom I write gives fresh meaning to the Latin tag *sui generis*. For this is no account of a stereotypically British immigrant dutifully exchanging his union jack for a maple leaf. To the contrary, Canada's literary elder statesman is the fiercely anti-nationalist enemy of mindless chauvinism — from whatever source.

Nor is he one of that prolific brigade of university-nurtured authors in Canada whose interests are limited by a campus boundary. No college environment could ever satiate the gargantuan Woodcock appetite for diverse knowledge and the communication of it. Certainly he numbers professors among his closest friends but rarely in session with him have I not heard some cool comment about academics. His campus pals tend to be the kind who do not take themselves with risible seriousness.

It would be equally misleading to describe our senior scribe exclusively as a journalist — even if he is no stranger to Grub Street in articles and reviews, and long ago learned to be a skilled and successful script writer for CBC radio and television.

Any description of George Woodcock which derives only from the subjects he has written about will always prove a misnomer. One may absorb the contents between the covers of his books but still find the personality of the author elusive.

For beyond this poet and playwright, biographer, historian, anthropologist, and travel writer, is the sum of these and more. A literary *presence*, who in the aggregate is perhaps best defined simply as an *Homme de Lettres* with the specific connotation that the French phrase connotes. Even in the English sense it is not too grandiose to describe him, then, as Canada's primary Man of Letters.

I do not intend to be fey in admitting to a perception of my old friend as a *badger*. However, I refer specifically to that creaturely image evoked by *The Wind in the Willows* variety of *Meles meles* rather than the smaller *Taxidea taxus* native, like Woodcock himself, to this continent.

If I emphasize the precise *genus*, it is because I speak of a man who is the opposite of slovenly in his natural history and botany. Indeed, he is as much the foe of the slipshod in this context as in any other.

I once casually referred to the 'chickweed' I harvested in the neighbourhood

for my voracious canary. George was quick to pounce. "I think you are referring to groundsel, not chickweed." He was one hundred per cent accurate. Then he invariably is with such matters.

But if Woodcock *the man of letters* is reminiscent of Kenneth Grahame's badger in his old-fashioned courtliness and sage evaluations, he can from time to time exhibit other qualities where there is no sense of *badgerdom* at all!

When aroused or enraged by anything sham or scurrilous, it is the ferocious stoats and weasels of Kenneth Grahame's "wild wood" that spring to mind!

There is yet another mammal he summons up for me — one lone representative of which I discovered far from its natural habitat. A few miles from the Mexican border there lives in the happily feral environment of the San Diego zoo, a Scottish wildcat. This native of the Highlands is a rare animal with a reputation for being wholly untamable. A truly untrammelled creature, it springs to mind whenever I read the particular Woodcock who inveighs against some unfair and boorish adversary who runs afoul of our gentle author's skills in ferocity.

There was the case of the unsuspecting anthropologists of the University of Victoria whose professional snobbery animated an attack upon a brash interloper who had the temerity to publish his opinions about the Indians of the westcoast.

There was the importunate Vancouverite who cast a slur at George's professional integrity by suggesting he had colluded with a reviewer in Central Canada. (I myself wrote in complaint of that particular offensive passage to the magazine in question, but needn't have bothered.)

Our dexterous dualist took good care of all that and the academic snobs and the local journalist were all duly despatched by the "Scottish wildcat" who once more "found the jugular" with his usual precision.

I tingle with pleasure whenever I observe the Woodcock epistolary weapons unleashed with the cleansing force of *Drano* on the cant that discolours many of the literary debates appearing in our few magazines and even fewer correspondence columns.

SO MUCH FOR THE ADVERSARIAL figure. I must now address the paradox of someone who is truly a pacific and reconciling figure, too. One of the extraordinary features of the *Woodcockian* enterprise is its absolute refusal to bow supinely to fashion and thus embrace either the literary chic or the necessarily politically correct.

I have referred to the *British* Woodcock, the one extant before a return to a native land — when he stuck to his lonely anarchist and pacifist guns, when even the radical Left supported an Erastian and militaristic alliance of the western democratic states against the totalitarian ones of continental Europe. So alliances

have changed, as have populist opinions about the nature of war — but to the true individualist such as Woodcock the *VOX POPULI* is as dangerously illusory now as it was then.

Only I think today that our protagonist would be attacked more for his positions on literary matters than necessarily for his political and social ones. So that his poetry would be more likely dismissed as unfashionable than his trenchant warnings against the excesses of centralist federalism or his loving affirmation of Helvetian democratic patterns.

His metrical poems are surely regarded as heretical when placed under the scrutiny of the North American Poetry Inquisition with its iron clad criteria of poetic orthodoxy. But to me they carry the perfume of rebellion and Orwellian freedom like few others I read. In fact I could scarcely have undertaken this testimony of friendship and appreciation were it not for the opportunity to refer to his poem “Ballad for W. H. Auden,” which is beginning to be progressively anthologized across this country.

But for the most astute if brief commentary on these particular matters I refer the reader to Al Purdy’s Introduction to Woodcock’s *Notes on Visitations: Poems 1936-1975*. Purdy’s are lovely words.

When I began this tribute I was very aware that I could but hint at the sheer diversity of this most literary yet reticent of men. So I shall merely nod towards the letter-writer, the pamphleteer, playwright, and visual arts authority and concentrate on a few more personal references about a very private person wedded, incidentally — but I think significantly — to a very private woman.

Purdy, in that introduction, says of his friend: “He writes books like other people breathe . . .”

True. Yet it is not the *quantity* of what he has written, (although that is what invariably preoccupies the media) but the *depths* he is able to vouchsafe the multiplicity of his interests. The pace of the prose, however much of it there is, never ceases to be measured and considered.

He occasionally smiles with his words but he is never frivolous. I think George Woodcock constitutionally incapable of superficiality. Yet his eyes twinkle behind those spectacles when, with a grin, he focuses a corrosive sense of humour on some hapless charlatan or phony guru.

There have been times when I have taken issue with his political conclusions, but never for one moment with the probity with which he has arrived at them. I don’t think George Woodcock uses polling booths, but if he did it’s doubtful we would ever enter the same one. Yet in spite of my obsession with universal suffrage, I invariably feel perilously close to the motivation that keeps him resolutely away from the hustings.

In comparable vein, we might disagree about many aspects of Christianity yet I am always left with the impression when such subjects as life and death surface

between us that religion, as poetically expressed in the felicitous liturgical language of historic Anglicanism, seeps in his bones even if it doesn't take pride of place in his head.

LET ME CONCLUDE WITH a Woodcock role that he might even deny but of which I have long been a beneficiary. I refer to his persuasive power as a conversationalist. Or should I say argumentalist? I have never attended a lecture by him but I count him my most significant teacher of cosmic history. He has succeeded in arousing my concerns about our fragile and threatened planet when the romantic rhetoric of anthropomorphic, zoologically ignorant, environmentalists has left me wholly unmoved.

This tenacious man of well-honed convictions has managed to push my prejudices apart and allow the light of other places and communities — so remote from the bourgeois realm I inhabit — to penetrate my Celtic obduracy. In sum, he has lent me his eyes and ears and made me a gift of his history. Can one man give more to another?

IMPOSSIBLE THINGS BEFORE BREAKFAST

Greg J. Paulhus

Nothing rhymes with orange
so how could you write a
poem about an orange? You couldn't
so I'm not even going to try.
Why would anyone bother
doing something that can't be done?
Something like writing a poem
about an orange; it's impossible.
Why would you do something impossible,
especially before a decent breakfast.
So I'll write about a peach,
that is easily within my reach.

SILENCE IN EMPTINESS

George Woodcock

On The Red Room
by Peter Ilsted, 1915

One rose in a vase
on one table.
We face
a closed door
and light pours
through a window
open on the left.
The curtain blows,
a clear veil.
On a chair a woman
with her back to us
sews.

There is nothing else
in this picture
by a shy, unfamed,
precise Scandinavian.

Its emptiness
is silence
distilled into glory.

GEORGE AND INGE AND DORIS AND ME

*Jack Shadbolt**

HOW IT CAME ABOUT that the Woodcocks and ourselves became immediate friends when we first met in 1953 has been described by George in the second part of his autobiography, *Beyond the Blue Mountains*; how they came to live in the little cabin in the woods next to our evolving house on Capital Hill; how they lived with us for a period of time when George was refused re-entry into the United States because of his stance as a philosophical anarchist; and how we found we shared so many common interests. It didn't take long during those early periods of close contacts when the friendship was forged to find out many fundamental things about George: his quiet brilliance and impressive erudition; his extraordinary ranging curiosity; his strong scholarly inclination but also his rootedness in physical contact with the world; his capacity to observe and to analyze resulting in a mind that is a bottomless well of stored information while his memory is a dipper ready to bring to the surface without hesitation whatever facts might be required. In those early days we heard and saw him at his work, the steady and apparently untroubled sound of his typewriter having to do, we assumed — apart from his finely honed skill with words — with that reliable well-stocked memory and his quiet strength and easy temperament, qualities which made him so comfortable to be around. We sensed at once the moral firmness which underlies all his words and actions and which make him in his full maturity a person of great ethical stature.

I suppose the bond which began and happily continued between George and me has been primarily based on our rooted belief in the efficacy of the creative life, George as a writer and myself as a painter, each interested in the commonality of the creative process as well as in the differences between our respective disciplines. There has always been so much to learn. But the equations of friendship are numerous and beyond analysis. The fabric of friendship grows not only out of philosophic accord and respect but also out of experiences shared on the simplest and most mundane of levels. And so it is that inevitably in speaking of George, I must also speak of Inge and Doris because it is in the context of this foursome that

* With an assist from Doris.

the fabric of friendship has developed the enduring texture that it has acquired. And increasingly as the years have rolled along that context has consisted of evenings together, dinner in their house or ours, over lingering drinks (martinis, scotch and wine) and then the delicious meals Inge or Doris had prepared, all the while talking about the things that mattered in our lives, serious or frivolous, consequential or prosaic.

AMONG THE INTERESTS shared, travel has always loomed large, the idea not only of feeding one's curiosity about the look and feel of other parts of the world but of challenging oneself with the shock of cultures other than that in which one has been locked. The Woodcocks — with the added motivation and direction provided by their mutual humanitarian concerns and by George's writing interests — have been infinitely more venturesome and seasoned travellers than we. We shared one expedition into the B.C. interior in the 1950s but we have never been able to bring off the frequently projected trip to Europe with them to explore mutual old haunts and to be introduced to some of their favourite places. Both our houses reflect the directions in which our travels have taken us in the collection of objects of ethnic art and craft which crowd them — African carvings, New Guinean, Tibetan or East Indian masks, fabrics, drums and all the rest. Many of them are the result of our gift exchanges.

It is in the realm of travel that George's keenness of perception is so apparent: his knowledge of history, his grasp of political and social situations, his openness to sight, sound, taste — he misses nothing and nothing is irrelevant as he enters the new experience, and his later recall is total. And so when they are home once again we become the greedy consumers of their adventures, the accounts of which have enormously informed and stimulated our own more limited travel. Many conversations about their travels throughout India finally led us to a three-month trip to the near east on our own. They had told us of the richness of the Indian experience we could anticipate but had also warned us of the cultural shock we might well undergo. Innocents that we were, during our first few hours in New Delhi, we lost five hundred dollars to a pick-pocket and had our first shattering encounters with beggars. Considerably depressed that evening in the seclusion of our hotel we turned for help to the notes of their advice which we had jotted down in Vancouver prior to our departure; there we encountered the words of — (I think it was Inge) — "If desperate, go to Singapore!"; it was just what was needed to snap us out of our mood of paralysis and into the rewarding experience of the trip ahead. Those words, first uttered in an atmosphere of friendship and the tone of amused and good-natured high irony we had come to know so well, have remained familiar to us, often returning to cheer us on in a moment of low spirits.

THEN THERE IS the Woodcock's love of animals. It has nothing to do with the common sentimental relation to pets, but is rather a passion for the whole range of living creatures who represent that ever fascinating and mysterious link between our human selves and the larger natural world. For them the feeling is deep and respectful, expressing itself in active concern for the abuse and suffering of domestic or other animals or, closer to home, in the regular feeding on their Kerrisdale back porch of a family of territorially displaced racoons. There is as well, of course, the personal satisfaction of sharing a household with a member of the feline species and in the process being rewarded with a glimpse into another creature's mode of being. And so it is that cats (theirs and ours) have always been a not unimportant point of focus in our friendship. We have been on intimate terms with all their cats as have they with ours, for many years each of us looking after this or that pet when either of us was away from home — an expression of mutual trust that all cat devotees will understand. After having survived several generations of cats, our respective households decided that the next pet would probably outlive us and that our fascination with cats should take a more abstract form. But now there is Tiger, a needy stray who found his way without too much trouble into the Woodcocks' hearts and happy home. More often than not these days when we come to visit, it is he who starts off the conversation with his particular form of small talk, and he returns from time to time during the course of the evening when he feels the conversation is getting too philosophical.

ESPECIALLY IN THE springtime there is the renewed delight in the world of plants and gardens. George's botanical knowledge is prodigious and minute and he is especially attracted to native flowers, those he finds in this province or that he remembers from England or other countries. Our own garden includes a 'bosky bit' where offspring of his special white violets and other woodland treasures find a home.

Whether the evening is an ordinary get-together, or a birthday celebration, or the New Year's Eve which seems to have become a yearly ritual, we soon get down to other areas of conversation. We are all interested in art and artists, we are all respectful of the creative spirit and of the craft that lies behind its products. George has always just finished a book and has one or more on the way, themselves enough to engage us in a year of talk. As an artist who spends most of his thinking time painting, I cannot begin to tap the resources of George's mind, except possibly in my own territory of art where I know enough to ask provocative questions. Like George an omniverous reader, Inge is apt to be probing some fascinating theory concerning human behaviour or the history of the universe — that is in the time

she permits herself to take off from whatever is her latest project for helping needy people in some part of the world, projects which George equally shares and into which their bottomless compassion has led them. And so ideas flow.

Common interests there are, yes, but it is more likely some underlying agreement as to what things are important — the simple life, the life of the imagination, a connection with the natural world, human dignity (attitudes largely unarticulated but tested and proven over the years) — that has kept our friendship alive and enabled us to be simply humanly at ease when we are with each other. We sip, talk, laugh, recall anecdotes, admire, gossip, discuss our advancing years and the ironies of life with a warm-hearted affection that defies time and binds us closer. We think our own lives are fairly busy but theirs is one of constant engagement, for their humanitarian consciences and George's writing activities have made for them a circle of friends, personal and professional, that literally encircles the globe. And so there is a reasonable interval between our meetings. Underneath friendships one can usually detect complementary needs. Perhaps we provide an element of stability in the Woodcocks' restlessly searching lives. Our pattern is solid. We live where and as we have lived for nearly forty-five years and it looks as though we shall continue to do so. Perhaps we are small fixed stars in their intellectual galaxy. We are here where they have made their home, part of the home base. Doris and I could not imagine life without the sustenance and joy we receive in being part of their more intimate lives.



THREE POEMS

Barry Dempster

from *Letters from a Long Illness with the
World, the D. H. Lawrence Poems*

EASTWOOD 1906

... much thought to the scheme of writing: a million words honey-combed in my brain, each for its own perfected purpose, a clear glass bell. Have you ever sat and listened to someone drone on predictably when suddenly they utter a pearl? By God, my ear drums echo and my toes curl. A phrase like "I'm about as beat as the backside of a rug" or "The cat hedge-hopped up to the butter dish." The blandest face blazes with imagination: a brain like no other, a private compartment on a flying train. There's no reason to be dusty-tongued with a rusty voicebox squeezing out squeaks. The world's aloft with all sorts of undiscovered similes and metaphors. Writing is an apple snapping its branch, a wave exploding, the swerve of a kiss ...

OMENS . . . CORNWALL 1916

Waves climb the bony cliffs
a spray of silver-serpent light
dazzling on the meadow grass.
The ghost of a Cornwall woman
wears a bonnet of mist
her china feet floating
inches above the endless mud
the dew drops clinging to
straw-coloured gorse, like frost.

Leaping over brambles
high-stepping grasps of ivy vines
I feel my English body
peel, my bones hollowing
into spokes or feathers. Only
the essence of a man can walk
on air; the rest of him
quickly drops and puddles.

Days pass where I hide
inside this stony cottage
shedding my skin on a rough
white page. A war is clutching
Europe, squeezing cities flat.
England trembles, damp and
ornery, searching the skies for
big black butterflies, pacing
the meadows bare. With poison pen
I end the lives of cowering
men, raising the blackberry
bushes to a wall of spikes.
There are soldiers tied tight
in the ivy, Germans and English alike.

I wait for the night when
a blessed bomb might split the shore
in two, when our little cottage
will float to sea complete with
garden and books. A new land then
an ideal ring of sparkling
waves, of roses tinged
with salt. Frieda and I will be
free of nationality
castaways like Adam and Eve.
To be an island is to be
complete, the whole world
recreated in a man.

Toss the gossips from their slick cliffs
let them cut the throats of sharks.
A critic or two bouncing on
a wave, nothing more than foam,
Let us roast the scavengers
and feed them to exotic birds.

For now though, all of England
is sharp and misshapen
a broken fist. Only the waves
are perky. Frieda and I dream
beyond accusations and black-outs
to a cracking time and place.
A severed hand slipping
from around our swollen necks.

I am an omen of life.
Look closely, I am an island
on the Cornish coast, a ghost
of what once was solid land.

BOOKS ARE

Books do not breathe, or
share your soup, stroke your
arms, inhale your rare perfumes.
Books do not spit, love or scheme
for more. Books do not live
parallel lives. Books do not
pray or hold mirrors unto God.
Books do not die with regrets.

What books do is talk
endlessly. Not to you or
the sycamores or the china
cups, but to no avail at all.
Talk, more talk. Books have
something to say and are bound
to say it. Books equal
their words exactly.

Since my last letter I have
been a book or several books
together. I do not listen
or spit. I talk to thin air.

Books are and emphasize.
Nothing, they chant and storm
will ever stay the same. The
wind on everything, pages
turned, pages torn.

TRACING THE TRAVESTY

Constructing the Female Subject in Susan Swan's "The Biggest Modern Woman of the World"

Teresa Heffernan

FOR THE FEMINIST WRITER, aspects of postmodernism, including the dissolution of the subject, the formulation of identity as a linguistic construct, and the fragmentation of cohesive narratives, are problematic — she has no coherent sense of self to dissolve, no present to make absent, no history to write herself out of, no story to fragment, and although she would acknowledge that realities and identities are experienced through representation, she is also concerned with physicality, particularly, the un/silencing of the female body.

In *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*, Patricia Waugh writes of the point of divergence between feminism and postmodernism:

At the moment when postmodernism is forging its identity through articulating the exhaustion of the existential belief in self-presence and self-fulfilment and through the dispersal of the universal subject of liberalism, feminism (ostensibly, at any rate) is assembling its cultural identity in what appears to be the opposite direction. . . . As male writers lament its [the character/subject's] demise, women writers have not yet experienced that subjectivity which will give them a sense of personal autonomy, continuous identity, a history and agency in the world.¹

Susan Swan, as a feminist writing a postmodern work, foregrounds this point of contention in her biographical, genealogical, historical, and fictional text *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*. She plays with the peculiar ironies that emerge from the tensions between a particularly masculine postmodernist obsession with unforging an identity (that the male writer was busy forging from the Romantic through to the Modernist period) and the feminist concern with recovering and constructing female subjects. Her work generates questions about the relationship between the author and her subject, about the production of history, about the importance of private versus public documentation, about the function of intertextuality, and about the relationship between narratives and reality.

In an essay entitled, "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History," Michel Foucault argues that it is the genealogist's task to "disturb what was previously considered

immobile,” “to fragment what was thought unified,” to show “the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself.”² However, his approach presupposes that the genealogist is confronting a history that is written, cohesive, and continuous, a presumption which poses a dilemma if the genealogist is female. Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* attempts to write a history of women and fiction, and instead must write a history which foregrounds the silence of women: “For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups are washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it.”³ Unlike Foucault, Woolf and Swan have no sustaining female narrative that they can call into question.

When Swan writes in the preface of her novel that the Nova Scotia giantess is “curiously” not as well known as her male friend Angus, and Anna Swan has been billed as “the biggest modern woman of the world,” the irony is readily apparent — even the biggest modern woman of the world is absent from history’s master narrative. Swan must write Anna into history and so, ostensibly, she employs the conventions that have governed the traditional recording of history — the narrative is continuous, it locates an origin, it is concerned with connections (not fissures), and it involves a chronology of facts borrowed from the real Anna Swan’s life (date and place of birth, employment, marriage).

Similarly, Susan Swan problematizes the masculine postmodernist approach to the subject in literature. Robert Kroetsch’s translation of a Foucauldian sense of history into literary terms encourages him to employ an archaeological model in his poetry and theory; he supplies the reader with artifacts and puts the reader in the position of choosing the story: “you have simply unearthed something and the reader has the task of fitting this into whatever scheme he wants to fit it into . . . you’re giving him that task you’re not going to do that for him you’re not going to rule out one (reading) against another.”⁴ Kroetsch assumes that the reader has a number, perhaps an infinite number, of stories to draw upon; but as Swan suggests in her juxtaposition of references to literature’s male giants (Gulliver, Bunyan, Goliath, the Cyclops, Gargantua, Pantagruel) with the absence of references to Anna’s female counterparts, the reader is dependent on stories to make new stories, and stories of female giants do not immediately leap to mind. As Woolf establishes in *A Room of One's Own*, stories about women often remain obscure and unrecorded. There is no context for a female giant; hence, Swan must rely on the conventions of the realistic novel (even as she parodies them) to develop her character: she begins with the birth of Anna, records, chronologically, her adventures, and concludes with her death.

Thus, Swan writes Anna’s large female frame with its seventeen inch vaginal tract into history and literature and in capital letters. Gayatri Spivak in her preface to *Of Grammatology* comments on Derrida’s practice of writing “sous rature” or “under erasure” or the practice of crossing out words and then printing the crossed

out word — a practice which serves to denaturalize language and which forces us to confront our assumptions about presence.⁵ Parodying this practice, Swan writes about her character in capitals, like Derrida to defamiliarize language, but, unlike Derrida, to emphasize the presence of her GIANTESS.

But even as Susan Swan makes use of literary and historical traditions to write Anna Swan into our consciousness, the text is self-conscious about the process. At the opening of *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, the preverbal infant Anna recounts her experiences (complete with literary, social, and cultural references) in the present tense:

My mouth is sucking a table leg as if it's a wooden nipple and my eyes are glued to the floor, mesmerized by the sight of my parents' feet. My mother's foot, a dainty Queen Mab appendage rolls back and forth, grinding clean and sharp, a tarnished needle on a sandy board. My father, Oberon, rests his backwoods clodhoppers, sole to sole, next to those of his queen.⁶

As Linda Hutcheon points out in *The Canadian Postmodern*, Swan, like Fielding in *Shamela*, parodies Richardson's *Pamela*.⁷ Swan mimics Richardson's faith in the transparency of language, and mocks Richardson's attempt to convince his audience of the sincerity of Pamela through the use of the diary. Like Pamela, Anna records her seduction in a diary at the very moment of the seduction. Sitting at her desk, Anna writes: "In the glow of the wall candle, I can see Martin's face moving closer to mine" (Swan 208). The effect of these scenes, unlike the intended effect in *Pamela*, is to highlight the process of writing/recording events and underscore the inevitable gap between the act and the representation of the act.

Furthermore, at the opening of her work, Swan presents three spiels (Spiel is defined by Webster's as: "a speech or story, usually delivered volubly and with the intent to persuade" / in German spielen is to play and spiel is a game)⁸ or three possible interpretations of Anna's life to suggest further that the author of each spiel is necessarily biased in her/his choice and ordering of events. The presentation of spieling as a commodity — "No performer should expend energy for groups that offer neither pay nor applause" (Swan 50) — at once signals a dismissal of the modernist notion of "high art" as the "transcendent" work of a disinterested creator and acknowledges the inescapable motive of "self-interest" in any exchange/dialogue/creation. Anna's art (and by way of implication Swan's novel) is not "true" or "pure" but contaminated by interest.

IN A LETTER TO the editor of *Maclean's*, an irate relative of Anna Swan writes: "My purpose in attending [Susan Swan's reading] was to express the regret and disappointment I felt, both as a direct descendent of Anna Swan and as a Nova Scotian, that the author felt that the true story of the giantess's

life was not worthy of writing and thus making many more people aware of this part of our Nova Scotian heritage.”⁹ However, in keeping with the tenets of post-modernism, Swan’s novel contests this notion of Anna’s “true” story. Even as Swan writes about her huge female subject in a chronological narrative, the possibility of a continuous, coherent, autonomous agent or a consistent, objective, historical account recedes as the author acknowledges the artifice and the inevitable biases inherent in generating narratives. Nevertheless, Swan is sensitive to the potential conflict between her acknowledged desire to recover the history of women and tell stories about women (or freaks or Nova Scotians) and her awareness of the impossibility of recovering a true history or a definitive story. In *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, Swan considers this tension in light of the process by which women and men represent their histories and how the stories of women, Canadians, freaks, have been/are written out of history by “normals.”

History, Foucault asserts, is a record of the transfer of power, of the seizure of a system of rules, and of “the endlessly repeated play of dominations.”¹⁰ However, history’s “others” have never played, nor, as Anna Swan suggests, are they necessarily interested in participating in this drama of dominations. She writes to her mother that in contrast to Americans, Canadians: “possess no fantasies of conquest and domination. Indeed, to be from the Canadas is to feel as women feel — cut off from the base of power” (Swan 274). Ambivalence about power and domination provoke Anna to employ innovative tactics in her struggle to be heard. Anna, instead of seizing the system of rules and entering into the play of dominations as a means of achieving volume for her female Canadian voice, parodies the game. Hence in Anna’s spiel on “Yankee ignorance” she describes a cough syrup which causes the user to “exhibit an agreeable tendency to avoid confrontation and seek consensus instead” (Swan 69) — a formula which threatens the very foundations of American ideology and causes the aggressive, entrepreneurial Barnum to ask nervously (worried about having to ingest the “cure”) “Are Canadians infectious?” To which Anna responds: “The cold mummifies agents of disease, rendering the majority of people in Canada harmless” (Swan 69). Of course, Anna’s ironical commentary is also self-directed, for she has travelled to New York (in keeping with the artistic drain from Canada to the United States) precisely to seek the fame and fortune which she cannot attain amid the “harmless” Canadians. Anna’s employment of irony disrupts the dominant/other dichotomy. In this exchange with Barnum, she provokes and challenges the American while acknowledging her own frailties. This impure intersection between two oppositional ideologies allows for the possibility of a critical tolerance or a negotiated space instead of alienation of or domination over what is perceived or constructed as “other.”

Like Anna, Swan employs this multi-edged irony as a means of avoiding a drama of dominations (female versus male, Canadian versus American) while

simultaneously creating room for the Canadian giantess in history and literature (room which patriarchal representations deny). The concept of history as an event experienced via selective representation and interpretation in the present supported in *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* challenges the notion of history as a series of tangible facts fixed in a past and fully accessible. While the intertextual play in the novel allows for the inevitable and inescapable influence of the dominantly masculine representations of the past, Anna's ironic commentary calls into question the "universality" or "centrality" of this construction of "humanity"; the referencing of a text attests to its influence and power, while irony exposes and contests the logic of that influence and power. Linda Hutcheon writes:

Postmodernism nevertheless tries to understand present culture as the product of previous codings and representations. The representation of history becomes the history of representation too. Postmodern art acknowledges and accepts the challenge of tradition, however ironically: the history of representation cannot be escaped, but it can be both exploited and commented upon critically, often by means of parody.¹¹

ANNA, AS A CHILD, is trapped behind a wall of yellow ice created by her father and his friend, who are busy inscribing their identities onto the snow. Anna's father amuses himself by writing his initials with his "daily waterings" — "a humble way to impress himself on the land" (Swan 14). The act of inscribing the landscape as a metaphor for identity has a long literary tradition in Canada. Leonard Cohen's *The Favourite Game* follows a young male artist who is obsessed with "leaving his mark" in poems, on women, and on the snow (the favourite game involves making snow angels): "I want to touch people like a magician, to change them or hurt them, leave my brand, make them beautiful. I want to be the hypnotist who takes no chances of falling asleep himself. I want to kiss with one eye open."¹² Breavman aspires to control the "other" in order to create and protect his identity as an autonomous agent and a disinterested artist; he wants to affect women and literature without acknowledging his own reflection in the creation. As a child, Anna is both fascinated and separated, by the wall of yellow ice, from this masculine ritual of inscription. This early scene reflects one of the preoccupations of Swan's novel — an interest in feminine and masculine renditions of the self and the history of representations of the subject.

Like Breavman, Captain Bates is concerned with forging an identity. In his treatise, the author forecasts the betterment of the "American" race in a giant's version of "Darwin's *Origins of Species*," entitled "Species Development, or a Tract Towards Continual Anatomical Wonders." The treatise is necessarily exclusive in its limited equation of greatness with size, and the logic of Bates' argument

closely resembles racial, class, or gender based theories which promote the superiority of a given segment of society but which evade the questions: how is great or superior defined and who validates these definitions? In response to Martin's thesis Anna writes: "I have read it over and over, trying to find some points of his thesis I can admire. Unfortunately, it is a long-winded work, flawed by his failure to recognize his subjective view behind his scientific idealism. I cannot hear such tracts without hearing the voice of male pride and, in his case, it is obvious he glorifies size to make up for his excessive height" (Swan 163). Not only is Martin's thesis called into question by Anna's critique but so too is the entire tradition of scientific ("objective," "disinterested") documentation which has been used/abused in attempts to illustrate "empirically" a hierarchy of value.

Martin also exploits another public and powerful venue in his search for a form of documentation that will lend authority to his posture as the potent protector — the media. When Bates starts working for the carnival newspaper he writes a version of Anna's nocturnal escapades in which he, "the manly Captain," comes to the aid of his "wife and partner," a version which of course is very different from the adulterous story Anna and Apollo are making in the Monster Music Car.

Historical records, scientific documents, and news articles profess to be true, unbiased, and objective accounts of events and Bates relies on this tradition to legitimize his narrative and support the inversion of the hierarchy of normal-freak to freak-normal. Despite the Captain's own experience of marginalization within the normal-freak hierarchy, he continues to value the story of power and to support a system that is founded on a policy of exclusion. Thus in order to establish himself as the dominant figure, he must define himself against the inferior other — he continues to wear his Confederate uniform in the north despite the fact that the Civil War ends eight years prior to the couple's return to the States; he engages in a continuous stream of contests and fights in his attempts to assert his physical superiority, and his obsession with his role of husband leads him to cast Anna into the role of the maternal, submissive female.

Furthermore, as other males in the novel concern themselves with forging an identity, Anna is cast as a marketable commodity in Apollo and Barnum's story, as the fecund, fertile female by her father, as a domestic mate by Angus, as an interesting scientific specimen by the numerous Victorian doctors, and as a Cinderella figure who married for love in the fairy tale narrated by the curator at the Sunrise Trail Museum in Tatamagouche. Although Anna's participation and complicity in these various roles cannot be denied, her simultaneous resistance to them is not given a voice in the masculine scenarios. For example, after the freaks are forced to perform a version of *Macbeth*, one protests: "It is a mistake to cast us in dramas that were not made for special people like ourselves" (Swan 99). As an alternative to the Shakespearean drama, Anna proposes "Giant Etiquette" which

articulates a giant's experience to normals. Anna's protest both challenges the universal relevance of Shakespeare (and, by implication, the canon of literature) and gives voice to a silenced and marginalized sector; however, Barnum dismisses Anna's etiquette claiming that Anna's "appeal" (market value) lies in her size, and hence, silences her resistance to the process of objectification and commodification that he, as a capitalist, inflicts on his performers. As Anna travels the world searching for a place, she is unable and sometimes unwilling to perform the absolute and limited dramas assigned to her in the course of the masculine narratives: she does not marry for love, she is not fertile, and she resists being sold as a commodity.¹³ On her death bed, she concludes: "I was born to be measured and I do not fit in anywhere" (Swan 332).

The silencing and control of female identity is analogous to the repression of the female body in the Victorian aesthetic of the demure, petite, asexual maiden. The image of the physically and mentally contained and restrained female who is eclipsed by a vocal and dominant male is realized in the marriage ceremony of Anna and Martin during which Anna literally loses her voice. Patricia Waugh writes: "Subjectivity, historically constructed and expressed through the phenomenological equation self/other, necessarily rests masculine 'selfhood' upon feminine 'otherness.' The subjective centre of socially dominant discourses (from Descartes's philosophical, rational 'I' to Lacan's psychoanalytic phallic/symbol) in terms of power, agency, autonomy has been a universal subject which has established its identity through the invisible marginalization or exclusion of what it has also defined as 'femininity (whether this is the non-rational, the body, the emotions, or the presymbolic).'"¹⁴ The limitation and control of Anna's identity through the representation of her as "other" in the masculine narratives is parodied in the third spiel in which Anna reduces the men in her life to their hand size, which she implies is indicative of their sexual potency, that is, of what "makes a man a man."

BUT ULTIMATELY SWAN must confront the problematic tradition of the subject in her portrayal of Anna. Martin's attempt to invert the normal-freak opposition to freak-normal provides ample reason for Swan to avoid replacing the male centre with a female centre. Anna does become a character, a subject, a presence, but her identity necessarily emerges in relation to a fluctuating social, historical, and cultural environment both within and outside the text; she is neither static nor fully autonomous but a fluid character who both participates in and is incorporated into the inconsistent and heterogeneous narratives constructed by herself, her husband, family, friends, lover, enemies, acquaintances, the author, and the reader. The structure of Swan's novel also challenges the fixed

autonomous identities that Anna's male counterparts attempt to establish via their official documentation — the Route Book of Judge, Martin's scientific treatise, the doctor's medical records. The masculine texts and, by implication, the tradition of authority and objectivity, are placed in a context which both allows for the inevitable connection between representations of the world and self interest and admits multiple and fluctuating perspectives that necessarily de-stabilize the notion of "fixed" identity.¹⁵ Barbara Herrnstein Smith argues in *Contingencies of Value* that the various boundaries that have been used to delimit the self or humanity (from the sense of man as divinely free to the sense of man as driven by his libidinal impulses) are necessarily incomplete, subject to change, and contingent:

What I am suggesting here, rather, is that all such terms and accounts (homo economicus, homo ludens, man as rational creature, cultural creature, biological creature, and so forth) offer to conceptualize is something that might just as well be thought of as our irreducible scrappiness. . . . It is out of these scrappy (heterogeneous) elements and the local resolutions and provisional stabilities yielded by their continuous scrappy (more or less conflictual) interactions that we (and, from various perspectives, others) construct our various versions of our "selves" and, as necessary, explain or justify our actions, goals, and beliefs.¹⁶

In keeping with Smith's philosophy concerning the irreducibility of the subject, Swan does not in the end mark out a definitive place for Anna but instead subverts the notion of place — in the course of the novel everyone joins Anna in her displacement.

Again, Swan employs intertextuality as a means of acknowledging the inevitable influence of historical and literary representations of the subject on her own work and then uses parody as a method of offering a critique of the process by which these representations are constructed. Textual references for Anna's autobiography include eighteenth-century novels that employ the epistolary form, notably, Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela*. Anna, like those eighteenth-century heroines, writes out her story in diaries and letters. The effect of the epistolary form is both to contextualize Anna's experiences and to allow for the acknowledgement of her private voice in her public performance. The letter challenges the assumed opposition between public (official/objective) and private (personal/subjective) documentation and allows for the politics of the individual. In a way that the media, historical, or scientific documents do not allow, the letter invites a dialogue and implies multiple perspectives. Although Richardson appears to privilege this tradition of women and letters in his novels, he resists the values of openness and fluidity implicit in this mode of communication. The increasing faith in science and empiricism in the eighteenth century encourages Richardson to validate the subjective, private voices of his heroines in terms of a fixed referent or an "objective" reality. Richardson, in order to fix the identities of his female heroines, con-

cludes his novels with the translation of *Clarissa* and *Pamela* into “tangible” public emblems — the inscription on *Clarissa*’s tombstone locates her in terms of symbols of eternal virtue (her name is circled by a crowned serpent with a tale in its mouth and accompanied by the images of a winged hour-glass and the head of a white lily snapped off);¹⁷ and, *Pamela*, in the course of a parable, takes on the role of *Prudentia* (“‘PRUDENTIA is YOU,’” exclaims her daughter).¹⁸ Hence, Richardson attempts to make his heroines “veritable” by writing them into a text that is ostensibly fixed and autonomous. Terry Eagleton argues that Richardson, finally, does not privilege “feminine” (socially constructed) values; evidenced in his earlier novels and confirmed in his last novel, *Sir Charles Grandison*, these values are “recuperated by patriarchy and centered on a man.”¹⁹

Swan parodies Richardson’s attempts to legitimize and complete his fluid and relative heroines by molding them into stable, public symbols. Thus, Anna at the conclusion of the novel is translated, ironically, into a symbol of righteousness. The tombstone that is erected bears an inscription from Psalm 17, verse 15: “I will behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Swan 340). In the course of the novel, a great deal of the Canadian giantess’ grief and torment has arisen precisely from the pressure of righteousness — the pressure to conform to what is considered “right” or “normal.”

THE CARNIVAL ATMOSPHERE (which is established both through the plot of the novel and the intertextual references to Rabelais and to Bakhtin’s reading of Rabelais) challenges this attitude of righteousness and contests the rigid and exclusive boundaries of race, class, and gender erected in the production of identity. The performers of the carnival, in their exaggerated roles, are necessarily self-conscious about the production of their “identities” in relation to the “other”; as their roles fluctuate, the other is absorbed and recognized as an inescapable aspect of the “self.” Julia Kristeva writes:

It [carnavalesque structure] is a spectacle, but without a stage; a game, but also a daily undertaking; a signifier, but also a signified. That is, two texts meet, contradict and relativize each other. A carnival participant is both actor and spectator; he loses his sense of individuality, passes through a zero point of carnivalesque activity and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game.²⁰

Within the world of the carnival, Swan sets up a continuous stream of dichotomies between male and female, black and white, poverty and royalty, American and Canadian, the Confederate south and the Union north, heterosexual and homosexual, and normals and freaks. However, the barriers that allow these opposites to exist in an absolute and hierarchal relationship, begin to fall away as differences are stacked on differences until everyone is absorbed into a literalization

and modernization of what Bakhtin refers to as “gay relativity”²¹ — the Canadian giantess, the impotent Yankee, the lonely lesbian queen, the Québécois strongman, Apollo the normal, the right-wing dwarfs. In the course of the novel, everyone is exposed as different, the dynamic of privileged self and the marginalized other is subverted, and the term normal is defamiliarized. Leslie Fielder writes that even though we desperately attempt to defend the boundaries between normal and freak, the true freak, which we recognize as both human and monster, “challenges the conventional boundaries between male and female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other, and consequently between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth.”²² The problem of representing the self for a feminist postmodernist is to some extent addressed in this notion of the “freak” which involves a reflexive approach to the construction of the self fuelled by the awareness of the false dichotomy between self and other.

Perhaps the most pervasive intertexts in *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* are Rabelais’ *Gargantua & Pantagruel* and Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*. In Rabelais, according to Bakhtin, an aspect of the carnival, the “grotesque” body, subverts and contaminates the “high,” “transcendent” culture of the learned. Swan mimics Rabelais’ use of the body and its excretion of fluids to further stress the co-mingling and impurity of communities.

Tears, urine, menstrual blood, waters of pregnancy, and sweat breakdown (if only temporarily) the barriers of the “self” that are constructed to exclude the “other.” When Anna’s waters break, the reserved “Brits” passing below her window experience a “spring shower.” As fire sweeps through Barnum’s museum, the “barbarous” mudskills enjoy the spectacle of the burning “freaks”; in the midst of this terror, the Living Skeleton and Anna are brought together in friendship as their sweat mingles and converts to steam. And in the newsroom of the “New York Tribune” Anna and Jane unite the traumatized victims of the fire who float on the bodies of the Fat Woman and the Giantess in a lake of urine and tears. Finally, in the closed and exclusive community of Seville, Anna, the outsider, is temporarily embraced by the women who are affected by Anna’s menstruation: “Cora says one bleeding woman brings on the monthlies in other females close by and because I am so big, I may have caused all the women in Seville to spill over together with the blood of creation!” (Swan 272). The outflow of bodily fluids invites a point of intersection between the “self” and the “other.” Bakhtin in his analysis of Rabelais explicates the “logic of the grotesque”: “The object transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects.”²³

As in Rabelais, images of creation, birth and renewal are simultaneously accompanied by images of destruction and death — Anna’s waters break (in keeping with the images of her as a fertile fecund female that permeate the novel) but her

children are stillborn; burning flesh and the threat of drowning are aspects of the symbols of renewal — the flames and the flood; and Anna's menstrual blood serves as a reminder that she will not bear children. The universe is contained/uncontained in this circular chase of life and death that takes place on the site of the grotesque body; the gigantic female body of Anna, even as it mingles and changes and interacts with other bodies, forfeiting its autonomy, cannot be silenced by Martin's history of a master race or Barnum's imperialism or Apollo's capitalist schemes. The grotesque body as it confuses common dichotomies and disrupts the "normal" also challenges the boundaries of conventional narratives. Susan Stewart defines nonsense as a challenge to traditional and "normalized" practices; like the grotesque body, the borders defining nonsense are arbitrary: "If these nonsense activities show the arbitrariness of all beginnings and endings, they also show the arbitrariness of all middles as well. With this method of making nonsense, the center — the place of privileged signification — drops out and all that is left is a voice infinitely tracing itself into an infinite domain."²⁴ Anna, as a nonsensical figure, exposes the arbitrariness of the privileged narratives of history and displaces the masculine nucleus around which the "autonomous" self is constructed.

Robert Seguin, in his critique of Bakhtin, argues against what he sees as the "liberalism" inherent in this acceptance of the mingling of bodies:

I have in mind simply the passage from the early days of the revolution — when a heteroglot and dialogically vibrant polity was not a theoretical construct or Utopian hope but rather an aspect of experience — through to the repression of Stalinism, where this reality was eradicated and its value ever more strongly affirmed. This historical experience for us becomes flattened out, its two distinct moments now simultaneous and coterminous within the printed pages of the Bakhtinian text. It begins resonating with that bourgeois liberalism which is the dominant ideological register in contemporary North America, in which everything is at once all freedom and all deprival, where "difference" is now the language of advertising, where one can say anything one pleases precisely because it doesn't matter what is said anymore.²⁵

In defence of Bakhtin, Rabelais, and Swan, who, because of her complicitous relationship with the texts of the aforementioned authors, might be accused of advocating "bourgeois liberalism," I would like to examine the terms of the charge in light of *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*. Martin and Anna, the masculine American and the feminine Canadian, appear diametrically opposed at the opening of the novel; however, by the end of their life (and the novel) they come to recognize in each other's displacement a point of intersection: "Following Babe's death, Martin and I stayed together in the manner of married couples who are inseparably wedded by the geography of their souls. Babe's death confirmed the bond between us and sometimes we think he is with us so we leave a third chair" (Swan 332). Thus, the opposition that is set up by Seguin between the

absolute good of “the early days of the revolution” and the absolute evil of the repression of Stalinism, in Swan’s terms could not exist. Rather, the “pure” revolution is already contaminated by the possibility of repression and vice versa. As the revolution affirms its identity, it necessarily posits an “other” (what is outside the revolutionary aims) which must be repressed — the borders established around the revolution must then be defended. Furthermore, Seguin’s suggestion that the “early days of the revolution” are not a “construction” but “an aspect of experience,” is problematized by Swan’s text which, points to the artifice inherent in the representation of any reality (“no reality without representation”).

The language of difference, in the context of the carnival atmosphere of Swan’s novel, does not promote apathy or nihilism (“one can say anything one pleases precisely because it doesn’t matter what is said anymore.”) Difference is a breakdown of the self/other, good/evil dichotomy — the intersection of races, classes, and gender challenge the rigid borders of an “autonomous” identity. Rushdie’s defence of *The Satanic Verses* could perhaps also serve as a defence for Bakhtin, Rabelais, and Swan: “Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelisation and fears the absolutism of the Pure.”²⁶ The differences between Swan and Seguin’s representation of Bakhtin can possibly be explained by Swan’s willingness to support the philosophy of the impure, while Seguin is adamant about and nostalgic for the “Purity” of the early days of the revolution.

SWAN CONFRONTS THE tensions between the modernist defense of the “autonomous agent,” the postmodernist privileging of an “absent agent,” and the feminist dilemma of not having a fully present agent to make absent, by challenging and problematizing the literary and historical representations of the subject; she both acknowledges and parodies the traditions of past representations of the subject in the play of intertexts that takes place within her novel. The presentation of the modernist’s forging and the postmodernist’s un-forging of identity is challenged by the conceptualization of a subject that is local, fluid, relative, and contextual. The feminist concern with recovering stories that will allow for a sense of “history and agency in the world” is addressed in Swan’s novel as the author both participates in this process of recovery in her story of Anna Swan, while recognizing that it is impossible to access an “authentic” version of history. However, Swan is not discouraged by this prospect; rather, in writing

Anna's story Swan calls into question the whole tradition of the universal, autonomous, cohesive subject and the fixed, accessible, objective, historical account. The carnival structure in the text sanctions the intermingling of identities and renders the self/other dichotomy, employed in the construction of the autonomous agent, inappropriate; the resulting impure, incomplete, inconsistent, physical body of Anna contests and undermines the tradition of authority and objectivity in the documentation of history.²⁷

NOTES

- ¹ Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1989): 6.
- ² Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald Bouchard (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977): 147.
- ³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton Books, 1989): 85.
- ⁴ Robert Kroetsch, *Labyrinths of Voice: Conversations with Robert Kroetsch*, ed. Shirley Neuman and Robert Wilson (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982): 14.
- ⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, preface, *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976): xiv.
- ⁶ Susan Swan, *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983), p. 10. Subsequent page references appear in parentheses in the text.
- ⁷ Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press Canada, 1988): 121.
- ⁸ *The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, (New York: Lexicon Publications, 1988): 956.
- ⁹ Linda Swan-Ryan, letter, *Maclean's*, 29 October 1984, p. 8.
- ¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," p. 150.
- ¹¹ Linda Hutcheon, "The Politics of Representation," *Signature 1* (1989): 40.
- ¹² Leonard Cohen, *The Favourite Game* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963): 101.
- ¹³ Susan Stewart's, "The Gigantic" in *On Longing* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984) traces the historical and cultural significance of the giant; Stewart argues that with the development of commerce, the gigantic is "appropriated by the state and its institutions" and held up as a model of "abstract social formations" but also continues to belong to the submerged and material world of the carnival. Anna Swan is similarly situated between the official and the subversive world; she is held up as a symbol of success by the institutions of a capitalist state while her "grotesque" body simultaneously resists and challenges the boundaries of these official labels.
- ¹⁴ Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*, p. 8.
- ¹⁵ Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (London: Pan Books, 1985) is another interesting text to read in conjunction with Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman in the World*; both texts forefront the problematic depiction of the female subject. Fevvers, the heroine of Carter's text, is a female "freak," an aerialist with wings; in the

course of her performance Fevvers, like Anna Swan, is constructed by the "normal" gaze. However, Jack Walser, the reporter who attempts to write Fevvers into a narration which is dependent on self/other, male/female, normal/freak dichotomies, is simultaneously caught in the vortex of Fevver's gaze which in turn (like Anna's contextualizing of the masculine texts) undoes his stable constructions and threatens his identity.

- ¹⁶ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988) : 164.
- ¹⁷ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985) : 1305.
- ¹⁸ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela*, vol. 2 (London: Dent, 1976) : 471.
- ¹⁹ Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982) : 95.
- ²⁰ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980) : 78.
- ²¹ In the context of the passage from Bakhtin ("The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity") "gay" is used in the sense of happy or joyous.
- ²² Leslie Fielder, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) : 24.
- ²³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986) : 310.
- ²⁴ Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979) : 143.
- ²⁵ Robert Seguin, "Border, Contexts, Politics: Mikhail Bakhtin," *Signature* 2, (1989) : 48.
- ²⁶ Salman Rushdie, "A Pen Against the Sword: In Good Faith," *Newsweek*, 12 February 1990, p. 52.
- ²⁷ I would like to thank Linda Hutcheon for reading drafts of this paper and for her invaluable comments.

WHITE LIES

Neile Graham

for Christine

I hang the Thunderbird your son carved
next to my door
to say that I know you

and what belongs to your people
mine can only borrow.
I hope not to misuse what we have stolen
but hope is worth little

and pains me.
Everything we take is usurped
till even our guilt isn't honest —

The carving is small but cedar
and richly stained. It is somehow warm.
I live in the city where you came
to see the house you grew up in

now lodged in a museum you paid to enter.
The signs there talk of your uncle,
call him chief

though that was your father's place,
their words don't mention what he did with the money
for selling a home that was also yours.
I went there myself,

weaving through crowds of children
at play with bright, loud games of science,
tricks, modern white magic,

to enter the proper silence of your house.
First I wondered how it was
when it was yours and lived in,
then how it must have been for you

to enter it here yourself. These walls,
these cedar planks, held your days,
held the first words you spoke —

I only know I can't know how you felt
then, seeing your house here, the word *home*.
You live with Salmon and Cedar,
Raven and Thunderbird — who tell no lies.

All my rhetoric falls nowhere between us,
so I offer you a place in my house,
the honest affection living in my lying words.

I place your son's carving
where I see it just as I go out my door
to remind me each time of the poverty
and riches of the world I step out into.

THE LOST CHILD

Susan Glickman

We thought you were just down in the garden
playing, we thought you could hear us, we thought
as soon as we called
you'd come home.
So when I asked your father to get you he said
"Let's wait a little longer" — after all,
wasn't it yesterday we too had been children?
And when he felt it was time I
wasn't quite ready.
Everything had to be perfect: the furniture polished,
linen ironed, your birthday candles lit.
Then we called and called

through the appleblossom, the mist, the warm spring rain;
through the long summer's grasses, the slanting light the dancing
maddened flies; through the bruised leaves of one fall
and another; the drifts
of one desolate winter, and another
but you didn't hear us you didn't come
where had you wandered to, our darling, where?

How helpless we were, how foolish we felt
before the detectives, their fancy machines
and tracker dogs. We answered their questions
and endured their inspection
and searched with them again and again all
your hiding places, looking
for a footprint, a strand of hair, a forgotten
toy. Anything, anything

to show you *had* been there, you *might* return
and then suddenly after all there you were, quite calm
and happy, waiting for us, in your own patch of sunlight
in your own private meadow, no sun warmer
no flower sweeter
than you. Oh
you were never lost, dear child, you were
just not yet found.

'GENTLY SCAN'

Theme and Technique in J. G. Sime's "Sister Woman" (1919)

Sandra Campbell

JESSIE GEORGINA SIME (1868-1958) — a gender-neutral 'J.G. Sime' on the title page of her books and J. Georgina Sime to autograph seekers — was an important feminist writer active in Montreal circa 1907-1950.¹ *Sister Woman* (1919), her book of short stories, is a technically and thematically sophisticated landmark in women's writing in Canada.² In it, Sime created a ground-breaking work of fiction, one that dealt with unprecedented candour with changes in women's consciousness, occupational patterns and modes of life precipitated in Canada by the Great War. Its women characters—the hardy, shrewd, nurturing, lower-class women of Montreal, native and immigrant alike — held a particular appeal for Sime.

In *Sister Woman*, structure supports theme: twenty-eight stories are framed by a Prologue and an Epilogue. The stories are told by a woman to a male companion as *exempla* of women's multi-faceted need for self-realization and the support of men in changing a society whose norms have been hardest upon women, in particular single, working or lower-class women. As the female hero of Sime's 1921 novel *Our Little Life* puts it: "It's women alone have the poor toime."³ W. H. New has described the stories of *Sister Woman* as focused on female life at the margins, "an oblique education in the realities that the male norms of social order do not take into account and an implicit call for attitudinal reform."⁴ In addition, *Sister Woman* embodies Sime's belief that for the woman writer, an important element in transcendence over emotional suffering and gender inequity lies in art. That is to say, for Sime it lay in the leap of faith and affirmation of the spirit that artistic creation embodied. Sime, like many women writers, saw affinities between artistic and maternal creation.

An Anglo-Scot who came to Canada in 1907 on the eve of her fortieth birthday, Sime came of age as a writer during her four decades of Canadian residence. The evolving urban society of Montreal fascinated her. She came to see herself as a "near-Canadian,"⁵ that is to say, a writer focused on Canada whose perspective was rooted both in the cultural values of her British intellectual upbringing, and in the 'view from the margins' implicit in her status as an unmarried, self-supporting woman writer and office worker. Sime was thus a double outsider in the

Canadian society of the day: she was both an immigrant intellectual and an unmarried woman, without proximate family, living alone, a situation unusual for her era and class. As an artist and as a woman, however, she realized that those marginalized in a society can often analyse it more clearly because they are not blinkered by power and privilege.

Some crucial elements of Sime's biography, so long obscure and so vital to an understanding of her art, have been recovered by W. H. New and Jane Watt.⁶ Sime was born in Scotland. A cherished only child, she was brought up chiefly in London with several intervals on the Continent. Both her mother, Jessie Aitken Wilson, and her father, James Sime (1843-1895), a biographer of Goethe, were writers.⁷ Sime treasured childhood memories of such family friends as George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, and W. B. Yeats.

Through her mother, a collateral relative of the popular Victorian novelist Mrs. (Margaret) Oliphant and Sir Daniel Wilson (1816-1892), longtime professor at the University of Toronto, Sime attended Queen's College, London (an institution devoted to the education of women), and then trained in Berlin for a year to be a singer. At the age of eighteen, she returned to London. Her plans for a career in music gave way to a hunger for literary expression. By her own account, at this period the debate over the "New Woman" and the ideas of George Bernard Shaw and especially William Morris impressed her deeply.⁸ From her pen came a column for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, book reviews for the *Athenaeum* and reader's reports for publishers in London and Edinburgh, some of this under a male pseudonym, "Jacob Salviris."

After the death in 1895 of her father, her beloved "friend and counsellor,"⁹ Sime and her mother moved to the latter's native Edinburgh. The rigors of the next decade shaped Georgina Sime's vision of woman's capacity for struggle, fidelity and sorrow. The difficult years 1895 to 1907 spanned the financial and emotional travails of her mother's long illness and death. Sime also experienced in these years women's office work and love unvalidated by society, both major elements in *Sister Woman*. While in Edinburgh she worked as secretary to Dr. Freeland Barbour, an eminent gynaecologist. There Sime came into contact with many brilliant minds. For example, she served briefly as secretary to the visiting William James.¹⁰ Sime's perspective was therefore that of an intelligent, well-educated woman working in a 'subordinate' status as secretary. She moved in a world of ideas and yet was inevitably perceived by others as at its margins. Another event was to influence deeply her fiction and orient her to a concern with extra-marital love, maternity, and medical settings, elements rife in the stories of *Sister Woman*. According to Jane Watt, while Sime was working for Dr. Barbour, she came to know one of his most gifted students, Walter William Chipman, a young Canadian who was winning honours in the medical school at University of Edinburgh.¹¹ Sime and Chipman (1866-1950) were to have life-long emotional, intel-

lectual and occupational ties, ties with important consequences for Sime's life and art.

In 1907, after her mother's death, Sime came to Montreal, initially to visit: she was in fact to be based in Montreal until 1950, the year of Chipman's death.¹² By her own account, she initially worked for Walter Chipman, who had returned to Canada in 1900, where he had begun to establish himself as Montreal's premier obstetrician-gynaecologist.¹³ Tall, commanding and courtly, allied by marriage to the highest social circles of Montreal, Walter Chipman was by all accounts a fine surgeon, a gifted orator, an able administrator and a literary aficionado interested in Kipling.¹⁴ From early in the century until his death, he was a popular public speaker of international repute on women's health and maternity issues. He and Sime enjoyed a rich cross-fertilization of ideas: many of the stories of *Sister Woman* deal with such topics as pregnancy, illegitimacy, venereal disease and female fatigue, issues Chipman was addressing in the same period as a health professional.¹⁵ In addition, the available evidence points to a lifelong liaison between them, a liaison that perforce placed Georgina Sime in a rather isolated social position. This isolation helped to shape her particular feminist vision of art and society.

Accordingly, *Sister Woman*, like Sime's other books published after 1907, expresses her fascination with women's changing roles in Canada and elsewhere. For example, Sime's *The Mistress of All Work* (1916) is a practical household handbook for the single working woman.¹⁶ *Canada Chaps* (1917) is — despite the prescriptive masculinity of 'chaps' in the title of this series — a series of vignettes of Canadian men and women in wartime, both 'over there,' and on the home front.¹⁷ Sime's decision to include women's experience in a wartime chronicle made her forcibly aware that, while she lived in Canada, and was engaged by it, she could never be *wholly* of it. Reviews of her work emphasized this. In 1917, *Saturday Night's* male reviewer tartly relegated *Canada Chaps* to the margins on the basis of the author's gender and nationality:

... the publisher would have been better to have had the stories written by a man and a Canadian. Mrs. [sic] Sime not only has a distinct feminine touch in her stories of soldiers, but she is obviously a stranger to the finer points of Canadian life.¹⁸

By contrast, today's reader tends to be more positive about Sime's inclusion of war nurses and waiting wives and children in an account of Canadian heroism in the Great War.

BOTH *Canada Chaps* AND *Sister Woman* use the short-story mode. It is clear that, in Sime's aesthetic, the short-story form mirrored the multifaceted disjunctions of urban female life in the early twentieth century. In her non-fiction, she wrote of the Montreal she knew:

... one feels in the cities [of Quebec], I think, the potentials of quite another kind of art — disjointed, disconnected art that finds its expression in thumb nail sketches, short stories, one-act scrappy plays and the like.¹⁹

She reasoned that short fiction was the best medium to depict Montreal in a period of rapid social change:

Life in the cities of the New World is fluid, restless, like a kaleidoscope to which someone is perpetually giving a shake, and that is one of the interesting things about them.²⁰

The kaleidoscope image is at the heart of Sime's aesthetic in *Sister Woman*. Like a kaleidoscope, the stories 'gently scan' a Montreal of female writers, seamstresses, prostitutes, domestic servants, shopworkers, charwomen, ladies of leisure, paupers, unwed mothers and factory workers. In the twenty-eight stories, the narrator (who strives to give her characters a fair shake!) is usually depicted as a woman of status and situation similar to Sime's in these years. That is, she is an empathetic, intelligent, autonomous, single middle-class woman, one with special feeling for women whose role as mistress or prostitute is censured by 'polite society' of the day. The gynocentric empathy Sime valorises is emphasized by her epigraph for the volume, taken from Robert Burns's "Address to the Unco Guid":

Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler, sister woman;

Sime's valorization of empathy and compassion, particularly by and for women, and her rejection of narrow and punitive moralism is echoed in the next two lines of the Burns poem, suppressed in her epigraph:

Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang
To step aside is human.

Gender concerns shape Sime's intricate structural design for the stories. The outer frame of Epilogue and Prologue presents three protagonists: a nameless man and woman, evidently companions, and a typewriter — for the woman is a writer. The frame narrator carries on — the kaleidoscope again — a multilevelled dialogue. Her interlocutors are alternately male and female, Canadian and British, real and fictional. On one level, the stories are presented to us as parables addressed to a man (and men in general) in reply to his query: "What do women want?" The Prologue is explicit:

"Well," I said, after a long pause for consideration, "I'll — I'll skirt the question if you like."

"The Woman's Question?" he inquired.

"The woman's and the man's," I said. "It's the same thing. There's no difference." "That," he said, "sounds hopeful. That's the most articulate thing I ever heard a woman say."

At that we laughed again. When people like each other and are happy they laugh easily.

"When," I asked him — "when shall I begin?"

"Now," he said, "this minute. State your grievance, madam!"

I took the cover off my typewriter and sat down before it . . . (8)

However, the stories themselves make it clear that, while a male is the frame interlocutor, within the stories women usually carry on an inner dialogue or address a female narrator. Appeals are made to the shared folk wisdom of women. For example, in the story "A Page From Life," a husband's return home is described in this fashion:

"Is that you, Tim?" cried Katie from the kitchen. Well she knew it was Tim but she cried out at him to ask if it was he just in the way we all do when our husbands turn their latchkeys in the door and come home to us. (198)

Thus Sime constructs a 'kaleidoscopic' narrative which in effect places her male listener at the margin, just as he appears only in Prologue and Epilogue, the edges of the volume. He becomes by implication the male who 'overhears' female lore and mores — and who ultimately is depicted in the Epilogue as unable to deconstruct and interpret what he has heard.

Sime is addressing the British reader as well as the Canadian. In a book published in London and Toronto in 1919, Sime is quite aware that the narrative had to cue a British reader to 'hear' the nuances and peculiarities of Canadian speech and custom. Her kaleidoscope presents facets of nationality as well as gender. Accordingly, we find a passage in "Art," a story in which a London-born resident of Canada asks a British reader:

Why do English people come out to Canada and antagonise the whole Dominion? Why? Why can't they be the natural, kindly people that we mostly are at home . . . (230)

Sister Woman, therefore, is at once addressed to women, to men, to Canadians and to non-Canadians in a kaleidoscopic, multi-levelled fashion.

Moreover, the title of *Sister Woman* has a double meaning: not only does the work deal with women's relationships with men, it also deals with women's interactions with one another. These connections occur in the empathy (sisterhood) of female narrator for women characters, and in women's need for tolerance and understanding — a 'gentle scan' — from both sisters (women) and brothers (men) in a world of social change. The stories repeatedly valorise empathy among women which transcends differences in class, education, occupation, language and ethnic origin. For example, the narrator in the story "Love-O'-Man" — a "leddy born" to Elsie, her elderly Scots ex-cook — feels the social barriers between them dissolve when she learns how selflessly Elsie has loved:

To me Elsie is no longer only the cook who baked and boiled and roasted for me for a given wage; she has become a sister creature too, hoping and fearing like myself, trusting more faithfully than I shall ever do — and loving so well that the very bitterness of her grief has passed into a sort of second happiness. (54)

EMPATHY ALSO SOFTENS moral censure. Most of the stories present women who, by the standards of 1919, were social pariahs or at the margin of social acceptance — ‘kept’ women (“A Woman of Business”), prostitutes (“Adrift”), paupers (“Waiting”), mistresses (“An Irregular Union,” “Alone,” and “Union”) and single mothers (“Motherhood” and “The Child”). Like the Burns quatrain, the stories stress that to empathise with the female deviant is to view her less censoriously. By contrast, prudery and joylessness are censured. A vicious Mrs. Grundy is exposed in the story “A Circular Tour”: “So do the Harpies smile while they are sharpening their claws.” (222) It is different when the narrator of “A Woman of Business” discovers that her neighbour is a kept woman, about to retire on her illicit gains to live with the daughter whose virtue her income has protected. Attitude becomes theme as the narrator muses:

She had gone right down into the [moral] deeps and let them all go over her — and the odd thing was that she didn’t seem much the worse. If ever I were in a tight place I don’t know anyone I would rather have with me than Madame Sloyovska. She gives me the feeling of a straight woman — and yet her life has been crooked enough if we judge it by our customary standards. (203)

Sime also places before the reader the ethical dilemmas posed by the poverty of sweatshop life for urban, working-class women, a situation well-documented in the urban sociology of the day²¹:

If Madame had led what we call an honest life, earning a sparse livelihood, say with her needle, then Dilli [her daughter] would have had but a poor chance of virtue. She would have been the scapegoat instead of her mother, and there would have been all the difference. As it was — Madame had sold over and over again the only thing she had to sell — her body. (206)

In story after story, Sime depicts the exploitative conditions of much of the major female employment areas of the day: dressmaking (“Adrift” and three other stories), domestic service (“Alone” and ten others), factory work (“Munitions!”), office work (“An Irregular Union” and two others) and the retail trade (“Mr. Johnston” and “The Cocktail”). The pitfalls of exploitation are depicted unsparingly: poverty, sexual harassment, prostitution, alcoholism, ill-health, and isolation, among others. Sime also keeps her criticism of the exploiters implicit, not explicit. She invokes compassion rather than political action, a result of her precept that “the great sin against art” was writing “to the order of a philosophy of life instead of to the order of life itself.”²² Rather, she valorizes the fellow-feeling of women, which arises out of their widespread subjugation — sexual and occupational — in a male-dominated world.

Sime’s stories also depict women who attempt (and often fail) to balance the demands of tradition and convention with their urge for sexual and occupational

fulfilment. In a link with the norms of Victorian women's writing, stories like "Motherhood" and "The Child" celebrate women's maternal love, even in situations of illegitimacy and social isolation. Not surprisingly, given her ties to obstetrician-gynaecologist Walter Chipman, many stories deal with sexuality and maternity, and are set in hospitals or a physician's waiting room. "An Irregular Union" sketches a young woman as she waits for a telephone call from hospital about the health of her lover/employer. The sensibility of a young working woman is presented with a complexity not matched in Canadian short fiction until the Linnet Muir stories of Mavis Gallant's *Home Truths* (1981).²³ Sime brilliantly marshals the imagery of domestic space often found in women's writing. Phyllis Redmayne is "the ubiquitous Business Girl of our time, and she earned the money she lived on by the sweat of her brain" (76). Two emblems of the new technology — the typewriter (work) and the telephone (love) — dominate her life. In work, modest financial independence has meant hierarchical subordination in the office world. As mistress to her boss, Redmayne's emotional dependency is equally unmistakable: her lover is her "Great Reality" (83). Compelled by convention to conceal the affair, she is perforce imprisoned in lies:

... not one person that she knew could be made to understand that she, Dick Radcliffe's mistress, had kept her self-respect, that she was an independent creature — she detested the word mistress, and she didn't feel that it applied to her . . . and yet she knew that it *did* apply to her and that her poor, pitiful little plea about earning her own livelihood and keeping herself decently wouldn't have any weight with anyone at all anywhere. (86)

The narrative comment reinforces this perspective:

She was just the old traditional woman clothed in a Business Woman's garb. For all that was unexpected in her ideas, her typewriter might just as well have been a kitchen stove — or a cradle. She looked on Dick Radcliffe as Eve looked on Adam. She thought the same old things that women always have thought, though she gained her own living and imagined she was independent and free and modern and all the rest of it. (78)

The theme of the story is Redmayne's desolation at her marginalization, a desolation unrelieved by the long-awaited telephone call. The small 'bachelor' flat symbolizes the calustrophobic confines of the cramped environment she is actually free to share with her lover. "An Irregular Union" ends in desolation:

She looked out through her little window at the early evening sky. She sat watching the lovely evening clouds going their majestic peaceful way. And suddenly — no one could be more surprised than she herself — she laid her head down on her two outstretched arms — and she sobbed and sobbed. (88)

In other stories, such as "Munitions!" and "The Cocktail," Sime portrays female sexual mores in the light of the demographic shift early in the century in women's

occupations from domestic service to factory and store work, a shift historians of women have described as central to the period.²⁴ Moreover, in many of the stories, as the last quotation from “An Irregular Union” makes clear, Sime uses the landscape and climate of Montreal to counterpoint or contrast with her character’s inner life with a skill that anticipates Mordecai Richler’s similar use of the Montreal climate in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959).²⁵ In Sime’s “Munitions!”, the pent-up vitality of a young domestic-turned-munitions worker is displaced onto the thawing March landscape. “It was the very early spring” is the story’s refrain. To a streetcar full of girls bound for a suburban factory, the March thaw, in company with the explosives they produce, mirrors their own surging sexuality. They are newly-freed from the cloister of domestic service:

. . . massed together in the slushy road, they stood, lighting up, passing their matches round — happy — noisy — fluttered — not knowing what to do with all the life that kept on surging up and breaking in them — waves of it — wave on wave. Willingly would they have fought their way to the Munitions Factory. If they had known the Carmagnole they would have danced it in the melting snow. . . . (45)

SIME’S ARTISTRY GIVES similar richness to the framing of the volume. The outer frame of the stories — the Prologue and Epilogue — encloses an inner frame made up of the first and last stories in *Sister Woman*: “Alone” and “Divorced.” A reading of the two delineates the nature of Sime’s feminist dialectic. Both stories present Mansfieldian *dames seules* — with instructive differences between “Alone” and “Divorced.” The stories move from despair over woman’s lot to a qualified and stoic affirmation (bought at enormous cost) of male-female love. “Alone,” the first story in the volume, recounts the despair and suicide of a young immigrant housekeeper whose employer/secret lover (at whose insistence she has earlier aborted a pregnancy) has suddenly died. In “Divorced,” a lonely office worker who has divorced her adulterous husband is moved to affirm her enduring love for him, one only to be fulfilled in the world to come. Both stories employ third-person centre-of-consciousness narration as Sime depicts how and why each woman suffers and how each responds. Both stories affirm the richness of sexual initiation, even given subsequent suffering. Sime does not valorize marriage. Marriage, denied Hetty in “Alone,” has brought Ella of “Divorced” no economic or emotional security. Yet “Divorced” is less bleak than “Alone,” and deliberately so, because Sime’s maternal feminism affirms women’s spiritual power and fidelity in the face of male perfidy. Ella Hume has chosen the painful autonomy of divorce, yet even cuckolded, and rejected, she embraces a mystic fidelity to the man she loves sexually and spiritually:

The thought came to her that she was the keeper of their love and that, in that day to come, she would have his share to hand back to [her husband]. (290)

Given a degree of economic independence, Sime's characters affirm both the sorrows and joys of experience and female idealism:

[Ella] saw clearly enough that she had had a bad time; but she also saw that if she hadn't had that bad time she might have had a worse in not having any time at all. "It's better to suffer than not to *feel*," she said to herself. It's better even to be maimed than never to have had an instinct." And then — quite suddenly and unexpectedly — she realised that she had not stopped loving her husband.

(288-89)

Sime's brand of feminism was thus not anti-male. As woman and artist, she remained committed to male-female relationships while recognizing women's suffering in the prevailing social order. In espousing this view, Georgina Sime subscribed to a dominant strain of thought in the Canadian feminism of her day. Women's historian Deborah Gorham has written that feminism in Canada was "characterized by a spirit of reconciliation," a maternal feminism in which "self-sacrifice was central to women's role and the key to her psyche."²⁶ Men might wreak havoc, but they were essential to Sime. This is confirmed in *In A Canadian Shack* (1937), her memoir of her rural Laurentian sojourns during World War I. There she mused whether it was feasible for an autonomous "*thinking* woman to have and hold her flocks and fields and to be content alone. Is this possible? I don't know. Where would be the fun of shearing the sheep and fashioning a gown for myself out of the wool if there was no one there to cry at the end, 'Bravo, you look nice?'" (Italics Sime's).²⁷

She was convinced that "whatever we [women] say and however feminist we become, it is woman's nature to serve, and I think we are never happier than doing so."²⁸ Given this credo (whatever its psychobiographic origins), the final story of *Sister Woman* celebrates its female protagonist as a lone keeper of the flame of eternal love, a kind of sexually-initiated vestal virgin.

The Epilogue adds final thematic elements to *Sister Woman*. As the he/I dialogue resumes, the male interlocutor has clearly failed to understand what he has heard. "He" is bemused: the woman is perturbed, albeit gently. The male complacently relinquishes to the female narrator the challenges of expressing woman's state:

"I've got reams and reams and reams to say," I said to him. "Oh, so you think it's simple, do you? Well, let me tell you that what we women want is simple — but the world isn't simple. 'Don't you see,' I said, 'you've got to start the world again if — *We* can't fight the world the way it is. You — you've got to . . ."

I stopped for breath. He sat there saying nothing for a bit. At last he said: "When you've got started, let me know." (292-93, italics Sime's)

For Sime the task of the female artist is to portray the kaleidoscope of women's lives, and to affirm the empathy, the sexuality, the maternal devotion and the idealism that give meaning to women's vicissitudes. Accordingly, the final sentence of *Sister Woman* focuses on woman and typewriter, not woman and man. The symbol of women's entry into the business world also becomes the instrument of female expression. Sime subverts the traditional happy ending as the female narrator caresses — "gives her hand" — not to man but to machine:

I ran my fingers over the typewriter keys — and felt them lovingly. . . . (293)

ONE MAY WELL ASK about the Canadian reception to (for its time) such a candid, socially-aware maternal feminist work, unmatched until the fiction of Mary Quayle Innis, Irene Baird, Dorothy Livesay, Gwethalyn Graham and others in the 1930s and 1940s. While Sime has affinities with Canadian contemporaries like Nellie McClung and Marjorie Grant Cook ('M. Grant'), no contemporary equalled her documentary style and sexual candour.²⁹ Reviews of *Sister Woman* treated it gingerly. Peter Donovan commended its candour rather coyly in *Saturday Night*. Like the male of the Epilogue, he missed the point, and the artistry of the story cycle:

Clerks, munitions workers, charwomen — the author knows them all and writes of them gracefully and sympathetically, especially of those whose histories are rather unconventional, let us say. It is an attractive and clever book, but the constancy of the point of view in the tales gives a certain monotony. But one doesn't need to read them all at once.³⁰

For its part, the *Canadian Bookman* reprinted "An Irregular Union" in its April 1920 issue. The anonymous reviewer, unlike Donovan, was willing to accept Sime as a "near-Canadian" woman writer:

There are qualities about the collection of short sketches . . . which make us hesitate to describe it as belonging to Canadian literature. Nevertheless, the author is and has been for a good many years a resident of Montreal; most of the characters and episodes of the book belong to Montreal; one feels that Montreal has to do with the shaping of the author's attitude toward life.³¹

Yet both reviewers shied away from Sime's "European" candour about female sexuality. Class and gentility, not gender, was the *Canadian Bookman's* sticking point:

Miss Sime has an enormous sympathy with all the great primitive motives and feelings, which probably form a larger part of the structure of life among scrub-women than they do among the guests at the Ritz-Carlton [a Montreal society hotel] — although this is a proposition that we put forward diffidently, and with some fear that we may be slandering the wealthier classes of society.³²

Sister Woman, it declared in effect, was just too sophisticated and avant-garde for the Canadian literary public:

It is scarcely likely that her volume will receive full appreciation in this country, at any rate unless it is so brilliantly successful in England that an echo of that success makes its way over here. It is not a book for a young country. It is lacking in sentimentality and optimism, which we seem to demand from purveyors of fiction on this North American continent.³³

No doubt Sime relished the ironies of this judgement. *Sister Woman* gently scanned women's lot, but its illuminations were as yet too harsh for the eyes of the largely prim, patriarchal, middle class literary world of Canada in 1920.

NOTES

I am grateful to Lorraine McMullen of the University of Ottawa, my co-editor for *New Women*, our University of Ottawa Press anthology of short fiction by Canadian women 1900-20 (which includes Sime's "Munitions!"), with whom I first explored Sime's work. Thanks also to W. H. New and Jane Watt, two generous scholars with whom I exchanged information about Sime's career, and to Frank Tierney of Tecumseh Press, which has just (1992) reprinted *Sister Woman*.

¹ For a description of Sime's life and work and a bibliography, see W. H. New, "Jessie Georgina Sime," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 92, ed. New, 356-361.

² J. G. Sime, *Sister Woman* (London: Grant Richards, 1919). The work was also issued by S. B. Gundy, Toronto. All subsequent quotations from the work are from this edition, and are inserted in brackets in the text by page number.

³ Sime, *Our Little Life* (New York: Stokes, 1921): 29.

⁴ New, 359.

⁵ The phrase Sime used of herself in an interview for "Canadian Women in the Public Eye: Miss Sime," *Saturday Night* (18 Feb. 1922): 31.

⁶ Jane Watt, currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Alberta, has done extensive research on Sime, and has recovered an important collection of her correspondence.

⁷ See "James Sime," *Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁸ Sime's memories of this and her encounters with other mentors and celebrities are recounted in a book of essay-memoirs, written with Frank Nicholson, *Brave Spirits* (London: Authors, 1952).

⁹ Sime & Nicholson, *Brave Spirits*, 52.

¹⁰ Sime & Nicholson, *Brave Spirits*, 98.

¹¹ Jane Watt, letter to author, 16 April and 14 May 1990, information based on interviews with Mrs. Nicholson, widow of Sime correspondent Frank Nicholson.

¹² Montreal city directories and other sources list various addresses for Sime for the period 1907 to 1947. Through interviews, Jane Watt has learned that Sime was in Montreal at the time of Walter Chipman's death in April 1950.

- ¹³ Walter William Chipman had a brilliant medical career at McGill University Medical School and the Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal. Nova-Scotia born, he had graduated from Acadia University in 1890. His first love was literature, and he initially worked as a journalist. In 1889, he married Maud Mary Angus (d. 1946), a daughter of wealthy Montreal banker and CPR director R. B. Angus. R. B. Angus was a sometime governor of McGill University and president of the Royal Victoria Hospital, positions Chipman himself later held. See "Dr. W. W. Chipman, Former President of R.V.H., Dies," *Montreal Star*, 4 April 1950, p. 1 and E. H. Beasley, "Walter William Chipman," *McGill Medical Luminaries* (Montreal: Osler Library, McGill, 1990): 70-73.
- ¹⁴ Chipman published a monograph on Kipling, "Kipling: An Appreciation," (Montreal: Author, n.d. (1910?)). As director of the Women's Pavilion of the internationally-known Royal Victoria Hospital, he oversaw its amalgamation with the Montreal Maternity Hospital in 1926 to much praise. The amalgamation was enriched by Maud Chipman's philanthropy to the Women's Pavilion in the years after her father's death in 1922.
- ¹⁵ See, for example, Chipman, "Sociological Aspects of Medicine," *McGill News* 11 (June 1930), 15-20. Here Chipman criticised the exploitation of shop-girls, dealt with maternal public health issues and declared that "the rich and poor must meet, and in their meeting secure for themselves a mutual salvation. It is indeed a question of Social Medicine."
- ¹⁶ Sime, *The Mistress of All Work* (London: Methuen, 1916).
- ¹⁷ Sime, *Canada Chaps* (London: Lane/Toronto: S. B. Gundy, 1917). The "Chaps" series were patriotic tales of martial life in each of the Allied countries published by Lane during World War I.
- ¹⁸ Peter Donovan ('Tom Folio'), review of *Canada Chaps*, *Saturday Night*, 7 April 1917, p. 9.
- ¹⁹ Sime, *Orpheus in Quebec* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1942): 34.
- ²⁰ Sime, *Orpheus in Quebec*, 38.
- ²¹ See for example the classic work of urban sociology for Montreal, H. A. Ames, *The City Below The Hill* (1887; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1972).
- ²² Sime, *Thomas Hardy of the Wessex Novels* (New York: Carrier, 1928): 45.
- ²³ Mavis Gallant, *Home Truths* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981).
- ²⁴ See Alison Prentice et. al., *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt, 1988): 113-189. In 1891, 41% of women working outside the home were in domestic service; by 1921, only 11% were.
- ²⁵ Mordecai Richler, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (London: Deutsch, 1959).
- ²⁶ Deborah Gorham, "The Canadian Suffragists," in *Women in the Canadian Mosaic*, ed. Gwen Matheson (Toronto: Martin, 1976): 43-44.
- ²⁷ Sime, *In A Canadian Shack* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1937): 62.
- ²⁸ Sime, *In A Canadian Shack*, 206.
- ²⁹ Nellie McClung is well-known. Canadian Marjorie Grant Cook ('M. Grant'), a Quebecker, addressed similar themes in her 1921 novel *Latchkey Ladies*, a tale of upper middle class young women in war work in London. Anne, her main female protagonist, becomes the mistress of a married man and bears his child to social censure. Cook lacks Sime's artistry and her social breadth. See *Latchkey Ladies* (London: Heinemann, 1921).

- ³⁰ Peter Donovan ('Tom Folio'), review of *Sister Woman*, *Saturday Night*, 28 Feb. 1920, 9.
- ³¹ Anon., "A Montreal Woman on Women," *Canadian Bookman* (April 1920) : 57-58. The reviewer was obviously chary of the lower-class forthrightness depicted by Sime, and admiring of her "wonderfully moving presentation of unmarried love." "An Irregular Union" was reprinted with the review, a daring choice of topic and treatment for a Canadian periodical of this period.
- ³² *Canadian Bookman*, 57.



GARDENS

Lorna Crozier

Moving away from winter, he retires
to the coast, westering, mile zero,

land's end. And what of a garden
I ask? Is there room for that?

Yes, but of a different kind
from the ones he remembers,

the sweet peas his mother planted,
her hands pale spiders in the earth,

the cabbage and potatoes, the anemone
of dill, the rows of beans and beans.

On the coast the soil is thin, a linen
napkin over stones. There, he says,

he'll grow different things, some basil,
a little thyme. He plants the seeds already

in his mind, no fear of frost,
the summer's long, herbs grow

on stony constellations, air
moves in from the sea with its smells

of eternity. Back where he was born
his mother now would be soaking seeds

in a shallow bowl, snow outside the window.
He'd give anything to be there,

crossing time as if it were
a landscape he had dreamed, a garden

large enough to hold desire. She
spreads the packages of seeds

like a deck of cards on the kitchen table,
a royal flush, a winning hand.

She lets him rearrange the rows,
placing peas by broccoli,

carrots by tomatoes, marigolds
along the border. On the coast

he says the names out loud:
Early Bird. Sweet William. Everlasting.

He can see the sun breaking up
the clouds, pools of light

along the windowsill, the oilcloth
his mother wipes and wipes,

setting china plates for people
he'll never see again,

he and she in another time, waiting
for the earth to tilt.

THE POLITICS OF THE HOUSE: BEDS

Tom Wayman

Beds are close relatives to tables:
four legs that raise a level surface.
But beds are even more self-effacing
than their cousins, perhaps due
to beds' shorter stature.
When we refer to beds, we usually mean
not the physical construction
but the colour and weight of blankets
and the number or thickness of pillows.
Sometimes we have in mind how soft the mattress feels
or else a bedspread
that entirely hides the bed beneath it.

This imprecision in terms
affects young people in particular.
When they begin life on their own
they often decide: "I don't need a bed. I'll sleep
on a foam pad on the floor."
We discover the virtues of beds, however,
through their absence.
Not that any bed would take advantage
of our confusion. Like tables
they perform their function
with as little fuss as possible,
only objecting if under great stress
or very old.

Loyal to a fault, a bed will support
generation after generation
without complaint — no matter how often it hears
someone who merely tucked in the sheets
announce: "I made
the bed."

THE POLITICS OF THE HOUSE: COUNTERS

Tom Wayman

A counter is
a cross between a shelf and a cabinet.
In stores, a counter frequently has a glass top
or front, to reveal what it contains.
But in a house, counters usually are opaque.
Their contents are secret,
put out of sight for now.

Whatever counters are like, though,
they have nothing to do with relaxation.
We ordinarily stand at a counter
— to work or buy.
When a restaurant offers counter service
it is for people who wish to eat in a rush
compared to the women and men who choose booths or tables.

And no kitchen anywhere
has enough counters.
Each kitchen displays the same motto
engraved on the air:
*if the designer of this kitchen
had to cook in it
there would have been more counter space.*

In my house, for instance, the fridge
is alongside one edge of the stove
and the only unoccupied nearby flat surface
is a narrow strip between the stove's other side
and the dish drainer.

One of the indisputable signs
that the Revolution has triumphed
will be a rearrangement of counters.

NAMES, FACES AND SIGNATURES IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S "CAT'S EYE" AND "THE HANDMAID'S TALE"

Jessie Givner

I'm afraid . . . I'll look into the bathroom mirror and see the face of another girl, someone who looks like me but has half her face darkened, the skin burned away. (CE 212)

THE HEROINE OF *Cat's Eye* thus describes herself reflected in a mirror, simultaneously doubled and divided, figured and disfigured. Elaborating the mirror Elaine Risley envisions, Atwood's work introduces a mirror structure in which autobiography and fiction, the referent and the figure emerge as figuring and disfiguring counterparts. In Atwood's work, names, faces and signatures, the very elements which suggest the referentiality of autobiography, become figures which undermine the referentiality they introduce. Thus, Atwood disrupts the autobiography/fiction, referentiality/self-reflexivity polarities with an incessant play between naming and misnaming, facing and defacing, figuration and disfiguration.¹

One of the most persistent arguments in Atwood criticism is that her works are structured by duality and binary opposition.² Such criticism tends to situate Atwood's work within a system of oppositions between literal and figurative, referentiality and self-reflexivity, autobiography and fiction. It has been suggested, for example, that Atwood's *Cat's Eye* is primarily autobiographical.³ As I shall argue, it is precisely the autobiography/fiction, referential/auto-referential dichotomies which Atwood strives to undermine in her novel. While almost all of Atwood's poetry and prose explores the name, face and unified I/eye central to autobiography, it is particularly in *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale* that Atwood disrupts the elements often used to define the boundary between autobiography

and fiction. Atwood produces an intertextual echo between the two novels as well as reverberations of prior literary texts. Yet such intertextual resonances are not simply literary; indeed they transgress the boundary between verbal and visual art, between the seen and the heard. Ultimately such intertextual echoes are themselves another mode of figuration.

In *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, the figures Atwood uses to destabilize a whole system of oppositions are, paradoxically, in and of themselves structured by a framework of binary opposition. While the process of naming and misnaming turns on oppositions between proper and improper, the process of facing and defacing turns on oppositions between the half-face and the full-face, the speaking face and the silenced face. Often introduced as a metonymic substitution for the face, the eye image in Atwood's work initiates divisions between the seen and the heard, the "I" speaking and the "you" spoken to. The process of naming and misnaming, facing and defacing inaugurates a malignant, disfiguring replication of the very oppositions it disrupts. Atwood's work raises a question which is relevant to current feminist theory: How might woman inscribe herself in a process which turns on the name, face and unified I/eye of man, a process structured by binary opposition, doubling and division? In both her poetry and prose Atwood ruptures the dualities which have structured the name, the face and the unified "I/eye," for she introduces an I/eye which is "multiple and in fragments" (*CE* 316). While exploring the boundary between autobiography and fiction, Atwood's works not only give a face to a name but also give a voice to a face and perhaps even give an "ear to the other."⁴

In a review of *Cat's Eye*, Douglas Glover opens his discussion of the relationship between autobiography and fiction with a description of facing and defacing. Glover remarks that Atwood is "the face on the construction-site wall that everyone gets to deface." Just as Atwood's public image is prominent enough to invite defacement, Glover notes, so Elaine Risley's face is a public one which may be defaced. Glover refers to a passage in *Cat's Eye* in which Elaine Risley contemplates the defacing of her poster. After suggesting a correspondence between Margaret Atwood and Elaine Risley, however, Glover questions the correspondence he introduces, remarking, "But Risley is not Atwood — or is she?" Furthermore, Glover writes that Atwood loves to play hide-and-seek at the place where autobiography and fiction meet.

As Glover observes, the front matter of *Cat's Eye* raises the problem of whether Atwood's novel is fictional or autobiographical. Atwood's prefatory note explains, "This is a work of fiction. Although its form is that of an autobiography, it is not one." The claim that only the form of Atwood's work is autobiographical undermines the very referentiality on which autobiography depends, for it is precisely its form which transparent autobiography would efface. The statement at the front of Atwood's work raises Paul de Man's question:

... since the mimesis here assumed to be operative is one mode of figuration among others, does the referent determine the figure, or is it the other way round ... ?
(de Man 1984:69)

THE QUESTION OF THE relationship between autobiography and fiction prevails not only in *Cat's Eye* but also in the earlier work, *The Handmaid's Tale*. While *Cat's Eye* begins with a note describing its content as fictional and form as autobiographical, *The Handmaid's Tale* concludes with "Historical Notes" which parody the desire for historicity and authenticity uncontaminated by fictional elements. At the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the "Historical Notes" present a transcript entitled "Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*" (HT 312).

Throughout both *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, names as well as faces disrupt the fiction/autobiography dichotomy. Paul de Man asserts that what makes autobiography seem referential is "a single subject whose identity is defined by the uncontested readability of his proper name" (de Man 1984: 68). What complicates the relationship between autobiography and fiction in Atwood's work is the instability of names, which continually shift, frustrating the reader's desire to locate a single, proper name. In his discussion of autobiography, Derrida argues that the structure of the proper name initiates a process of exchange, a winning and losing, a giving and taking away of names. By turning the proper name into a common name, Derrida argues, one simultaneously establishes and relinquishes the proper name. Derrida claims that "One takes the risk of losing one's name by winning it, and vice versa" (Derrida 1985: 77). *The Handmaid's Tale* opens with an exchange of names. Describing the handmaids who lie on their beds and lip-read rather than speak, Offred remarks, "In this way we exchanged names, from bed to bed: Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June" (HT 14). The indirect form of communication suggests that while some names may be given, some may be lost; while some may be named, some may be misnamed.

In his essay on autobiography, Paul Hjartarson contends that Atwood's heroine, Offred, is nameless, since her name is a patronymic comprising the possessive preposition "of" and a man's name, "Fred" (Hjartarson 115). Indeed, the desire of the Gilead regime to remove names is as strong as the desire to remove faces. Just as the rulers of Gilead try to eliminate mirrors, reflections of faces, so they attempt to erase names. Offred explains, "the names of shops were too much temptation for us. Now places are known by their signs alone" (HT 35). Nevertheless, Gilead never manages to eliminate names completely and Offred never becomes entirely nameless. Instead, Offred enters into a process of giving and taking away names, of dismembering and remembering names. The shifting of names conveys the impossibility of tracing any originary, referential name.

At the end of Atwood's novel the "Historical Notes" indicate that Offred's name is taken away, replaced by a patronymic. What would have been the heroine's last name in the pre-Gilead period becomes her first name in the Gilead period. Thus, the common or improper name becomes replaced by the proper name, which is itself improper, since it is not "propre," her own.⁵ As the "Historical Notes" further explain, the names were taken by the handmaids when they entered a particular commander's household and were "relinquished by them upon leaving it (*HT* 318). The name "Ofglen" becomes a signifier whose signified continually shifts. When Offred meets a woman who calls herself "Ofglen," Offred remarks, "of course she is, the new one, and Ofglen, wherever she is, is no longer Ofglen . . . That is how you get lost, in a sea of names" (*HT* 295). Furthermore, the very process of naming displays an instability which frustrates the reader's attempt to locate any one system of naming. While the narrator becomes known by her patronymic, "Offred," her friend becomes known by "Moira," and the aunts are called by "names derived from commercial products" (*HT* 321).

The name "Offred" itself becomes a circulating signifier, which not only shifts from person to person but which in and of itself displays an incessant shifting. Although the narrator's name may be divided into the possessive preposition "of" and the name "Fred," "Offred" may be further dismembered into another preposition, "off," and the adjective, "red." Indeed, throughout Atwood's novel the adjective "red" becomes instrumental in the process of giving a face to a name. At the beginning of the novel Offred, relating that "everything except the wings around [her] face is red," adds, "I never looked good in red. It's not my colour" (*HT* 18).⁶ When she looks in the mirror, Offred sees herself as "some fairytale figure in a red cloak . . . [a] Sister, dipped in blood" (*HT* 19).

As *The Handmaid's Tale* progresses, Offred becomes fascinated with the adjective "red" as a signifier which disrupts the signifier/signified, sign/referent correspondences. Describing the red tulips in Serena Joy's garden and the red smile of the hanged man, Offred remarks, "the red is the same but there is no connection" (*HT* 45). It is precisely the connection between sign and referent which "red" disrupts. The connection between the red of the tulips, red smile of the corpse and the "red" in Offred's name thus creates a disjunction between the name, the signifier, and the bearer of the name, the signified. As Cynthia Chase notes, the proper name is like a code whose message is missing; the name has no meaning apart from the unique individual it signifies. Although the proper name seems to exist outside the network of common nouns in language, it may become contaminated through a pun or rhyme, such as the "Offred" / "off-red" connection, which links the name with a common noun. Rhymes which link the proper name to a common noun or adjective, Chase argues, "give a face to a name," "make a description from inscription" (Chase 108).

AS ATWOOD'S NOVEL PROGRESSES, the giving and taking away of names becomes inextricably linked with the giving and taking away of faces. While names replace faces, faces replace names in a series of metonymic substitutions. In his essay, "Autobiography As De-Facement," Paul de Man argues that it is the figure of prosopopoeia which characterizes autobiography. Beginning with the etymology of the term, *prosopon poien*, "to confer a mask or face," de Man describes the figure of prosopopoeia as investing a name with a face (de Man 1984: 76). Indeed, what de Man calls "the giving and taking away of faces" comprises most of Offred's narrative. The exchange of names which opens Atwood's novel operates through a reading of the face which substitutes the seen for the heard. By lip-reading, the handmaids replace the silenced voice with the movements of the mouth from which the voice emanates. Thus, the handmaids must read the figure, the face, in order to read the name. Just as the handmaids lip-read, so the reader of Atwood's work must read the lips as a figure which continually crosses the boundaries between the exterior figure conveying the message and the interior message conveyed. One of the most prevalent images in *The Handmaid's Tale* is that of the crimson tulips. Not only do "tulips" and "two lips" become linked by a phonological similarity, but they also become linked by a similar tropic structure. The figure of metaphor, de Man notes, depends upon the relation between inside and outside. Like the two lips, the tulips become what de Man calls a metaphor of a metaphor (de Man 1979: 37). Offred describes the tulips as "chalices" which are "empty" and will eventually turn themselves inside out, just as the interior message of metaphoric substitutions moves inside only to move outside again.

Offred's fascination with lip-reading begins early in the novel. Just before Serena Joy replaces a name with a face, Offred, unable to see Serena Joy's face, substitutes part of the body she can see for part of the face which in turn becomes substituted for the whole face. Relating that she "wasn't looking at Serena Joy's face, but at the part of her [she] could see," Offred asserts that Serena Joy's fingernail was "like an ironic smile . . . like something mocking her" (HT 24). The simile prefigures the red smile of the corpse, which later becomes linked with the tulips. Offred thus describes the blood which stains the white sack covering the head of a man who has been hanged on the wall:

the red smile is the same as the red of the tulips in Serena Joy's garden, towards the base of the flowers where they are beginning to heal (HT 43).

By describing the stain as a smile, Offred's words give a face to the lifeless corpse whose face has been blanked out, covered over with a white bag. Not only does Offred's description give life to the corpse but it also gives life to the tulips through the figure of personification. Thus, Atwood introduces a chiasmic figure which

crosses the boundaries between life and death, the literal and figurative. The very wound which suggests the death of the hanged man brings the flowers to life, for Offred's simile, comparing the red blood of the corpse to red of "the flowers where they are beginning to heal" (43), personifies the tulips.

While Atwood gives face to the lifeless, she simultaneously de-faces, undermining the figurative with the literal. No sooner does Offred's simile introduce the figure of prosopopoeia than her words undo that figure:

The red is the same but there is no connection. The tulips are not tulips of blood,
the red smiles are not flowers, neither thing makes a comment on the other.
(HT 43)

In these lines we hear, not an allusion to but rather an echo of Sylvia Plath's "Tulips," the kind of intertextual echo which, John Hollander argues, is itself a type of figuration. As Hollander demonstrates, such literary echoes are in fact metaphors for literary allusion. "Actual quotation," Hollander writes, "is represented or replaced by *allusion*, which may be fragmentary or periphrastic." Similarly, echo substitutes for allusion just as allusion does for actual quotation. Echo is a more faint, shadowy version of allusion, presenting scattered fragments which are not so much heard as overheard (Hollander 64). I would argue that Atwood's revision of Plath's text belongs to the whole tropic structure of figuration and disfiguration. In Atwood's text we do not hear an actual quotation or immediately recognizable allusion to Plath. Instead we may identify a similar mode of figuration which resounds between the two texts, a similar substitutive operation within which the same tulip image circulates.

Sylvia Plath opens "Tulips" with the speaker's words, "I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses/and my history to the anaesthetist and my body to surgeons" (160). After the subject of Plath's poem becomes divested of her name, she then becomes, like the heroine of Atwood's text, divested of her face, disfigured by the figure of autobiography, prosopopoeia:

They have propped my head between the pillow
and the sheet-cuff
Like an eye between two white lids that will
not shut. (160)

As the head becomes an eye, the subject becomes part of the room's face. The metonymic substitution of an eye for the subject's head inaugurates a whole series of substitutions which personify, give face to, the room and at the same time de-face the subject in the room. As Plath's poem progresses, the subject shifts from a seeing eye to an "I" who is seen. The speaker's words, "now I am watched" begin a long description of defacement:

And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut
paper shadow

Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of
the tulips,
And I have no face, I have wanted to efface
myself. (161)

Plath's image of the eye which initiates a play between figuration and disfiguration is reflected in the eye image of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Just as Plath introduces the staring eye to personify the tulips and deface the subject of her poem, so Atwood uses the eye image to personify, give face and deface. When she describes her room, Atwood's heroine, Offred, remarks that a blank space in the center of her white ceiling has been "plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out" (HT 17). In Offred's description the image of the eye engenders simultaneously the emergence of a face and also a defacement. Atwood personifies the ceiling at the same time as she covers over the ceiling's face with white plaster like the white bags covering the faces of the hanged bodies.

DURING THE COURSE of Atwood's novel language both disfigures and is itself disfigured. The narrator describes the handmaids' conversations, the "clipped whispers" as "amputated speech" (HT 211). Addressing the reader, Offred apologizes for her "limping, mutilated story" which is "in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force" (HT 251). Yet Atwood disfigures the very figure of disfiguration by forcing the reader to read the disfiguration literally, or leterally, to the letter. When she plays a Scrabble game with the Commander, Offred arranges her letters to form the word "limp" (HT 149). Similarly, the bodies of victims from a Men's Salvaging hang from hooks which disfigure. The hooks, however, become signifiers which not only disfigure but which are themselves figured and disfigured. Offred observes that "the hooks look like appliances for the armless. Or steel question marks, upside-down and sideways" (HT 42). Through the figure of the simile the hooks become part of a disfigured body and then become part of a language, punctuation which is disfigured, turned "upside down."

The specular play between naming and misnaming, facing and defacing, figuration and disfiguration in *The Handmaid's Tale* seems to prefigure the exploration of names, faces and figures in Atwood's later novel, *Cat's Eye*. In *Cat's Eye* a winning and losing of names becomes inextricably linked with the giving and taking away of faces. While women in *The Handmaid's Tale* slip in and out of names, women in *Cat's Eye* become involved in an exchange of names. The narrator, Elaine Risley, imagining that her friend, Cordelia, has changed her name, observes that "women are hard to keep track of, most of them. They slip into other names and sink without a trace" (CE 226). Further conveying a sense that names

in *Cat's Eye* shift like circulating signifiers is the narrator's assertion that her friends' names have become emptied of their meanings:

Their names are like names in a footnote, or names written in spidery brown ink in the fronts of Bibles. There is no emotion attached to these names. They're like the names of distant cousins . . . people I hardly know. (CE 201)

Atwood's dialectic of naming and misnaming becomes particularly interesting in a passage which describes an exchange of valentines. When Elaine Risley receives her valentines, she discovers a series of substitutions for the signature and the proper name. While some of Elaine's cards are not signed at all, some are signed with "Guess Who?", a question inviting Elaine to fill in the blank (CE 163). Other cards which Elaine receives "have only initials," fragments of names (CE 163). The cards which Elaine receives from girls, however, are "neatly signed with their full names, so there will be no mistake about who gave what" (CE 163).

ALTHOUGH THE NARRATOR, in one passage, describes the name "Cordelia" as having been emptied of its meaning, for most of Atwood's novel the name Cordelia becomes emptied of its meaning only to be filled with another. That the proper name is not a static signifier which corresponds only to the bearer of that name becomes apparent early in Atwood's novel. At the beginning of *Cat's Eye* Elaine, having mentioned Cordelia's name, remarks, "But which Cordelia? The one I have conjured up . . . or the one before or the one after? There is never only one, of anyone (CE 6). As Cordelia explains to Elaine Risley, she and her two sisters Perdita and Miranda are named after characters from Shakespeare's plays. Later in *Cat's Eye* Elaine, meditating on the name "Cordelia," wonders, "why did they name her that? Hang that weight around her neck. Heart of the moon, jewel of the sea . . . The third sister, the only honest one" (CE 263).

As *Cat's Eye* progresses, the name "Cordelia" seems to become both proper and improper, an appropriate and inappropriate name for Elaine's friend. The Cordelia of *Cat's Eye* does indeed display many of the characteristics of the Cordelia from *King Lear* who, Elaine notes, is "The stubborn one, the rejected one, the one who was not heard" (CE 263). Nevertheless, in Atwood's novel Elaine Risley seems to appropriate the meanings of Cordelia's name. The tendency of Atwood's characters, Cordelia and Elaine, to slip in and out of their names frustrates the reader's desire to fix a one-to-one correspondence between the Cordelia of *King Lear* and the Cordelia of *Cat's Eye*. Discussing her anxiety about encountering Cordelia at an art exhibition, Elaine remarks, "I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places" (CE 227).

The sense that Cordelia and Elaine are changing places emerges early in *Cat's Eye*. It is not Atwood's character, Cordelia, but rather the narrator, Elaine, who begins to resemble the Cordelia of *King Lear*. In response to King Lear's demand that Cordelia compare her love for him with that of Goneril and Regan, Cordelia simply utters the word "nothing." At the beginning of *Cat's Eye* it is Elaine who answers "nothing" to Cordelia's question, "what do you have to say for yourself?" (CE 41). The parallels between King Lear's daughter Cordelia and Elaine Risley's friend, Cordelia, again become disrupted when Elaine responds to Cordelia's "what do you think of me?" with "Nothing much" (CE 254).

At the beginning of *Cat's Eye* Cordelia "insists on always being called by her full name: Cordelia" (CE 72). Her insistence creates reverberating echoes of *Anne of Green Gables*, a novel whose heroine is similarly fascinated with names.⁷ Like the characters Elaine and Cordelia, in Atwood's novel, Anne becomes involved in an exchange of names. When Anne arrives at the Cuthberts, she answers Marilla's question, "What's your name?" by asking, "Will you please call me Cordelia?" (26). Bewildered by Anne's response, Marilla exclaims, "Call you Cordelia! Is that your name?", to which Anne responds, "No-o-o, it's not exactly my name, but I would love to be called Cordelia" (26). When Marilla refuses to call Anne Cordelia, Anne insists that the name which is seen is as important as the name which is heard. Requesting that her name be spelled with an "e," Anne explains that it "looks so much nicer" (27). Similarly, Elaine meditates on her name, remembering that she had "wanted something more definite, a monosyllable. . . . Nothing you could make a mistake about" (CE 263).

The character of Elaine Risley further becomes linked with Anne, for Anne not only calls herself Cordelia but also takes on the name Elaine. Hence, while Elaine and Cordelia in *Cat's Eye* slip in and out of their names, the heroine of Montgomery's novel slips in and out of the names Cordelia and Elaine. After suggesting that she and her three friends dramatize Tennyson's poem, "Lancelot and Elaine," Anne decides to play the role of Elaine and lie on a barge which floats down the river under the bridge. While Anne's three friends stand on the bank and watch in horror, however, the barge on which Anne is floating begins to leak. Anne's friends run for help, leaving Anne clinging to a bridge pile until Gilbert Blythe rescues her. Similarly, Atwood's heroine, Elaine Risley, falls through a frozen pond beneath the bridge while her three friends stand on the bridge watching. Interestingly, Atwood begins *Cat's Eye*, as Montgomery begins *Anne of Green Gables*, with the image of the bridge. Anne tells Matthew, "I'm always afraid of going over bridges. I can't help imagining that perhaps, just as we get to the middle, they'll crumple up . . ." (22). At the beginning of *Cat's Eye* Elaine Risley also refers to her fear of reaching dangerous midpoints, comparing the middle of her life to "the middle of a river, the middle of a bridge, halfway across, halfway

FORMING A BRIDGE between *Cat's Eye* and *Anne of Green Gables*, are not only the resounding names, Elaine and Cordelia, but also the echoes of "Lancelot and Elaine." We hear Atwood's echo of Montgomery's echoing of Tennyson's poem. Through a remarkable intertextual redoubling, the topos of winning and losing names in Tennyson's work reverberates in the texts of Atwood and Montgomery. "Lancelot and Elaine" opens with the story of a battle between two brothers who had met "And fought together; but their names were lost" (150). Paradoxically, the brothers' battle in which their names are lost gives a name to the jousts which engage Lancelot in a process of winning and losing his name. Upon discovering the skeletons of the two brothers, King Arthur finds a diamond crown on the nameless King's skull. King Arthur, after removing the diamonds, declares that one diamond shall be the prize of every joust and calls the tournament the "diamond Jousts" (151).

When Lancelot enters the joust, he becomes entangled in endless chiasmic reversals which cross between his game and his name. Guinevere tells Lancelot, "Your great name, this conquers: hide it therefore; go unknown" (154). Following Guinevere's advice, Lancelot decides to go unknown, to lose his name and thereby win it back again. Tennyson's poem closes with Lancelot's recognition that in losing his name to win it back, he has won a name which contains the endless chiasmic reversals of winning and losing. Lancelot thus meditates on his name:

Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain;
Now grown a part of me: but what use in it?
To make men worse by making my sin known?
Or sin seems less, the sinner seeming great? (196)

In "Lancelot and Elaine" the winning and losing of names becomes intimately bound up with saving and losing face, with facing and defacing. At the beginning of Tennyson's poem, Lancelot decides to lose his name in order to save face. Having lied to the King about his wound, Lancelot asks Guinevere, "And with what face, after pretext made, / shall I appear, O Queen, at Camelot . . ." (153). Later in the poem Elaine, "she that knew not ev'n his name" (150), replaces Lancelot's name with his face, "And all night long his face before her [lives]" (160).

In *Cat's Eye* the exchange of names similarly becomes linked with the process of facing and defacing. When Elaine Risley sees a poster displaying her name and face, she comments that she has kept her name but lost her face. Observing the mustache added to her face, Elaine remarks "It was a defacing, it was taking away someone's face" (CE 20). Nevertheless, Elaine, reassuring herself that one must win a face in order to lose it, concludes, "I have achieved, finally . . . [a] public face, a face worth defacing" (CE 20). The process of giving and taking away

faces continues throughout *Cat's Eye*. When Elaine Risley applies her make-up, she remarks, "who knows what faces I'm making, what kind of modern art I'm drawing onto myself?" (CE 5). She again worries that her face is defaced when Cordelia holds up a mirror to Elaine's face and exclaims, "Look at yourself!" (158). As Elaine notes, Cordelia's tone implies that "[Elaine's] face, all by itself, has been up to something, has gone too far" (CE 158).

As Atwood's heroine becomes increasingly tormented by defaced faces, visions of figuration and disfiguration not only fill her conscious mind but also enter her dreams. In one dream Elaine envisions "a head wrapped up in a white tea towel" and sees "outlines of the nose, the chin, the lips" (CE 250). Elaine fears that if she unwraps the cloth to identify the head it "will come alive" (CE 250). This dream recalls a figure from her waking life which turns on chiasmic reversals between figuration and disfiguration, life and death. When Elaine sees a performance of *Macbeth*, the play closes with Macduff throwing Macbeth's head on stage. It is a "cabbage wrapped up in a white tea-towel" which comprises the simulation of Macbeth's head (CE 245). Thus, a lifeless cabbage is personified in order to simulate the disfigured head which suggests Macbeth's death. The very figure which brings the cabbage to life simultaneously disfigures, deprives Macbeth of life. Yet the process of figuration and disfiguration revolves around a cabbage which must itself be disfigured before it figures and disfigures. The cabbage must literally be lifeless, one which "is going bad . . . getting soft and squishy and smells like sauerkraut" (CE 245).

As soon as Cordelia replaces the dead cabbage with a fresh, "brand-new" one (CE 245), she reverses the whole process of figuration and disfiguration. At the end of *Macbeth* the fresh cabbage does not hit the stage with "an impressive flesh-and-bone thud" (CE 245) but rather "bounces, bumpity-bump, right across the stage like a rubber ball, and falls off the edge" (CE 245). It becomes apparent that Macbeth has not died and that the fresh cabbage, which is not sufficiently disfigured and lifeless, has become deprived of the figure which gives it life, personification.

ONE OF THE MOST pervasive images of disfiguration in *Cat's Eye* is that of the half-face. Elaine imagines herself jumping off the bridge and becoming disfigured, "smashing down there like a pumpkin, half of an eye, half of a grin" (CE 155). Moreover, a chapter entitled "Half A Face" closes with an uncanny play between doubles and halves, figuration and disfiguration. At the end of the chapter Cordelia reads Elaine a comic book story about two sisters: one is beautiful and the other disfigured by "a burn covering half her face." The disfigured sister hangs herself, but lives on when her spirit goes into the mirror. Look-

ing for her image in the mirror, the beautiful sister sees instead a mirror image of the disfigured other. Yet the horror story disfigures the figurative by making the mirror substitution literal. Escaping from the figurative realm of the mirror, the disfigured sister inhabits the pretty sister's body. The pretty sister's boyfriend, however, breaks the mirror, an action which ends the whole process of figuration and disfiguration.

The comic book story suggests that it is not the burn but the uncanny doublings and dividings, the pairs and halves which constitute a disfiguration. Similarly, Elaine Risley's painting of Cordelia entitled *Half A Face* does not replicate the disfigured, burnt face from the comic book story but replicates instead the process of doubling and division, of figuration and disfiguration. As Elaine observes, her painting presents Cordelia's face as both a whole face and a half-face, a divided face and a doubled face. Elaine comments that her title is odd, since "Cordelia's entire face is visible" and behind her, hanging on the wall, is "another face, covered with a white cloth" (CE 227). Like the white tea towel covering the cabbage, the white cloth in the painting becomes a kind of "theatrical mask" personified by the face behind it (CE 227). Through the figure of prosopopoeia the white cloth is given a face at the same time as it covers over, defaces the very face which gives its life.

Elaine Risley's two paintings, "Cat's Eye" and "Unified Field Theory" similarly exhibit a play between the half-face and the full-face. In "Unified Field Theory" a woman's face is "partly in shadow," defaced by the light of the moon (CE 408). Yet the moon which defaces is itself defaced by the painting's frame, which cuts into the moon and leaves visible only the moon's "lower half" (CE 408). The process of defacing, of cutting the face in half, links the moon and the woman's face. Hence, what disfigures and defaces the moon paradoxically creates the figure, prosopopoeia, which invests the moon with a face. In Elaine's painting, "Cat's Eye," the subject's face is similarly defaced by a frame which leaves visible only half a face, "from the middle of the nose up: just the upper half of the nose, the eyes looking outward" (CE 407). A mirror behind the half-face, however, reflects three full figures. While the half-face of the foreground remains in light, the full figures of the background become disfigured by shadow. The three figures in Elaine's painting walk forward, "their faces shadowed, against a field of snow" (CE 408).

Significantly, Elaine's paintings "Unified Field Theory" and "Cat's Eye," like the two sisters in Cordelia's story, become figuring and disfiguring counterparts of each other. The light/shadow, half-face/full-face dualities which divide Elaine's "Cat's Eye" in half find their counterparts in Elaine's other painting, "Unified Field Theory." While the foreground of "Cat's Eye" depicts a woman's completely illuminated half-face, the foreground of "Unified Field Theory" exhibits a woman's half shadowed full-face. Similarly, the background of "Unified Field Theory"

displays a moon's illuminated half-face, while the background of *Cat's Eye* portrays the shadowed full-faces of three full figures. Just as each painting in and of itself displays a ceaseless play between figuration and disfiguration, so the relationship between the two paintings initiates chiasmic reversals between the light and shadow, the full-face and the half-face.

The disfigured half-faces in Atwood's *Cat's Eye* echo the disfigured half-face of the oarsman in Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine." As Elaine, lying on her barge, floats down stream, her figure is covered, "all but her face," "that clear-featured face" (187). Whereas Elaine's beautiful full-face is visible, only half of the oarsman's disfigured face is seen from the bank. Tennyson thus describes the oarsman's disfigured face:

but that oarsman's haggard face,
As hard and still as is the face that men
Shape to their fancy's eye from broken rocks
On somecliffe-side . . . (190)

As the poem progresses, however, the guide's half-face becomes a full-face when he turns to see King Arthur and his Knights. Yet Tennyson further defaces the oarsman's face with a metonymic substitution of the eye for the full-face. Looking at the King, the "tongueless man" turns from the "half-face to the full-face to the full eye" (190).

JUST AS THE OARSMAN in Tennyson's poem turns from "the half-face to the full eye," so Elaine Risley in Atwood's novel turns the half-face into the full eye. In Elaine's "Cat's Eye" painting a convex mirror enclosed by an ornate frame reflects the back of Elaine's half-head as well as three other figures. Convex surfaces are instrumental in producing reflections of both light and sound. Repeating, yet distorting an audible or visible source, convex surfaces, Hollander notes, "converge echoes so as to make them louder and more noticeable than rebounds from planar surfaces" (Hollander 1). The convex mirror in Elaine's painting is indeed rich with converging resonances. In her painting we see the reflection of that famous and intriguing portrait of convex mirroring, "The Arnolfini Marriage." As the title of Elaine's painting suggests, the convex mirror of the painting's background becomes part of a face, an eye. The eye of Elaine's painting echoes an earlier reference in *Cat's Eye* to the mirror of Van Eyck's painting, a convex pier glass "like an eye, a single eye that sees more than anyone else looking" (CE 327). Like the mirror in Elaine's painting, the mirror in van Eyck's work is personified through an image of the seeing eye. Elaine's painting is perhaps an ekphrasis of all the intertextual reflecting echoes in Atwood's work.

The eye image which personifies the mirrors in *Cat's Eye* similarly personifies the mirrors in *The Handmaid's Tale*. As Offred goes upstairs in the commander's house, she notices that her face appears "distant and white and distorted" in the convex mirror which "bulges outward like an eye under pressure" (*HT* 59). While Offred gives face to the mirror through the figure of personification, the mirror defaces, disfigures Offred.

The relationship between facing and defacing, figuration and disfiguration, is integrally related to the relationship between referentiality and mirroring self-reflexivity. As Paul de Man argues, the process of figuration and disfiguration disrupts the referential/auto-referential opposition which has been mapped onto the autobiography/fiction dichotomy (de Man 1984: 68-9). The distorting mirrors in Atwood's work provide an example initiating chiasmic reversals between figuration and disfiguration. In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine's painting of the convex eye-mirror introduces the problem of the referential-auto-referential duality. Elaine describes her "Cat's Eye" painting as a "self-portrait, of sorts" (*CS* 407). Yet while certain elements of the painting do reflect Elaine's past, it becomes a portrait which undermines its own mode of self-portraiture.

Far from being a transparent reflection of Elaine's life, the painting, "Cat's Eye," constitutes a reflection and reworking of "The Arnolfini Marriage." Similarly, Elaine's work displays a convex mirror in an ornate frame. Just as van Eyck's mirror reflects figures who are not in the main picture, so Elaine's mirror reflects three figures beyond the frame of her painting. "The Arnolfini Marriage" is, in one sense, a self-portrait since the artist is reflected in the mirror behind the two main figures. Hence, Elaine's "self-portrait of sorts," by reflecting another self-portrait, paradoxically departs from the seemingly referential mode of self-portraiture. Elaine's painting is, moreover, an interesting reworking of "The Arnolfini Marriage." While van Eyck places himself as artist in the background of his painting, Elaine Risley places herself in the foreground of her painting, "Cat's Eye," and thus reverses the foreground/background, portrait/self-portrait division in van Eyck's work.

Elaine reverses a dualistic relationship of a painting which in and of itself destabilizes the opposition between portrait and self-portrait, between the referential and auto-referential. As Linda Seidel points out, van Eyck's work undermines the very authenticity on which it is based (Seidel 69). As do the "Historical Notes" in *The Handmaid's Tale*, van Eyck's painting functions as a record of actual events. In fact, the Arnolfini portrait performs much the same role as the household diaries used as evidence of the monetary exchange involved in marriage ceremonies. "The Arnolfini Marriage" records not only the marriage ceremony of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami but also such details as Giovanna's trousseau, which suggest a financial transaction. Because van Eyck's position as landowner gave him the power to witness and document legal transactions, Seidel notes, the bride's

father may well have commissioned the portrait as evidence of the marriage ceremony and the transference of dowry (Seidel 62-8).

Despite van Eyck's attempt to create a sense of authenticity, realism and legitimacy, his ambivalent position as both artist and recorder of evidence yields some intriguing contradictions. As she examines the Arnolfini portrait, Elaine Risley notices the words "Johannes de Eyck fuit hic. 1434" (CE 327). By placing his signature and the date above the mirror, van Eyck underlines the resemblance of the mirror to a seal of legitimacy. As Seidel argues, however, the "seal-like object" and signature draw attention to the unusual nature of van Eyck's form of documentation, since such records were normally produced by scribes. The signature has the effect of foregrounding textuality, for it depends upon our knowledge of a previous mode of reading and recording of events. It combines two seemingly opposite types of reading, a biographical, historical one and a more literary, narrative one (Bal 513).

Van Eyck's choice of the convex mirror for a legitimizing seal-like object introduces still more contradictions. The mirror reflects not only the marriage ceremony but also van Eyck witnessing and recording events. Any sense of the mirror as an objective reflection of events, Seidel observes, is complicated by van Eyck's dual role as an object in the mirror and the subject creating the mirror. Hence, van Eyck's signature and self-portrait, which emphasize his role both inside and outside the mirror, destabilize the interior/exterior, subject/object dualities suggested by the mirror's ornate frame. Far from being a closed mirror, the convex pier glass, Seidel argues, is an open one reflecting the viewer's gaze and the viewer's role in the production of the painting (Seidel 79).

In *Cat's Eye* Elaine Risley's description of van Eyck's mirror makes apparent distortions which further disrupt any authentication implied by the signature and the mirror's seal-like appearance. What interests Elaine Risley is the way the convex surface of van Eyck's mirror distorts:

These figures reflected in the mirror are slightly askew, as if in a different law of gravity, a different arrangement of space, exists inside . . . (CE 327)

In Elaine's reworking of van Eyck's painting the distortion of symmetrical reflections and divisions becomes important. As Elaine Risley observes, van Eyck's mirror creates a doubling of the couple being married, for the mirror reflects not only the backs of the Arnolfinis but "two other people who aren't in the main picture at all" (CE 327).

The Arnolfini Marriage does indeed exhibit a dualistic structure of doubling and division. In his analysis of the Arnolfini portrait, Derrida argues that the pair of shoes in van Eyck's painting form a kind of sinister *doppelgänger*, as each shoe is "strangely the double of the other" (Derrida 1987a: 374). Yet the pair of shoes off to the left of the painting is itself doubled by the other pair of shoes under the

mirror. Moreover, the double pair of shoes replicates the pair in the foreground of the painting, the couple being married. The two spouses, however, are themselves doubled by the other pair reflected in the mirror. Like the two pairs of shoes separated by the foreground and background, the two spouses in the foreground are set in opposition to the two figures in the background.

Elaine Risley's painting, "Cat's Eye," distorts the symmetrical division of van Eyck's work, for her mirror reflects an asymmetrical relationship between the one face in the foreground and the three sinister figures in the background. Elaine's painting, with its cat's eye mirror, both reflects and distorts "The Arnolfini Marriage," a painting which itself displays a distorting mirror. Thus, Elaine's "Cat's Eye" simultaneously reflects a distortion and distorts a reflection. It becomes apparent that Elaine's work not only disrupts the opposition between portrait and self-portrait, between the referential and auto-referential, but it disrupts the structure of binary opposition itself.

SIGNIFICANTLY, ATWOOD frames her novel with shifting structures of address which destabilize the sense of a fixed autobiographical subject. The first and last paragraphs which frame *Cat's Eye* display an ellipsis, an absence of the first person pronoun "I." While the last paragraph of *Cat's Eye* contains the pronouns "we" and "they," the first paragraph presents an insistent repetition of the pronoun "you":

If you can bend space you can bend time also, and if you knew enough and could move faster than light you could travel backward in time. . . . (CE 3)

As the reader progresses through the first paragraph of *Cat's Eye*, she might interpret the pronoun "you" as an address to the reader. Such an interpretation would be reasonable, given the prevalent notion that autobiography is a specular genre in which the writer and reader, the "I" and "you," mutually define each other. Atwood, however, frustrates the reader's expectation for any dualistic, specular relationship between the "I" and the "you." What undermines an interpretation of "you" as the reader is the sentence which opens Atwood's second paragraph, "It was my brother Stephen who told me that" (CE 3). By opening *Cat's Eye* not with the narrator's words but with her brother's words, Atwood defers the voice of the autobiographical subject.

A shifting between the "I" and "you" pronouns characterizes not only *Cat's Eye* but also *The Handmaid's Tale*. As Paul Hjartarson notes in his essay on autobiography, the "you" pronoun in *The Handmaid's Tale* becomes a kind of "mirror in which the 'I' finds herself" (117). Indeed, the narrator, Offred, continually introduces the "you" pronoun in passages which make the reader aware

of her complicity in the production of Offred's story. Addressing the reader as "you," Offred asserts:

By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you. I believe you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story. I will you into existence. I tell, therefore you are. (HT 279)

Atwood thus reworks Descartes' "Cogito, ergo sum," shifting the center from the "I" to "you," decentering the Cartesian subject.

While Hjartarson's description of the "you" as a mirror articulates the important role of the reader, his metaphor becomes problematic when he asserts that the "'I' finds herself" in a mirror reflection. Atwood's distorting mirrors suggest a kind of Lacanian process of misrecognition which frustrates the subject's attempt to "find" herself in either the "you" or a flat, two-dimensional mirror. What further disrupts any sense of an imaginary stage in which the ideal I finds its unity in the Other, the mirror reflection, is Offred's remark:

A story is like a letter. 'Dear you,' I'll say. Just you, without a name. Attaching a name attaches you to the world of fact, which is riskier, more hazardous: who knows what the chances are out there, of survival, yours? I will say you, you, like an old love song. You can mean more than one. (HT 50).

By affirming the plurality which ruptures the closure of the flat mirror, the direct correspondence between "you" and "I," sign and referent, Atwood's exploration of a text marked by openness and plurality provides an interesting point of intersection between her fiction and Luce Irigaray's feminist theory. In Irigaray's work a disruption of closed structures of address functions in tandem with a critique of the closed, flat mirror which reproduces man as subject and reduces woman to the other. Like the open, plural "you" in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the shifting pronouns in Irigaray's work display an openness and plurality. In a chapter entitled "When Our Lips Speak Together" Irigaray writes a kind of love letter which invites the reader to participate in a playful exchange between singular and plural pronouns. Criticizing the dualistic "I"–"you" structure of address which shapes the conventional love letter, Irigaray asserts, "You/I: we are always several at once." What Irigaray celebrates is a text in which there are "several voices, several ways of speaking [which] resound endlessly back and forth" (Irigaray 209).

SIGNIFICANTLY, NEITHER *Cat's Eye* nor *The Handmaid's Tale* closes with the centered I/eye. Instead, both works close with the figure of Echo, the voices which are silenced by oculocentric works. At the end of *The Handmaid's Tale* Professor Pieixoto affirms that the past is "filled with echoes" (HT 324). While "voices may reach us," Pieixoto asserts, the meanings conveyed by those voices are lost, for they are "imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come"

(*HT* 324). As Pieixoto concludes, such voices may not be captured by the eye, not even “in the clearer light of our day” (*HT* 324). *Cat's Eye* similarly closes with the image of echoes which the eye cannot see. Meditating on the stars, the narrator remarks:

If they were sounds, they would be echoes, of something that happened millions of years ago: a word made of numbers. Echoes of light, shining out of the midst of nothing. (*CE* 421)

By closing *Cat's Eye* and *The Handmaid's Tale* with reverberating echoes, Atwood decenters the central image of both works, the eye. In *The Handmaid's Tale* perhaps the most predominant image is that of the single winged eye. Not only does the eye constitute the central image of *Cat's Eye*, but it becomes closely associated with the center. In Elaine Risley's painting “Unified Field Theory,” a woman holds between her hands a cat's eye marble “with a blue center” (*CE* 430). Earlier in Atwood's novel Elaine describes the cat's eye marbles as clear glass with “a bloom of colored petals in the center” (*CE* 66). The image of a flower in the center of the eye recalls the central figure of Ovid's myth of Narcissus and Echo. Indeed, Narcissus is emblematic of the centre, for he not only becomes an ideal I, unified with his mirror image, but he later becomes transformed into a flower with “white petals clustered round a cup of gold” (Ovid III. 530). The association between the stars and the eyes in *Cat's Eye* further recalls Narcissus, for Ovid describes the eyes of Narcissus as a “twin constellation” (III. 420).

The figure of Echo occupies an eccentric position in Ovid's story. In contrast to Narcissus' unified subjectivity, Echo exemplifies split subjectivity, for her body becomes dismembered, scattered and fragmented, leaving only her voice behind. After she loses the power of speech, Echo may no longer inscribe herself as a subject in language:

All she can do is double each last word,
And echo back again the voice she's heard. (Ovid III. 373-4)

The figure of Echo suggests the impossibility of reaching a centre, an origin, a referent. While the words of Narcissus convey meaning, Echo's words form an opaque language whose meanings are endlessly deferred. Like the voice of Echo, the deferred echoes of light at the end of *Cat's Eye* rupture a correspondence between sign and referent.

Cat's Eye and *The Handmaid's Tale* both remain open-ended. Not only do the echoing voices at the end of each novel suggest a process of infinite regression, but the voices engage what Derrida calls “the ear of the other.” In his discussion of autobiography, Derrida argues that a text which acknowledges the reader's role in both hearing and producing the writing, introduces itself as a text which “awaits its own form” (Derrida 1985: 51). Indeed, in Atwood's work the play between “I” and “you” pronouns, between singular and plural, between voices and silences,

continually involves the reader's participation in both hearing and producing the text.

To focus only on Narcissus, on the seen, is to silence the "other" of Ovid's myth, the resounding voice of Echo. Similarly, to see only the centered I/eye in Atwood's work is to see only half a face. The reader of Atwood's work who constructs only a face and not a voice *de-faces*. During the course of Atwood's poetry and prose the gaps, silences and fragments of faces engage the reader in a process of constructing a face and a voice just as Elaine in Tennyson's poem constructs the absent face and voice of Lancelot:

so the face before her lived,
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence (160)

What emerges in Atwood's work is a sense of silenced voices, like that of the mute oarsman in "Lancelot and Elaine," voices which clamour to be heard.

NOTES

- ¹ Paul de Man articulates the chiasmic reversals of facing and defacing, figuration and disfiguration in his essay, "Autobiography As De-Facement" in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984).
- ² Sherrill Grace argues that Atwood affirms "the need to accept and work within [dualistic oppositions]." Moreover, Grace writes that in Atwood's work "violent duality is a function of the creative act." *Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood* (Montreal: Véhicule, 1980): 134.
- ³ In her review of *Cat's Eye*, Judith Thurman assumes that Atwood's novel belongs to the genre of transparent autobiography. Thurman refers to Atwood's heroine, Elaine Risley, as a figure "whose resemblance to Atwood, like peekaboo lace, is too coy to be elegant." Judith Thurman, "When You Wish Upon A Star," *The New Yorker*, (29 May 1989): 108-10.
- ⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Autobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie V. McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).
- ⁵ See Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's discussion of proper and improper names in their essay, "Ceremonies of the Alphabet: Female Grandmatologies and The Female Autograph," *The Female Autograph*, ed. Domna Stanton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- ⁶ Elizabeth van Berkel articulates the punning on Offred's name and the adjective "off-red" in her essay "Language As A Room of One's Own" (unpublished).
- ⁷ I am grateful to Joan Givner for reminding me of the names Cordelia and Elaine in *Anne of Green Gables*.

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SUBTEXTS

Susan Ioannou

Imagine words are snow we crawl under
and scratch at matted ice for crocuses.

Or, flattened on our backs in white,
that words fan angel wings.

And how could we forget
that clouds are words too?

Puff and blow
uncertainties into solid shapes,

wait —
How far will they glide?

But after shadows thin, and night
breaks through its first star,

throw off snow and run, wondering
what if white words burn?

OARS

Erin Mouré

WHEN I AM in trouble, as I was last night, I imagine
walking with you. Just that, walking with you. Together
in the crowd of people moving forward off the sidewalk we
have just crossed Sherbrooke. I am in trouble & I sense
your arms close to mine, the length & sureness of your
stride. I gaze ahead & walk onward with you beside me.
You, to whom for months I have not spoken. You are the
voice from my right cortex, seized & projected outside of
me to my left side. We are walking up University, turning
east onto Milton. Famous street names don't attract our
attention. I am in trouble. We are walking. We have
turned up onto Park Avenue, the streetlights illuminating
us, orange.



ALL THE PLACES we have been will never equal the places we have not. Certain streets with harsh traffic at this hour, "rush" hour. Your arm touches mine, unintended, we are walking, serious, having laughed & now ready for this seriousness. Palm trees & don't try to buffalo me. People in the restaurants are drinking, their glasses shine in the window, yellow, invitational, serene at this hour. We get into the small boat, stowing our gear under the seats, beside the nets & rough floats. The surface of water beckons. We are going onward, past this point of land. The orange haze of streetlight over us invents new routings. Without making this decision, we go on. Our arms pull the oars up into the oarlocks.



WHERE YOUR ARM attaches to your shoulder, disappears into the bone, a small light. I think I see it thru your jacket, & watch it dance when you speak, marking the spaces with your hands, the spaces between ideas, or rests, as in music. We walk together & you talk & the buildings pass. Lights burn on in these buildings, no matter. This time we are not laughing, but have laughed, in recent minutes, & still feel this laughter. It is a simple moment. We keep walking, without making this decision. Our legs carry us. The long bones are buoyant inside the sea of the body. Street lights have just come on.



LAURA GOODMAN SALVERSON

Her Father's "own true son"

Barbara Powell

Laura Goodman Salverson has been known primarily as a minor, ethnic, regional writer admired for her portrait of Icelandic immigrants in her novel *The Viking Heart* and for her autobiographical revelations of life in Winnipeg at the turn of the century in *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*. But her writings are more than regional accounts of immigrant experience; they mask great depths of feeling, often recounting in metaphoric language hurts too deep to name. Her *Confessions*, according to Kristjana Gunnars, speaks of a "wounded self," a divided self that strives unsuccessfully to unite the author into a coherent individual.¹ Gunnars explains that Salverson's wounds were two: she was different for reasons of both gender and ethnicity. The first of these was a greater barrier to becoming a confident writer. She could succeed as a writing Icelandic, for she believed that writing came naturally to such an intellectual race. Once she learned English, then, she wrote to justify her Icelandic people to the North American public. She had more difficulty, however, as a writing woman. She never did learn an authentic woman's tongue to tell her own story. She believed in women's ability and accomplishment, but also seemed to think that only men could write books. Salverson's goal in writing was to write like a man; to be her cultured literate father's "own true son."²

She was always proud of her Icelandic heritage. She grew up hearing her parents read and recite folktales, sagas, and verse in Icelandic; her father was a well-known writer for North-American Icelandic-language publications. After she discovered the public library in Duluth, Minnesota, however, her driving ambition was to emulate her father, but to do so by writing in English, a language she did not learn until the age of ten. This goal proved difficult for her, restricted as she was by poverty and the limiting expectations of others; no one in her family even attended her high school graduation, and few expected her to write. Against the background of hard domestic work and constant wandering, even once she married, Salverson struggled to express in literature the nobility of her Norse ancestors

and fellow immigrants, whom she defended against the prejudice of other Canadians.

The result was some fame in North America and Europe. She won the Governor-General's Award twice, and was awarded a gold medal for literary merit from the Paris Institute of Arts and Sciences. But this fame could not redress the wrongs suffered by her family, so reduced financially and socially in the New World, and it came at the price of the scorn of her fellow Icelandic immigrants. Gunnars explains: "The tragedy of Salverson's life as an Icclander is made up of one misery and failure after another, culminating in severe disapproval by her own people of what she has written" (151). Her people disapproved because she wavered from realism into romance — to Salverson the only mode possible for expressing her lofty sentiments about her Icelandic ancestry.

She struggled even more with the notion of gender than that of ethnicity in what she called "book-making." Choosing to write forced her into what she saw as men's linguistic world of artistic creation. She used her talents in this world not only to defend her fellow Icelanders, but also to champion the cause of women and rail against their domestic enslavement. Her comments on her ethnic background indicate only her pride in her noble Norse heritage;³ her comments on her gender suggest that it, on the other hand, was a hindrance. She could easily see the value of her ethnic "otherness" as she identified strongly with all that was admirable about Icelanders, but there was little to admire in the situations of many women. Because she "was raised in a domestic atmosphere of erudition and culture"⁴ Salverson relied more on the conventions of her Icelandic forebears than on the evocation of womanly experience, even when writing about women. She often writes of feminine experience, then, with a masculine language. This presumes, of course, that men and women use language differently, and poses the question of just what the differences between men's and women's language are.

In recent decades psychologists and linguists have begun to assemble some answers. Carol Gilligan opened one aspect of the discussion, postulating "a different voice" for women. She writes:

The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the differences in their voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation. By positing instead two different modes, we arrive at a more complex rendition of human experience which sees the truth of separation and attachment in the lives of women and men and recognizes how these truths are carried by different modes of language and thought.⁵

Jennifer Coates transfers the discussion to the realm of linguistics in *Women, Men and Language*, in which she assumes measurable linguistic differences between the sexes. These differences are not only in syntax, morphology, and pronunciation, but also in what Coates calls their "communicative competence," or each gender's "sense of what is *appropriate* for them as speakers."⁶ Girls learn to

use language differently than do boys, she says; in fact, "children are socialised into culturally approved sex roles largely through language. Learning to be male or female in our society means among other things learning to use sex-appropriate language" (133). Women therefore understand such behaviours as turn-taking in conversation differently, with men organizing their talk competitively, women theirs cooperatively (Coates 154).

Primary among the differences, however, is the function each gender sees in language. Anthropologist Ruth Borker explains: "Because women and men do different things in different places with different people, their talk differs. Women's talk is about people and takes place in small groups in private settings. Men's talk is less personal, more public, and often takes on the character of a performance."⁷ Men have also long been seen as "serious talkers," while women have been seen as idle, frivolous gossipers. Another way of viewing this difference, however, is to say, as Coates does, that "men pursue a style of interaction based on *power*, while women pursue a style based on *solidarity* and *support*" (115). Women's voices, linguists have repeatedly demonstrated, are muted voices, those less likely to be heard or read.

WHAT IMPLICATIONS DO THESE notions about the relationship between language and gender have on the career of a woman writer? How does an individual woman writer enter into the public literary domain? Salverson's writings exemplify some of the compromises a woman writer makes. She had hoped for success on a man's terms, and rejected the female mode of domestic discourse, exemplified by the gossiping conversations of her mother, in favour of the masculine, intellectual world of written ideas inhabited by her father, who wrote whenever he could out of spiritual duty and delight.

As a child Salverson had ample opportunity to listen to the intimate social exchange of gossip, or the personal, domestic language of all-women groups.⁸ Salverson characterizes her mother's gossip as thrilling to hear, but not intellectually serious. She writes in her *Confessions*: "Someone was always popping in from the country, or near-by villages, with tales strange and varied."⁹ Instead of using the women's talk she overheard to define herself as part of the women's social group, Salverson considered the gossip as a source for the novels she wrote. She loved to hear stories of the neighbours, "It made me prick up my ears more avidly than before when some gossip dropped in for a cheering cup" (*Confessions* 157), because in the stories she overheard she discovered not her role as a woman, but her role of the recorder of the demons in the human heart. In her novels she used the gossip and stories her mother and aunts told, but always placed them in the intellectual, idealistic framework assumed by her father in his writings.

Despite her relishing of many women's gossiping tales, she admires much more women who avoid the talk of women about private lives. Her aunt Haldora, for example, ran a private maternity hospital in Duluth. There she cared for and delivered the babies of women from all sorts of circumstances, including the most sordid and degraded. Salverson equates Haldora's linguistic control with the presumed "insignificance" of the details of the women's plights: "For gossip and small talk she had no taste, and this indifference to insignificant details was extended to all those unimportant matters that clutter up most people's lives" (*Confessions* 77). Salverson, too, hoped to be above recording the personal and, especially the sexual details of life. She continually decries frank writing about sexual passion and activity in modern popular fiction: "I am even more aware and deeply concerned by that awariness [*sic*] that very few of our people seem to care that the greatest of our human arts is being daily degraded to the level of peep-shows — curious prying into the decadent minds of decedant [*sic*] creatures."¹⁰ She, like many nineteenth-century American women writers, represses the importance of these sexual feelings, choosing not to comment on what may be of the greatest personal importance.¹¹

Although she does use some of the stories she heard at Aunt Haldora's hospital, she tells them more as cautionary tales of women seduced and abandoned. She explains that her decision not to use sexual material does not stem from ignorance: "Any single week in my aunt's hospital would have supplied me with material for six turgid novels" (*Confessions* 402). Instead she seems to see gossip as harmful, for when the mother of one of her friends gave birth to a deformed baby who later died, she reports ironically on the sinister gossip and its function in the women's group: "Buzz, buzz, buzz, wherever two or three gathered" (*Confessions* 291).

While Salverson herself derides gossiping women, she does put some words of defense for traditional women's language in the mouth of wise old Illiana Petrovna, the matriarch of her novel *The Dark Weaver*. Illiana Petrovna speaks to her granddaughter Greta, telling her the family stories: "This is not gossip. . . . Human history, little rabbit, that's what it is. In such few, ineffectual words may be told the long histories of suffering women; of their years of heartbreak, and those rivers of tears that once it seemed nothing could dry. No, it is not gossip to pause and remember for a little beside one's dead."¹² The "stories" of which Illiana Petrovna speaks (she doesn't call them *gossip*, for the word has pejorative connotations for her) tell of the dark side of life, to which she feels practical women are far closer than idealistic men. Women's stories, far from affirming life, are of "heartbreak," her "dead"; later in the passage she speaks of people who have been "wronged," and "the sad weaving of human woe and misery." She tells of these sadnesses with pride, knowing their value in the histories of women. This dark side of life is that suffered by immigrants; it is the side which Gunnars says dominated in Salverson's account of her own life as an ethnic "other." The difficulties are all on the grand scale, the

sad stories Salverson contains and continues are of the sufferings of a race, of a generation.

Although Salverson writes often of human woe and misery in the stories of her characters, she is especially reticent in her writing about her own sad story, the very stuff of most women's gossip. Since she is, as Gunnars suggests, trying through writing "to unify a divided self," she strives to give a picture of confident wholeness to her high-minded ideal reader. Instead of confessing, even in her *Confessions*, she feigns an assumption that the reader would not be interested in hearing about her life of the heart. About her birth and childhood she writes "none of these things seem of the slightest importance" ("Sketch" 69). The account of her own courtship and marriage is given equally abrupt treatment: "I had decided on a much more ordinary career. I had met a breezy young man from Montana, who thought he could put up with me for better and for worse . . . In June 1913 I married George Salverson in the old Lutheran manse in Winnipeg" (*Confessions* 374). So is the birth of her only child, about which she says only: "There is nothing to say of my baby, except that the prospect bored me" (*Confessions* 375).

Salverson refuses to gossip with the reader about herself, denying the power of the story of her private life. Her reticence is ironic, because she says in her speech "What may We Expect from Literature" that literature comes from the heart, and speaks to the heart (5). She writes freely about her characters' hearts, but rarely her own. She is sister to other strong women writers who suffer a common dilemma, believing that a recipient of literary success must be a failure in her personal life. Ostriker explains: "That she [a strong woman writer] should succeed in both art and love might well seem to her, and to us, unthinkable" (81). Gunnars suggests that in avoiding the story of her personal life in such a brusque manner Salverson "ends up having displayed a wound [she] sought to hide" (150). The wound is the consequence of her womanly identity that would, she felt, prevent her from succeeding as a writer and a voice of her people.

THE OBVIOUS FRUIT OF a womanly identity and the unspoken sexuality is childbirth, but whenever Salverson goes beyond her tactful silence and mentions birth or babies anywhere in her writing, including her fiction, she soon mentions pain, suffering, and the burdens of motherhood. She often writes with anger about women's enslavement to sex, birth, and the consequent housework: "I thought of the millions of women committed to this sort of thing, world without end. To drudgery, and pinching, and those niggardly economies that stifle the spirit and stay all hope" (*Confessions* 291). She uses the subject matter of women's gossip, stories about marriage and childbirth, but with a kind of distaste and horror for the sorrows and dangers of motherhood. Childbirth in

her writings brings terrible unacknowledged pain to women, such as that suffered by Borga, heroine of *The Viking Heart*: “Borga lay across the bed tortured with pain that only women suffer. . . . This was to be a battle where the valor displayed might have honored any military field. A battle such as the pioneering mothers of our country faced again and again without hope of either laurels or praise.”¹³ Salverson does call birth a *miracle* once, but only after the child has died: “It was as if the maddened mother thought that by the warmth and love of her own heart’s blood she could give heat and life to the little inert form. But, not even to a mother does God grant this miracle more than once” (*Viking Heart* 134). In *The Dark Weaver* a male character reflects with masculine disgust on motherhood: “Queer wasn’t it, that civilized women should produce their progeny in gastric fits and tears” (48). The key word here is *civilized*, for Salverson saw the civilizing effects of culture, particularly literary culture to be far removed from the unhappiness of motherhood and housework.

Salverson rarely records delight in a new life, but only “misery,” as she suggests in her account of the comments of a woman who had just given birth: “‘Declare there’s no end to misery,’ she greeted me, freeing one hand from the infant she was guiding to her breast, to indicate a rocker near by. ‘It kills you to have them and it kills you to feed them. Declare, it’s misery all round’” (*Confessions* 131). Her own mother bore and buried several children, but nowhere in her writings does Salverson list or name all of her siblings. She remembers with pride her mother’s ability to tell traditional stories and folktales, feeling “horror,” on the other hand, for her mother’s role as the source of life in this reflective passage from her *Confessions* regarding her mother’s pregnancy:

Someone was always having a baby, or burying a baby. . . . It set up a kind of quivering horror in my whole being to have suddenly plumbed the alarming possibilities of the female body; to have forced upon me, unsought, the staggering knowledge that all the while that mamma sat quietly knitting and spinning a tale from *The Thousand and One Nights* for our cheer and amusement, her woman’s body, like a creature apart, was pursuing its own creative mysteries. (206)

Salverson refuses to identify with the “creative mystery” her mother’s body is pursuing, preferring to see her mother as “a creature apart,” relishing the story but not the prospect of the new baby.

Salverson throughout her life valued the creation of a story over the fruits of a mother’s role. Even as a child she preferred her father’s freedom of literary creativity to the limits of a mother’s care. She later records that once when a new baby arrived, she was required to wheel her baby (brother? sister? — she doesn’t say) around in a carriage. She writes, “Because babies bored me I fell to talking to my grey cat”; the cat heard all sorts of stories while the baby howled and protested the lack of attention (“Sketch” 71).

Whether talking to the cat or writing stories, Salverson felt that language and literature were her escape from the drudgery of everyday female life. When she was a small child, Salverson's father brought her a fairy tale book to teach her how to read: "It was not only my key to dreams, but a passport into a kingdom of understanding that has to do with charities to which the Marthas of this world remain forever blind" (*Confessions* 107). Despite her love of reading, despite her dreams, Salverson as a woman was still tied to the same domestic toil of other Marthas. She found her artistic voice when she wrote her first poem "The Creation of the Birds" as "the bacon frizzled in the pan," and accepted the Canadian Club prize from Lady Byng for her first short story wearing a "newly dyed hat" (*Confessions* 404). As a writer, Salverson yearned for the man's world free from the restrictions of worry over money and domestic concerns.

Salverson places her ambitions in her female characters, many of whom also yearn for some kind of artistic expression. Greta in *The Dark Weaver* has more practical career goals; she wants to become a nurse. Her sweetheart Manfred jokes with her about the new language she is learning, saying that she "sounds like a medical journal" when she says that "we already have ten patients in the tubercular ward and five . . . assorted diseases and two prospective mothers" (222). Implicit in his jesting comment is a man's judgement of a woman who strays too far, who wants to learn a new technical language, and a suggestion of just how hard woman must try to find a new language of professional accomplishment, even one tied to familiar female roles involving birth, babies, misery and death.

When her women characters in *The Viking Heart* find artistic expression impossible, they transfer their ambitions to their sons. Borga's hopes for her son Thor are representative:

For this was her son. About him from day to day she built her dreams. She had dreamed them once for herself, and she had learned how hard is the road of progress for a woman. She had often felt that had she been a man her opportunity might have been greater, or at least she might have realized more easily some of the ambitions she had had. . . . The world was made for men and only men could get on in it. (62)

The mad, muted Anna Hafstein couldn't get on in the world either, despite her talent. Her song, silenced in marriage, continues in the talents of her son, a gifted violinist. Hers was, Salverson writes, "talent broken on the wheel of life, a glory entirely wasted unless a wise providence had passed it on to the lame boy [her son Balder] with his weird bird notes and his love for harmony" (124). Both Thor and Balder become successes in the world, due in part to the love and support of their mothers. The bird song that so entrances Anna and her son Balder confirms her sense of entrapment. She sings along with the birds, but can't make her own song, trapped as she is in earthly concerns. Only the sons can soar.

SALVERSON'S FAVOURITE AUTHORS were Hugo, Tolstoy, Hardy and Shakespeare, whom she reads, she writes, "Not because it was smart, or elevating, but because I had begun to hunger for ideas expressed with power, wit, and beauty; to read for the sake of reading, which is nothing rare in an Icelander" (*Confessions* 349). Reading literature opened her mind to eternal spiritual values, to truth and beauty. She considered women writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Fanny Hurst, Willia Cather, and Edna Ferber "splendid storytellers," but criticized what she termed their hysterical, sentimental, and melodramatic lack of restraint. Salverson admired these writers to a point, but didn't consider their writing to have sufficient detachment to be enduring literature ("What may we Expect" 5). Her loyalties lay not with other women writers but with Icelanders; she felt that her attitude toward literature stemmed in part of the "ancient concepts peculiar to [her] race." To her, literature's intent is that of all of "man's cultural pursuits . . . the [creation] of a living and immortal voice" ("What may we Expect" 1-2).

It is probably not surprising that her favourite possessors of that lasting voice were male, and that she said of them "they were great artists but they were also great men."¹⁴ To her, only men had the leisure of time and mind to create great works of art. Salverson's father, even when the family was mired in poverty, would dress up in his Prince Albert and freshly polished shoes on a Sunday afternoon and write essays. Salverson admired her father enormously, despite his financial failures. She saw in him a kindred spirit, explaining approvingly that he "was a scholar at heart, passionately devoted to the sagas, and well-grounded in the antiquities. He was always a romanticist, demanding something more than dull, realistic details of obvious faults and incidents in poetry and prose. . . . He was devoted to letters and the language, and whatever he wrote was carefully and conscientiously composed" (*Confessions* 60-1). He is much like Ephemia's father in *When Sparrows Fall*, who selfishly retains a room in their cramped house for his writing, while his daughter Ephemia must sacrifice her education and take in boarders so that the family will have some income.¹⁵

Salverson, in turning from the burden of womanhood, identified herself with her father, since she shared his dreamy temperament and his love for writing. When she was a child he called her his "own true son," and Salverson responded by emulating him: "As early as this [her childhood] she "hated the restrictions of [her] sex and foolishly thought to evade them" ("Sketch" 69). He revered what he called "bookmakers," casting them, as Salverson herself would, in the masculine mold: "Again and again, lifting his tired eyes from some yellowed page, he had paused in his passionate reading to remark with worshipping envy that only a maker of books had the power to immortalize his age" (*Confessions* 237). Ephemia, the young protagonist in *When Sparrows Fall*, is modelled on Salverson's younger

self, and she speaks "peevisly" about becoming a woman, "betraying the peculiar distaste, bordering on contempt, which she entertained for her sex" (21). Salverson contrasts Ephemia's mother's and father's life-visions, a contrast she felt in her own vastly different parents: her father's idealistic dreams show Ephemia "a world all rosy red and sweet," but Ephemia soon realizes that her lot is inevitably cast with her mother, whose life consists of "dull, dead years stretching behind her like a desert trail" (54).

Salverson wanted more than a woman's life of silenced songs and endless dullness; she wanted her father's, or any male writer's, same intense devotion to "letters and the language." She strove for a language of power and authority, which she felt resided more in her role as an Iclander than in her role as a woman. This desire is most apparent in her choice of words. She constantly shows her drive to justify her Icelandic ancestry in her writing; the lexis of value surrounds her every mention of Icelanders. In a passage at the end of *Confessions* she writes about her ancestors and her own drive to write: "The Iclander rakes up the ancestral fires in search of some glowing ember of integrity and merit whereby to light his own spirit and quicken his heart with courage against the dark future. The ancestors were a sort of spiritual scourge" (*Confessions* 403). She associates the Icelanders with the qualities *integrity*, *merit*, *spirit*, *heart*, and *courage*. Writing well enough for her ancestors, who were a sort of "spiritual scourge" required, as she states later in the same passage, "courageous effort."

Her preface to the historical prose romance *Lord of the Silver Dragon* shows how strongly Salverson felt about these ancestors. The book was written to establish the noble Vikings as the first Europeans in North America; Salverson characterizes them as "staunch friends, generous sires, loyal husbands, and liberal masters."¹⁶ She calls the heroes of another romance, *Immortal Rock*, "the first white martyrs of America"¹⁷; the plot of the book assumes the authenticity of the inscription on the Kensington Stone, which Salverson regards as their memorial. Their mission in the New World, Salverson feels, was a noble one; their fate at the hands of the bloodthirsty Indians inevitable. One character, Gisli, reflects on the impossibility of communicating the true nature of their lives in ordinary language: "What tongue had the skill to interpret the peculiar sorrows which lay in wait for them in the coming dawn? How could one find words to impart the paralyzing effect of the experience to come? It was easy to state bald facts, but the subtle impressions which reach down into the very depths of consciousness defy common speech" (158-9).

SALVERSON CONSISTENTLY DEFIED common speech in her writing, as though any form of realism could not begin to portray her deep emotion. *Lord of the Silver Dragon*, especially, is written in a romantically exaggerated

manner, marked by stylistic extremes. She magnifies the heroic qualities of the Vikings, as in this heightened description of Leif Ericson, who "might, indeed, have been some vagrant god wandering the hills of home and momentarily come to halt beneath these old grey walls. The pale spring sunlight turned his flowing hair to gold, rippled down his armor, and flashed upon his jeweled sword. Lazily he leaned against a stone pillar, a smile upon his handsome lips, but the chill of arctic peaks in those remarkable steel-blue eyes of his" (30). The characters also speak in a pseudo-archaic fashion:

"So thou wouldst make of me a skald for the maids of Greenland? Truth, it were more agreeable to be my lady Thorgunna's boatswain!"

"Thou shalt be my thrall this day, never fear! 'Tis a heavy sea to the isles. But know, my merry wit, that there is a prudence in my mind. As thou mayest comprehend, the time draws near for gathering the eiderdown. In making this early visit I shall know the better how many maids to send to the picking." (63)

Salverson felt compelled to defend her choice of a strained and obsolete linguistic style in the book's preface, saying "it is not to be supposed that I have chosen the formal manner of speech because of any wish to endow the makers of Normandy and Norman England with an effete manner . . . A conscientious study of Norse mythology, and more especially of the marvelous laws of this virile people, reveals a deep and enduring love for dignity and honor" (9). She hopes to cast the *effete* aside, linking her ancestors' love for *dignity* and *honor* with their *virility*, perhaps unwittingly excluding her female ancestors. Her style considers of the ordinary in terms of the mythic, with the mythic usually ascribed to the masculine experience.

Salverson did write one small volume of lyric poetry, a common vehicle for women writers wishing to record personal, feminine experience. In her poetry mothers still suffer in childbirth; men are "Heedless of pain which ushered in their day."¹⁸ But Salverson acknowledges in the same poem that from her mother she drew "strength and life," and she writes in other poems about sweetly sleeping babies. Still, all is not sweetness and light in her poetry. Even the sleeping baby dreams of ravens, and lies as still as though he were dead ("Baby's Dream" 56-7). Love and sexuality have a dark and exploitative side too. In the poem "In the Mist" a "gleaming mansion" attracts "Maids adorned as flowers" and "Men as moths that flutter, / Near the candle light: / Or as hunters stalking." On the men's arrival, faith and love flee, "Saddened, shocked and grieving" (41). She casts in allusion and personification the same difference between exploitative sexuality and the ideals of faith and love she saw in life and plotted in her novels.

Many of Salverson's poems contain bird song, suggesting the poems were written in her own "singing" voice. Like Salverson herself, the birds often sing among images of opposites, usually in the natural world, such as mountains and valleys:

If I might stand upon the mountain top,
 And see the valley lying green below,
 Nor miss the song of thrush and lilting brook,
 Nor gold of daisy where the rushes blow — ("Fantasy" 50)

As a poet she strives to embrace both extremes, just as she tried to embrace both sides of her divided self. Sometimes she succeeds, and the impossible differences are reconciled: in "Garden of My Heart" she writes of a garden "High 'mid blue hills" where "Joy and Grief / Have knelt in common prayer" (35). Her poems say in metaphor what her writings often mask: Salverson felt herself at the mercy of a vast division, longing for glories far removed from earthly human life and its degrading prejudices and divisions.

Salverson felt that a writer could heal these divisions through the ennobling power of the word wielded by the "maker of books." Her career as a writer was shaped primarily by her identification with her father's ideals and literary traditions; she in fact credits his influence on *Lord of the Silver Dragon*, saying that his "knowledge and sincere love of ancient Norse literature has imbued in me a like if lesser fervour" (12). Her mother's example was not negligible in her education, since she did show Salverson the value of reading and loved to tell folktales to children. However, her mother gave her no sense of how to speak or gossip intimately about her own woman's life. Salverson remembers that her mother "was always helplessly inarticulate where her innermost sensibilities were concerned. . . . [S]he must have suffered mental agonies for which she found no words, and pride drove deeper and deeper into her heart" (*Confessions* 69). Salverson, too, appears deep and reticent to us. She seems to feel keenly her difference in both gender and ethnicity from writers she admired. Her response was to defend the value of her Icelandic heritage, but sometimes at the expense of her feminine one. Stine, the community gossip in *Confessions* speaks for Salverson and her ambition when she says of a woman who suffered monthly hemorrhages, "The devil knows it's bad enough to be a woman when your insides work the right way round!" (186). Salverson, I think, decided to bypass the workings of the insides altogether to concentrate on what she saw as the higher realm of ideals: extremes of bravery, honor, dignity, and devotion.

NOTES

¹ Kristjana Gunnars, "Laura Goodman Salverson's confessions of a divided self" in Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli, eds., *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing* (Edmonton: Longspoon/Newest, 1986).

² Laura Goodman Salverson, "An Autobiographical Sketch" *Ontario Library Review* 14 (1930): 69.

³ Gunnars notes that "Everything pertaining to Icelandic culture, language, behavior, thought and expectations, is the material that makes life difficult" (151), but I feel that despite the unhappiness of her family's adjustment to North American life, Salverson saw more of value than of shame in her ethnic heritage.

- ⁴ Terrence L. Craig, "The Confessional Revisited: Laura Salverson's Canadian Work" in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 10: 1, (1985): 82.
- ⁵ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982): 173-4.
- ⁶ Jennifer Coates, *Women, Men and Language* (London: Longman, 1986): 97.
- ⁷ Ruth Borker, "Anthropology: Social and Cultural Perspectives" in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, eds. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker and Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980): 33.
- ⁸ See Coates 114-18 for a brief discussion of gossip as a non-pejorative term for the personal talk among women, and Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Spacks explains the value of gossip for women who are excluded from mainstream discourse: "If gossip in its positive aspects indeed reflects moral assumptions different from those of the dominant culture, that fact suggests . . . its special usefulness for subordinated classes. It embodies an alternative discourse to that of public life, and a discourse potentially challenging to public assumptions; it provides language for an alternative culture" (46).
- ⁹ Laura Goodman Salverson, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (1939; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981): 118-19. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- ¹⁰ Laura Goodman Salverson, "What may we Expect From Literature?", unpublished speech. Laura Goodman Salverson papers, National Library of Canada, Box 7 f. 36, p. 2.
- ¹¹ See Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), for a history of women not writing what was on their minds. Ostriker traces the history of women's duplicitous writing in poetry, even giving one chapter the title "Divided Selves," writing about many women writers' divided loyalties as Gunnars has done specifically about Salverson's divided self.
- ¹² Laura Goodman Salverson, *The Dark Weaver* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1939), 219. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- ¹³ Laura Goodman Salverson, *The Viking Heart* (1923; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1947): 53-54. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- ¹⁴ "On Making Books," unpublished speech. Laura Goodman Salverson papers, National Library of Canada, Box 7 f. 21, p. 4.
- ¹⁵ Laura Goodman Salverson, *When Sparrows Fall* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1925). All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- ¹⁶ Laura Goodman Salverson, *Lord of the Silver Dragon* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1927): 9. All subsequent references will be to this edition. Note that the ancestors fill only masculine roles. This masculine bias inhered in the language of the time, and represents unconscious sexism that is often avoided today. It may also represent Salverson's own sexist belief that only men are capable of action.
- ¹⁷ Laura Goodman Salverson, *Immortal Rock* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954): vii.
- ¹⁸ Laura Goodman Salverson, "Mother" in *Wayside Gleams* (McClelland & Stewart, 1925): 36. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

HOMMAGE À ROGET

Robyn Sarah

for Jack Hannan

1

The word being given: to find
most fitly and aptly their true colours,
distinct, vivid, or fervent,
a peculiar art, we are driven
and the result of our prolonged exertion
an instinctive tact — his eye may chance
like a beam of sunlight in a landscape
of complicated and curious pieces

For giving proper effect to the fictions
at his disposal, the costumes best suited
to his success, no procedure
by those who are engaged may appear
with perfect exactness —
false logic, disguised, the assent
of the unthinking multitude
set off into a region
of clouds, the object of his search
so profusely abounding

By rendering ourselves we are rewarded,
as he who has best learned
has greatly increased the medium
by which we are enabled to glide along
under new and varied aspects

An exact opposition will be found
in double columns, of negation
or refusal, a separate branch,
the most cursory glance bearing to it
with the verb 'to cleave.'
'Nervous' is used sometimes for 'strong,'
to the nicer shades of thought
made upon the ear, and also
the vibrations themselves, giving rise
to the properties and actions,

needless extension, simple addition, references
 in the active or transitive, the names
 which custom has associated under the head
 of courage, to those specific objects
 suggestive of fickleness

A shade of doubt, a flash
 scarcely conscious of one body
 on another, acting and reacting, of which
 I have contented myself, the same rule
 may be safely left to form
 from the verbs already given

Solely on that ground: if they possessed
 an acknowledged currency,
 the power of putting into the mouth
 such as may be wanted on occasion,
 though avowedly foreign, the rapid advances
 to express new agencies, new wants,
 as those they so recklessly coin
 to appeal to such a standard, engaged
 in parallel juxtaposition,
 combined and multiplied by having
 the ground thus prepared, the exclusions
 by which we arrive so perpetually
 at any ground for despair

2

The word distinct, a peculiar result
 of our tact — like a beam
 of complicated fictions,
 perfect logic, the assent
 of clouds

Rendering the medium
 exact — a separate glance
 bearing to the nicer ear
 in the active or transitive
 of fickleness

A shade scarcely conscious,
 the same safely given the power
 to express new coin
 parallel and multiplied: the ground
 by which we arrive

THE POLITICS OF ROMANCE IN "THE HISTORY OF EMILY MONTAGUE"

Robert Merrett

THE MOST INTERESTING, because most problematic, claim that Mary Jane Edwards makes in her fine edition of *The History of Emily Montague* is that Frances Brooke expresses in her novel an "essentially positive view of the potential of the new British colony."¹ This claim is problematic for many contextual and textual reasons. In the first place, although on March 22, 1769 Brooke dedicated her book to Guy Carleton, the recently appointed governor of Canada, and spoke glowingly of the country's prospects under his governance, her optimism is rendered questionable by her personal experience of the new province and by the frustration of her political wish to affirm the Conquest of Quebec. While the dedication praises Carleton's "enlightened attention" for bringing about a "spirit of loyalty and attachment to our excellent Sovereign" and a "cheerful obedience" to British law (1), the text of her epistolary novel, in the course of plotting a retreat from Canada to England, necessarily embodies a much less positive attitude than announced by the dedication.

When Mr. Brooke returned to his wife and England in the autumn of 1768, he did so because his petition for a land grant had met with no more success than their joint campaign to establish the Anglican Church in Quebec.² Like many of their middle-class contemporaries, the Brookes opposed historical, social and political forces that they understood only partly and could resist hardly at all. Still, in the two years following Carleton's arrival in Quebec and before Mr. Brooke rejoined his wife, the couple must have had an inkling that the new governor would continue to implement the policies of John Murray, the former governor, who, if initially a benefactor to the Brookes, regarded them finally as opponents of his governorship and of his strategic and aristocratic sympathies for the habitants. Indeed, the novel's allusions to Carleton's political stance less celebrate his enlightenment than warn him against continuing Murray's appeasement of Quebec's French populace. Having written her book in Canada during the last months of Murray's term and revised it in England throughout the summer of 1768, Mrs.

Brooke had time to grasp why the British government was abandoning the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and was ceasing to trumpet the Conquest of Quebec.³

However, *The History of Emily Montague* upholds the Proclamation without predicting the 1774 Quebec Act: while mirroring the facts behind the reversal of British policy, it fails to grasp this policy. Instead it aggravates this political contrariness in ways that question claims for Mrs. Brooke's optimism about Canada. She more eagerly resists political and economic change at home than she promotes Canada's future. She defends the Crown and attacks the Court by favouring military, Anglican and rural over commercial, dissenting and urban values in simple-minded, conventionally middle-class ways.⁴ Her bourgeois reaction to aristocracy's growing political and economic power is salient in her emphasis on the freedom of choice for marriage partners: her stress on the right of lovers to choose mates without parental interference constitutes a rear-guard attack on Lord Hardwicke's Bill of 1753, which forbade clandestine marriages and stipulated the fulfilment of ecclesiastical, legal, and familial conditions. This Bill, originating in the House of Lords, was interpreted as a sign of the increasing power of the upper chamber over the House of Commons and as an attack on the social mobility and individual liberties of the middle class. Mrs. Brooke's insistent yet questionable attacks on arranged marriages signal the important because ultimately contradictory relation between politics and romance in *The History of Emily Montague*. Rather than looking ahead to 1774, she takes her bearings from the Royal Proclamation, hoping thereby to belittle the aristocracy's power in church, army, and society, a power epitomized to her by arranged marriages in the English upper classes.⁵

Narrative logic requires Mrs. Brooke to confront as well as to recognize the complexity of Canadian politics, but she writes of them with a vague, even self-exposing, sense of propaganda. Colonel Edward Rivers, her hero, hopes a "new golden age" will follow the "interregnum of government" after Carleton officially becomes governor (7). But hopes for the institution of British rule are beyond realization. When William Fermor, the military patriarch who is Mrs. Brooke's most serious commentator, leaves the colony, he testifies to the governor's "personal character" diffusing the "spirit of urbanity" through this "small community" (285). But he will not judge the governor's political conduct since Mrs. Brooke wishes to eulogize Carleton's personality by way of evading his adoption of French cultural values. Evasiveness leads her to both bury conquest motifs in her text and subsume politics to romance. When Indian women announce to Arabella Fermor, the patriarch's coquettish daughter, that the English conquerors of Quebec are their "brethren" (50), the theme that the aboriginal people are eager to have the British military system of land grants in full operation is somewhat implausibly reinforced. Fermor truly finds the "politics of Canada" to be "complex" and "difficult," but Mrs. Brooke derides this complexity by fancifully turning political

evasiveness into female social power. Arabella thinks her preeminence at the governor's balls and assemblies vitally important since "we new comers have nothing to do with" the "dregs of old disputes." Her amusingly egotistic diversion of politics to the "little commonwealth of woman" (98) alerts readers to some of the social and cultural contradictions underlying Mrs. Brooke's propaganda.⁶

When Arabella declares that "[o]ur little coterie is the object of great envy; we live just as we like, without thinking of other people" (101), her sentiments indicate the typically self-exposing contradictoriness of the tiny community which Mrs. Brooke celebrates. This community sees itself as exiled from England yet able to exploit English patronage. It also feels superior to the *habitants* while appropriating French diction and *bons mots* to its speech. Pretending aloofness to Quebec politics, the community imposes its culture on the conquered. Claiming to live in isolation from the larger community, Mrs. Brooke's English characters seek to dominate it, with the result that they depend on it unconsciously. Thus, when Arabella's courtship of Captain Fitzgerald is interrupted by the failure of the French women at the governor's assembly to obey English dancing codes, her protest that the "whole province" knows of her courtship is profoundly inconsistent (188). This inconsistency is more than a matter of unintegrated geographical and cultural concepts; it stems from Mrs. Brooke's political evasiveness. Arabella first compares Quebec to a "third or fourth rate country town in England (98); yet, on leaving, she prefers to live there rather than in "any town in England, except London" (281). Despite this shift of perspective, the theme of colonial progress stands up to neither contextual nor textual scrutiny. The aloofness to colonial politics analyzed in the context of the suppressed views of the *habitants* and governors shows how Mrs. Brooke encodes political ideas in ways neither historically accurate nor narratively compelling.

Historians of the years between 1763 and 1774 clarify what William Fernor admits to have been a politically complex era and help to assess Mrs. Brooke's ideological exploitation of romance. The necessarily dialectical stance of historians is instrumental to understanding the propaganda in *The History of Emily Montague*. For Kenneth McNaught, the Treaty of Paris was "an unqualified British victory" over French imperialism, but the Royal Proclamation effected the "most perilous conditions imaginable" for British control of North America by defining a "substantial minority nation" on the continent which exacerbated mercantile and military tensions in the empire.⁷ Although the Proclamation counted on an influx of colonial Protestants, the mere six hundred merchants who came to live among the sixty-five thousand Canadians served to strengthen rather than weaken the religious and cultural identity of the *habitants*. If the merchants wanted the Proclamation enacted through a legislative assembly, the establishment of English common law, and the exclusion of Catholics from public office, Quebec's demography meant that "assimilation was soon replaced by a quite exceptional toler-

ance" of the Canadians.⁸ Their compelling sense, moreover, that the Crown needed to find in Quebec a military resource against the turbulent New England colonies led governors Murray and Carleton to oppose both the merchants and the Proclamation by tolerating the seigneurial system and Catholic institutions. When the Quebec Act allowed the Canadian church to collect tithes, enabled Catholics to hold public office and endorsed French civil law, the assimilation promulgated by the Proclamation was officially suspended. However, as W. L. Morton says, the church's power remained strong on account of the "sheer inapplicability, in reason and humanity" of the Proclamation to the "circumstances of Quebec."⁹ Thus, shortly after 1763 Catholics served on juries and pleaded cases before the Court of Common Pleas. Five years, then, after the appearance of *The History of Emily Montague*, the British government decided Quebec's future was to be more French than English, a reversal Mrs. Brooke might have foreseen as she composed her novel. Yet she discounted political trends in Quebec in ways that expose the flaws of British colonialism and undermine her narrative authority. While she and her husband sided with mercantile interests in support of the Proclamation, her book does not uphold these interests. Besides wanting Catholic institutions taken over by Anglicans and reserved for the seigneurs, she wishes her military, genteel class both to dismantle and appropriate the seigneurial system of landholding. While Morton argues that the displacement of the seigneurial class was the Proclamation's most irreparable effect (154), Brooke holds that the French noblesse can be preserved and assimilated by a new aristocratic order modelled on the English hierarchical recognition of military and noble values (250).

DOUTLESS, NATIONAL PREJUDICE dulled Mrs. Brooke's contemporaries to the clash of political systems in the colony. But enthusiastic imperialism seems to have blinded her profoundly to this clash. Her contempt for the seigneurs (26) and for the French landholding system (140) together with her indulgent stance toward River's political fantasies about purchasing a seignury show that the novel's opposing wishes to demean and to appropriate French cultural forms prevent it from openly exploring the conflicts arising from the interaction of the European legal and political systems. Her hero's dreams of being "lord of a principality" (3) and acting "*en prince*" (85) by way of building a "rustic palace" for Emily (154) so that he can regard themselves as "the first pair in paradise" and his spouse as "the mother of mankind" (260) agglomerate sexual, religious and royalist fantasies, thereby concealing his wish to treble the value of his land in a country which, without these fantasies, he feels to be a "place of exile." Economic imperialism underlies Mrs. Brooke's refusal to describe the *habitants'* well-known complaints about the crudity of the British legal system.¹⁰ Their sense of outrage at imprisonment for debt and for jail fees, their anger at

the expense and infrequency of court hearings, and their humiliation at trial-by-jury in the face of huge numbers of capital offences are neither presented nor allowed to generate implications. The discrepancy between constitutional theory and political fact, manifest by the abandonment of the Test Act in the selection of Catholics to jury service as soon as 1764, is also suppressed by Mrs. Brooke's imperial and colonial mentality. Unable to admit the implausibility of the 1763 Proclamation, she chose to ignore that Carleton "utilisa au maximum l'élasticité des textes officiels pour redéfinir la politique anglaise."¹¹

Mrs. Brooke's political views are yet more equivocal because her colonial and imperial ideas are interfused with notions of class and social hierarchy. Her evasion of the complex alliance between the governors and the *habitants* is inseparable from contradictory reactions to the long-time residents of Quebec and the newly arrived merchants. While her ambivalence toward the *habitants* and merchants promotes Augustan gentility, her novel contains a wider range of unacknowledged ideological conflicts which imply that her narrative heedlessly allows political, social, and cultural contradictions to coexist.

If Mrs. Brooke's commitment to the Royal Proclamation and the Conquest of Quebec appears to entail the degradation of French culture and appreciation of the merchant class, this is not the case simply. While she advanced the cause of Anglicanism in Quebec by siding with mercantile interests, her presentation of Sir George Clayton, the newly knighted baronet with close ties to the city, is negative. Moreover, although Fermor criticizes the economic and political restraints placed on the American colonies, his sense that they are "naturally inferior" (241) is one indication among many that Mrs. Brooke despised those who were supposed to swamp the *habitants* and embody the Proclamation. Since her stance toward the *habitants* is erratically authoritarian and sympathetic, it recoils on British policy as enshrined in the Proclamation. Thus, if Rivers mocks the noblesse's consciousness of rank (22) and laughs at the deference to titles in the French community (42), Fermor's propagandistic claim that the noblesse should be assimilated by a new system of titular honours binding this class to English military officers is not self-evident (250). Fermor's views of French culture often undermine British policy. If his claim that French officers have been assimilated by barbarous Indians stresses the hollowness of French culture (271) and defies its enlightenment (141), he weakens his claim by arguing that the convents in Quebec should be limited to children of the noblesse so as to preserve the old French hierarchy (274). His inconsistency is clear in light of the novel's repeated criticism of the convents as agents of celibacy and depopulation. His inconsistency is made more striking by his attacks on English economic and agricultural policies which, he fears, will so depopulate the countryside that it will become an "uncultivated desert" (221). His admiration of Rousseau and rejection of this philosopher's major idea of primitive virtue (271-72), shows that, while Fermor stresses English political

dullness, he holds that his nation's culture is more enlightened than that of France. But the novel's action unravels this pretension. Despite the running debate about the worth of French manners, the characters always proclaim their refinement in terms of French gallantry. Arabella may dramatize herself by rejecting French gallantry (49), but she employs the phrase "British belles" earnestly (147). An ultimate sign of the appropriation of French modes is the closing masquerade at which Emily appears as a "French *paisanne*" (377).

BEFORE ANALYZING MRS. BROOKE'S ambivalence towards the merchant class and mercantile wealth, we should recognize how she translates Augustan sensibility into a mode of enlightenment that appropriates and bests French culture. For Mrs. Brooke, classical allusion, Horatian ideas of retirement, and religious Latitudinarianism coalesce into a myth of Anglican gentility. Although her characters are displaced from England by economic and political change, their familiarity with Greek and Roman letters betokens true Englishness. Rivers' knowledge of Virgil's *Georgics* (24) and Sophocles (38) confirms his gentility, and, if Arabella claims that Canadian scenery renews her appreciation of Greek and Roman myths (30), her mythical references pretend to a sensibility which exquisitely invalidates ideologies other than her own. Thus, she cites Horace to establish an image of female grace applicable to the Church of England but not to Presbyterianism or Catholicism (80). Far from steadily implying that the Canadian setting upholds classical mythology, Mrs. Brooke shows that her characters transport mythology with them as an aesthetic system for disguising and validating their distinctly Augustan notion of patriotism: her strategic mythology helps to uncover the political ideology motivating her romance. If deities reside in Canada, they do so mainly because of Emily. In her presence Canada is the habitation of the Graces (139), for she is Venus who is always attended by the Graces (23): in England Rivers sees her as led by them (355). But this romantic hyperbole is not restricted to Canada or Emily; Temple in England pictures his wife Lucy as Venus attended by the Graces (373), and, since England is supposedly alone among nations in permitting marital choice to women, the country is personified as Venus tended by the Graces (56). So, if Arabella projects nereids (30), naiads (301) and other "tutelary deities" (303) onto the Canadian scene, her refined posture with mythic sense is based on a nexus of political, class, and patriotic codes. In expressing a desire to address a poem to his "household Gods" (379) and in esteeming his "native Dryads" more highly than an "imperial palace" (407), Rivers shows that this nexus of codes implicitly affects or lays claims to a universal enlightenment in the name of a beleaguered rural, Anglican gentry.

To the degree Mrs. Brooke's gentrified heroes and heroines both disparage and appropriate French culture, so they are ambivalent about merchants and mer-

cantile wealth. Vulnerability to inflation rates of twenty-five per cent in the 1760s partly explains their affected differentiation between the wealth of India and North America, between the wealth of imperial trade and colonial expansion. Although Canada holds out to Rivers and the others the prospect of new forms of landed wealth, the resolution of the plot depends far more on the riches of the Orient. Throughout, the characters contradict themselves about Indian wealth because they wish to associate it with city business interests. While Rivers spurns the wealth of nabobs (5), he wishes his sister to spend her portion of two thousand pounds on jewels when she marries Temple so that she will "be on a footing" with a "nabobess" (179). Despite the insistence that love and friendship are richer than an oriental monarch (330) and Lucy's claim that the return of Emily and Rivers from Canada is worth more than an argosy's treasure (311), Colonel Willmott, the patriarch who confirms Emily's marriage and endows her with his wealth, is a nabob (388). Although Rivers' house, Bellfield, is contrasted with an "imperial palace," Willmott's oriental wealth pays for the new wing and completes the original design (407). As final evidence of the questionable displacement of imperial wealth, consider Arabella's contention that "no nabobess" could be as happy as Emily and herself in marrying such poor men as Rivers and Fitzgerald (348): Arabella deliberately underrates their wealth which, if not ample enough for English peers, is far more considerable at the end than earlier in the novel.

Mrs. Brooke's ambivalence about mercantile wealth is clear in the way her characters belittle Clayton: they scorn him to uphold their social superiority but they are no less mercenary. Rivers looks down on Clayton as a "gentleman usher" whose unromantic sensibility fits him to marry a "rich, sober, sedate, presbyterian citizen's daughter" (51-52). Clayton's "splendid income" (74) leads Emily to reject his "parade of affluence" (58), "false glitter of life" (95) and "romantic parade of fidelity" (320). Arabella is completely dismissive about Clayton's prospect of marrying a rich citizen's daughter whose dowry is fifty thousand pounds and who brings with her the promise of an Irish peerage (121). Arabella's contempt arises from her avowed hatred of the "spirit of enterprise" that drives men to keep on acquiring money and land (347). But, if she derides the peerage by claiming that she would not give up the man she loves to the "first dutchess in Christendom" (124), her lover not only is the son of an Irish baronet but also has five hundred pounds a year plus a military salary (284-85), which he advances by exploiting the patronage system to become "*Monsieur le Majeur*" (404). The discrepancy between renunciation of wealth and mercenary calculation is sharper in Emily and Rivers since they articulate most forcefully the myth of rural independence. Emily has "the genuine spirit of an independent Englishwoman" since she resists patriarchal hierarchy (116), and Rivers believes that "we country gentlemen, whilst we have the spirit to keep ourselves independent, are the best citizens, as well as subjects, in the world" (342). The romance between Emily and

Rivers, far from simply a matter of companionate individualism, entails an ironically ideological debasement of mercantile and aristocratic interests, as can be shown by an analysis of the lovers' financial attitudes and circumstances.

Rivers declares that love is "more essential, more real" than riches (266) and, if he admits that a "narrow fortune" is inconvenient, he sees mutual love as a "treasure" cancelling fortune's power over Emily and himself (264). Yet, familiarity with the "finest company in England" always reminds him there is a gap between his "birth" and "fortune" (297). Far from endorsing the heroines' view that "our whole felicity depends on our choice in marriage" (381) and far from consistently treating money metaphorically, Rivers is very concerned with money and profit. His acquisitiveness seems to be based on his sister's trust that "the future will pay us for the past" (311). His desire for affluence is evident in his wish to treble the value of his lands in Quebec by clearing and settling them (154). His attitude to his English estate is no less mercenary, despite his claims to the contrary. His redefinition of country gentlemen as the "best citizens" stresses the reciprocity of private and national profit: when he counts on "raising oaks, which may hereafter bear the British thunder to distant lands" (342), he focusses on the systematic integration of personal and public gain that will stem from country gentlemen supplying the materials for imperial ventures. Rivers' profoundly conformist ties to the crown and the constitution are reflected by his constant references to his investment in the funds. While he pretends that he wants a larger income only to entertain friends and to be philanthropical (341), the masquerade's costly elaborateness indicates his unacknowledged wish to imitate London fashion and urban luxury. The underlying acquisitiveness of Mrs. Brooke's characters is elicited by the changing references to River's income and by Emily's dowry and other financial prospects. With his four thousand pounds in the funds, probably yielding five per cent (58), and his military half-pay, Rivers is said to have an income of four hundred pounds per annum at one time (301) and five hundred at another (312). The wish-fulfillment behind these erratic figures also motivates Mrs. Brooke's endowment of Emily with a settlement of twenty thousand pounds which, setting aside her prospects and Colonel Willmott's improvements to the estate, trebles Rivers' income (323). Doubtless, an income of fifteen hundred pounds per annum does not lift Rivers up to the "finest company in England," but it does move him from the merely land-based gentry to the class which gained from the financial revolution based on London capitalism. Certainly, his ultimate income depends far less on Canada than on imperial wealth from India.¹²

THE CONFLICTING RENUNCIATION of and dependence on monetary wealth confirms that Mrs. Brooke's characterization says less about Canada's immediate future than about the economic plight of Britain's gentry.

For the oblique reliance on finance and on mercenary calculation draws out the submerged themes of the middle-class's sense of displacement and its compensatory dreams of living in a more highly differentiated hierarchy responsive to its ideology of romance and sensibility. But, if cultural flexibility is an illusion that reveals her characters' loss of social and economic power, the same is true of their apparently progressive attitudes to gender, love, and marriage. As their myth of adaptation to Canada subsides, their fantasy of progressive romance merges into a social reaction that strengthens the forces they have been supposedly combatting throughout the novel. Their romantic strategies, far from being a compensation for relative poverty, in the end merely disguise their wealth and its imperial sources. The novel's closure so completely resolves the conflict between romance and money, individualism and patriarchy, that, in addition to undoing the motivation of the plot, it emphasizes that Canada in the 1760s was neither a fiscal nor a social haven for English gentry. Her merely formulaic reliance on parental and filial conflicts about love and marriage recoils then on Mrs. Brooke's concealment of the economic motives spurring herself and her characters to return from Quebec.

The commercial boom foretold by the Proclamation did not occur. Instead, a decade of recession followed, with many business failures and much fiscal muddle caused by the colony's three currencies.¹³ Paper money was overvalued since coins were scarce, and the resulting speculation in French bills led the French émigrés to export huge sums of specie and the British traders to absorb such losses that the colony's capital growth was stunted. The Quebec economy did badly too because of falling agricultural prices as a result of overproduction and international barriers to foreign markets. While Mrs. Brooke links Quebec to other cultures and to the international scene, she prefers to see its place in the world through utopian or nationalistic eyes. The result is that Quebec's economic problems manifest themselves in transferred and covert ways: if her characters pretend that romance transcends economic power, their sexual and cultural codes prove otherwise. Their letters, far from conveying epistolary pluralism, are uniformly nationalistic and imperialistic. The illusion of plural viewpoints and of radical stances to gender mask economic and political values that are reactionary and unsympathetic to Quebec's colonial burdens.

The elements of economic and political reaction in Mrs. Brooke's concept of romantic sensibility clarify the way she uses cultural and sexual codes. Rivers perhaps best exemplifies the reactionary impulses of what could be seen as progressive and experimental attitudes. The "tender tear" he lets drop at Carisbrook Castle in memory of the "unfortunate Charles the First" (3) and his oblique lament for General Wolfe, for the "amiable hero" who "expir'd in the arms of victory" (5), show that Rivers joins Stuart nostalgia to the pathos of military heroism. His sensibility is self-dramatizing and backward-looking in a manner that renders his pretensions to gentility questionable. He wishes to be "lord of a principality" in

Canada to "put our large-acred men in England out of countenance" (3). His ambition to be the "best *gentleman* farmer in the province" (24) and his concern for "dominion" (26) indicate that his fantasies about property and power divide him from indigenous cultural codes. In fact he trusts quite blindly to the political hierarchy that guarantees his estate in England and his freedom to traverse Quebec with a *valet de chambre* to look for land to develop (71). The foreign cultures he encounters only confirm his nationalism and aggrandize his already superior sensibility. He praises the Indians' hardy lifestyle mostly to denigrate "effeminate Europeans" (111). He also celebrates the Huron's matriarchal government to attack Europe's denial to women of the rights of citizenship (34). If he says that women may disobey laws not made by them (35), his feminism is not radical. He wishes English women to have the franchise so that canvassing for a parliamentary seat will be more enjoyable for men like himself who believe that women's real power is sexual and who refuse to be a "rebel to their empire" (158). The limits of his radicalism are evident when he concludes that European women have just as much right as the American colonies to complain about political disadvantage: in the context of Mrs. Brooke's consistent refusal to appreciate the American colonies, Rivers' comparison is gratuitous. The partial, prejudiced aspects of Rivers' sensibility are highlighted by his claim that Indian women will be civilized only if they are feminized (119) and by his avowal, after decrying French manners, that Emily embodies the best cultural features of France and England (57). Like Arabella who sees the promenade at Quebec as a "little Mall" (49), he imposes English cultural signs on life in Canada confusedly. When he talks of driving out "*en caleche* to our Canadian Hyde Park" (13), his histrionic English sensibility relies on French technology and manners. As with Arabella, Rivers' cultural volatility testifies to a vital personality but it reveals, too, the contradictions arising from a shallow, unthinking complacency. His indifference to Canadian politics is, like Arabella's, a mask for political power. Despite decrying the English parliamentary system, he unhesitatingly exploits it when he asks friends at Westminster to secure Mme. Des Roches's agricultural settlement (90, 277). Rivers' sensibility is romantic only in a very qualified way. When he offers Emily his Acadians as her "new subjects," since he pictures her in Edenic terms as the "mother of mankind" (260), his patriarchalism, royalist absolutism, and pseudo-worship of Emily cumulatively suggest that his sensibility is whimsically regressive.

WILLIAM FERMOR, THE MOST explicit upholder of Mrs. Brooke's propagandistic interests, gives commentaries on Quebec marked by contradictions that testify, like Rivers', to erratic sensibility. If he tolerates Quebec's institutions, he also wants them redefined by the English constitution. Moreover, while he defends the Proclamation by insisting Anglican bishops must supervise

Catholic rites, he opposes it by spurning the assimilation of *habitants* by an influx of British subjects (220). Fear of depopulation at home weighs on him more than prescriptions for Quebec: preoccupied with the harmful effects of the Agrarian Revolution in England, he satirizes its alliance of economic and aristocratic power for displacing rural workers and shrinking the birth-rate. Despite this satire, despite his view of the superiority of the French agricultural system because of its intense use of labour (222), and despite his criticism of the British government's unjust taxation of the American colonies (242), he still idealizes church-state relations in England, asserting that God blesses its constitution before all others (233). The contradictions between his satire and his idealization of England, particularly the gap between his views that Quebec's population is a great asset to England and that it must be defined by English political values, show Fermor remote from the spirit of accommodation promoted by Murray and Carleton. Fermor's parting eulogy of Carleton's urbane character rather than of his political stance is unintentionally ironic since Fermor hardly appreciates the complex processes Carleton was ably managing: in his patriarchal condescension to Quebec, Fermor stresses the Conquest and the colony's need for British institutions with a dogmatism opposite to Carleton's flexibility. Fermor's conventional, if confused, application of gender terms to England manifests the easiness of his sensibility together with his actual political rigidity. His view of the "mother country" as the centre of trade and the colonists as bees that must return to enrich the "paternal hive" (241) vaguely conflates sexual images in the name of national sentiment. His claim that the French leaders of Quebec, by adopting a new order of English honours, would spur the *habitants* to commercial efforts for England's benefit reveals a similar sort of utopian vagueness. His view that the *habitants* will not gain from the "change of masters" (250) until reformed by Anglican priests and his rejection of Rousseau's primitivism show extreme rigidity. By claiming that the most virtuous Indians are the most civilized and that they demand English priests (285), Fermor, far from tolerating Carleton's political and cultural pluralism, equates civilization with England and its national church.

To a degree, however, Mrs. Brooke exposes the contradictory propaganda of patriarchy, in the process apparently giving critical force to the sensibility of women. She even has her heroes criticize themselves according to what they take to be feminist sensibility. Rivers, Fitzgerald, and Temple seem to begin to understand the social construction of gender, and as a result their sense of romance leads them to attempt to reform social and sexual convention. But, if Mrs. Brooke's use of romance appears to offer radical insights into society's constraints upon women, ultimately her novel reinforces what it criticizes.¹⁴

Emily cultivates a theory of emotional refinement which displaces courtly politics: for her, "tenderness" always outweighs being "empress of the world" (295). Likewise, Arabella scorns male acquisitiveness and naval imperialism: she

debases the "lord high admiral of the British fleet" (310). By claiming to accept the women's criticism of political and military aims, Mrs. Brooke's male characters, especially Rivers, imply that relations between women and men must change, as must the institutions governing their relations. Since he feels most at home in a "feminized little circle" (326), Rivers pretends to a womanly sensibility and affects radical change. Although seeing himself as a rural gentleman, and therefore as a true citizen and loyal defender of church and state (343), he urges that the Anglican liturgy be revised by the removal of the word 'obey' from the wife's response in the marriage service (205) and he accuses the government of establishing "domestic tyranny" with its marriage law (371). He speaks on behalf of women because he is, he claims, one of the "few of [his] sex" to possess the "lively sensibility" of a woman (42). This androgyny is confirmed by Lucy and Arabella who see in him "an almost feminine sensibility" balancing his masculine "firmness of mind and spirit" (133, 198, 277). If, however, Rivers and his friends have the capacity to be "melted" to "the softness of a woman" by mothers, sisters, and wives (400), their feminism is condescending. Far from endorsing a distinctive female political outlook, it heightens sexual differences. Rivers' view that "Indian ladies . . . do not excel in female softness" (13) matches his instruction to his sister that she cultivate "feminine softness and delicate sensibility" (93). If he allows "a little pride in love" to women while holding that the man's role is "to submit on these occasions" (187), he also differentiates between the sexes by telling Lucy that "your sex" is to "avoid all affectation of knowledge" (206). His linking of companionate marriage with civic obedience shows that Mrs. Brooke's males do not take women's concerns as seriously as they claim. Despite their feminist pretensions, her heroes are no more averse than society in general to imposing constrictive roles upon women.

Mrs. Brooke's unsteady feminism is manifest in the way her women themselves differentiate between the sexes, allow matriarchal concepts to give way before conventional ideas of rank and nationalism, and promote romantic dependence on men. While calling Lucy "an exquisite politician" for keeping Temple at home by working hard to renew his domestic pleasures, Arabella insists that a woman always finds male more pleasing than female friends (378). When Emily affirms that she has acquired a "new existence" from Rivers' "tenderness" (340) she subsumes female claims of romantic transcendence to social and psychological truisms about sexual difference and marital roles. Mrs. Brooke's women embody an ideology that makes them secondary to men. If she associates England with Rivers' mother when insisting that he return to the world for which he was formed, Emily hails England as the "dear land of arts and arms" (212), thereby defending nationalistic and imperialistic values. Her social solidarity with Rivers is tacitly revealed by her sharing his judgment of Sir George Clayton.

THE POLITICAL LIMITS OF Mrs. Brooke's feminism are exposed by her dubious association of England with women's supposed free choice of marriage partners. Arabella's observation of foreign marital modes is superficial: having praised aboriginal matriarchy, she spurns it on learning that Indian mothers arrange their daughters' marriages (56). Emily and Arabella defend their native right to free choice in marriage by adopting romantic slogans. But they do not so much invent definitions of transcendent love as adopt the rules of love made up by Rivers. If the women feminize married love by pretending that it transcends money and social circumstance, he introduces slogans such as "souls in unison," "harmony of mind," and "delirium of the soul" (59). He promotes the transcendent concepts that Emily and he "were formed for each other" (185) and that they were friends in "some pre-existent state" (138). Having induced the "spirit of romance" in Emily (324), Rivers has strategically to offset the way it makes her unpredictable. The interpolated story that depicts Sophia as "romantic to excess" (360) confirms that Mrs. Brooke believes that women are made vulnerable by their "romantic generosity" (358). The political illusions arising from romance diminish women's intelligence. In likening the Church of England to "an elegant well-dressed woman of quality" (80) and claiming that women, unlike men, cannot be infidels because of their natural softness (107), Arabella unthinkingly links feminist romance to an institution whose theology opposes her feminism. Her application of "petticoat politics" to the creation of a "code of laws for the government of husbands" in the context of her tenet that England alone is enlightened about marriage manifests an inconsistency which reveals that Mrs. Brooke's feminist stance is not radically critical but complacently nationalistic (230-31).

While it may seem that the author uses the language of romance to denote the transcendent feelings shared by ideal couples and to validate the male's subordination to the female systematically, such is not the case. For Mrs. Brooke, romantic vocabulary does not apply exclusively to companionate marriage: it also elevates the male over the female as well as honouring the extended family and the gentry as a class. That is to say, the androgyny attributed to Rivers, seemingly on behalf of radical sexual experimentation, ultimately shows such experimentation to be redundant. While Rivers dismisses the liturgical vow of female obedience, making equality the basis of marriage (205), Emily from the first gives over her "whole soul" to him (189). To her, Rivers is "a god" (190) and the "most angelic of mankind" (192). His tender image excludes all other ideas from her soul (226). Not only does she find his "mental beauty . . . the express image of the Deity" (247) but also she effaces herself before him, letting her every emotion be ruled by him (249). If she transforms his benevolence by the romantic claim that their souls conform, her romantic self-assertion does not displace theological ideas of self-effacement. Further, Emily's idolization of Rivers is not unique: his mother

loves Rivers "to idolatry" too (254), proving that the words of romance are not systematic in companionate terms, a point accented by Emily's wish to secure the permission of Mrs. Rivers and of her father before she marries.

Far from constituting a private, intimate code between the heroine and the hero, the language of romance tightens society's patriarchal bonds. If Rivers idolizes his sister as well as Emily (177), Emily idolizes Mme. Des Roches as well as Rivers (219). If Rivers' eyes see no one lovely but Emily (165), she being the only object in his universe (224), so the whole creation contains no other woman for Temple than Lucy (226). Perhaps the strongest illustration of the conservative function of romantic codes is Arabella's pride in rebelling against patriarchal authority even as her father, unknown to her, controls her marital choice. The insubstantiality of radical, romantic action in the novel is evident from the predictable ways in which Mrs. Brooke solves the conflicts by contingency. Conflicts such as Emily's jealousy of Mme. Des Roches and her dispute with Rivers about delaying their wedding seem generated only to train the characters to offset languid marital moments by posturing with romance as distinct from developing radical visions through its means. If Arabella, on leaving Canada, mocks this "terrestrial paradise" and "divine country" (287), debasing thereby the terms of romantic idealization, her deliberate irony is indistinguishable in effect from accidental ironies. When Emily recalls her unwillingness to parade a romantic fidelity to Sir George (74, 320), it is impossible not to see that she so parades for Rivers. The masquerade closing the novel shows that the self-objectification by which Emily mediates honour to Rivers relies far more on social convention than on romantic transcendence.

THE ILLUSION OF FREE romantic plays always reinforces patriarchal structure in *The History of Emily Montague*. If Rivers creates private domestic spaces for Emily, he is bent on engrossing and absorbing "every faculty" of her mind (331). He succeeds because she agrees to have "no will" but his, submitting to him as "arbiter" of her fate (332). The lovers' romantic gestures do not reduce their desire to be recognized by their class. Their pleasure in the "little circle" and "little empire" of rural retreat is ironic: their boasted indifference to the "parade of life" (341) heightens their wish to make their estate a social and political centre. The interpolated story of Miss Williams and the orphan allows the lovers to parade their benevolence, their contempt for aristocrats, and their influence in the "great world" (336). The tensions between their romantic self-containment and political program for marriage are never sustained by narrative dialectic however, as attested by the arbitrarily complete closure. When

Emily wins her father's permission to wed Rivers, the threat of forced marriage dissolves, as in Arabella's case. It is not enough for Mrs. Brooke to reveal Colonel Willmott to be Emily's long-lost father; she must arrange that the patriarch chooses the same husband for his daughter as she chooses for herself. The closure's reliance on coincidences that displace plot-conflicts wholly, demonstrates that romantic resistance to patriarchy is a charade. By also having the lovers blessed providentially with wealth, Mrs. Brooke heightens her dependence on the sentimental dramatic formulae of plays such as Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*. In addition to remotivating money in a way the narrative resists, the closure elides married love, imperial wealth and patriarchal authority. That the ending rewards the rural gentry with financial wealth and social prestige is the ultimate devaluation of romance.

The closure, in epitomizing Mrs. Brooke's use of romance to champion the rural gentry and Anglicanism, debases narrative and political process. In its excessive symmetry, the closure does not present the author's discontent with politics in Quebec and England. The reduction of merchants and aristocrats to marital villains and the idealization of gentry as true citizens avoid rather than address political reality. The ending confirms the gentry's francophobia and Augustan nostalgia: they are patriots with an exaggerated sense of social exclusivity and their style of romance cultivates a likemindedness dismissive of cultural diversity. In seeming to reconcile ideological conflicts, the closure aggravates them: if matriarchy is admired, patriarchy is reinforced; if the liturgy is attacked, the Church is defended; if marriage is an agent of reform, it signals exclusive social contentment. No doubt, Mrs. Brooke shapes political facts with romance, and her novel does contain progressive ideas, as in the case of the motif of androgyny. But conformity seizes her innovations: old political ideas govern the new. Romance is static, not dialectical; the psychological thrills by which it offsets marriage's languid moments give way to a complacency aptly summed up by Rivers' phrases "peaceable possession" and "voluptuous tranquillity" (314). Far from allaying ideological conflict, the closure provokes unresolvable questions. If wealth and power are decried throughout the novel but appropriated to the ending and if prudence, maligned in the duration, finally outweighs transcendence, the final universalizing of themes debases their mediation.

This being so, the novel predicts little positive about Canada's colonial future. Its characters, far from considering the gap between political theory and fact, merely widen that gap; adamant about the Conquest, they think to confirm France's defeat through their cultivation of French sensibility. But, by insisting that French romantic sensibility is best realized by refined English people, they define patriotism in French terms. Their assumption that England can and must assimilate Quebec not only fails to foresee the day when French will replace English law but also blinds them to the political action implied by their romantic illusions.

The History of Emily Montague is less about Canada than about an overextended colonial empire and the strains of a mother country which supposedly most afflict the lesser, Anglican rural gentry whose refinement of English social hierarchy through romantic propaganda is their sole means of healing their own political displacement.

NOTES

- ¹ Frances Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague*, ed. Mary Jane Edwards (Ottawa: Carleton Univ. Press, 1985): xliii. All references are to this edition.
- ² Despite Mr. Brooke's fruitless association with merchants in Quebec, he was paid as its chaplain until his death. See Lorraine McMullen, *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1983): 79-83.
- ³ On the Brookes' Anglicanism and "genteel poverty," see Mary Jane Edwards, "Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague*: A Biographical Context," *English Studies in Canada*, 7:2 (Summer 1981): 171-82.
- ⁴ While the novel tries to "deal honestly" with the "Canadian scene," it is "dominated by a bourgeois moral system" that values "prudence, caution, and respectability" highly: Desmond Pacey, "The First Canadian Novel," *Dalhousie Review*, 26 (1946-47): 147-50. The present essay develops William H. New's claim that Mrs. Brooke's novel is "indicative of the tension of the times": "Frances Brooke's Chequered Gardens," *Canadian Literature* 52 (Spring 1972): 37. Mrs. Brooke's hostility to aristocrats is best seen through the eyes of such historians as Derek Jarrett, *The Begetters of Revolution: England's Involvement with France, 1759-1789* (London: Longman, 1973), and John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The peerage of eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), who emphasize the increasing economic and political power wielded by the aristocracy.
- ⁵ On the Marriage Act, see Dorothy Marshall, *Eighteenth Century England* (London: Longmans, 1962): 225-27. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century*, describes the growing intermarriage among aristocrats and the relative immobility of the middle class in marriage (74-92). McMullen, *An Odd Attempt in a Woman*, gives biographical reasons why the Brookes objected to the Marriage Act (9). Rivers definitely connects the Marriage Bill to the constitution (371).
- ⁶ Ann Messenger, *His and Hers: Essays in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1986), upholds Arabella's "complexity of self-awareness" (162) against Pope's diminution of the central character of *The Rape of the Lock*. Messenger assigns an "all-pervasive" irony to Arabella and an acute awareness of "irreconcilable contradictions" (164): Arabella is a self-conscious, not frivolous, coquette (165, 170). The present essay argues that Mrs. Brooke was fully in command neither of her epistolary medium nor of the strategic requirements of narrative dialectic.
- ⁷ Kenneth McNaught, *The Pelican History of Canada* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969): 45.
- ⁸ *The Pelican History of Canada*, 47-48.
- ⁹ W. L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada: A General History from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963): 153.
- ¹⁰ W. J. Eccles, *France in America* (Vancouver: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1972): 223-24.

- ¹¹ André Garon, "La Britannisation" in *Histoire du Québec*, ed. Jean Hamelin (Montreal: France-Amérique, 1976) : 260.
- ¹² Samuel L. Macey, *Money and the Novel: Mercenary Motivation in Defoe and His Immediate Successors* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1983) : 89-93, provides an interesting account of the growth of dowries and the relation of this growth to the 'financial revolution' and to the development of the national debt in the eighteenth century. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century*, "Marriage," 71-92, gives statistics about the tightening bonds between class, wealth and marriage in the period. He shows that, despite talk about companionate love, arranged marriages increased in number and increasingly fortified social hierarchy.
- ¹³ Fernand Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760-1850* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980) : 53-102, explains how economic rivalry between aristocratic and bourgeois values eroded nationalistic concepts. He discusses also the growing power of aristocrats in government. His account clarifies why Mrs. Brooke both admires the governors' gentility and rejects their aristocratic sympathy for the displaced seigneurs and noblesse.
- ¹⁴ Readers wishing to explore the issues raised by the present article are advised to consult Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987) and Leslie W. Rabine, *Reading the Romantic Heroine: Text, History, Ideology* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1985). Boone compellingly describes the ways in which conceptions of marriage and narrative techniques, whether traditional or progressive, are corollaries of one another while Rabine, through an analysis of the recoil of radical ideology upon itself in a series of romances, elaborates convincingly why progressive concepts in romance tend to be self-defeating.

PARTITA

Robyn Sarah

Springs in your knees, ball-
bearings in your ankles, always
on the edge of dancing — you —

your goat-dance down the sides of hills,
skywalks on scaffolds, your
shimmy-on-the-spot in bank queues

Even a dance
under your eyelids
when you close them

against the sun,
or the sharp colours
of remembering

what you liked, and
the private dance
of liking it.

LE JEU DES RYTHMES DANS "LES FOUS DE BASSAN" D'ANNE HÉBERT

Magessa O'Reilly

LA PERTINENCE DU MOT *rythme* en science littéraire n'est pas absolument évidente. Tout en ne manquant pas de définitions, le mot manque toujours de définition précise, convaincante et généralement admise. Et je sais dans quel abîme je plonge en voulant le définir à nouveau. En deux mots, le rythme c'est le mouvement d'un texte. Sa dynamique, le caractère propre de son déroulement. Mais qu'est-ce que cela veut dire? Tout au plus, on admettra que le mot *texte* n'est pas ambigu. Quant à *mouvement*, *dynamique* et *déroulement*, on y verra un abus de la métaphore vide. J'emploie ces mots simplement pour invoquer le caractère temporel, maintes fois souligné, du langage.

Le discours se poursuit; ses unités se succèdent les unes aux autres; l'ensemble s'élabore progressivement, s'étale de plus en plus amplement. (Même à la métaphore apparemment spatiale — *s'étaler amplement* — je sens le besoin d'ajouter la caractérisation temporelle *de plus en plus*.) La phrase et, à plus forte raison, le roman ont un début qui précède une fin. Que le texte soit reçu par la lecture ou par l'écoute, il s'inscrit dans le temps. Ce qui s'inscrit dans le temps est rythmé; le rythme d'un texte est le caractère particulier de sa temporalité.

Mais encore, *comment* le rythme d'un texte se manifeste-t-il? Prenons une définition plus technique, mais tout aussi générale, du rythme: *le retour à intervalles réguliers ou variables de phénomènes ressemblants*. Plus une œuvre est complexe et plus elle fait appel à des moyens variés, plus la manifestation du rythme est complexe. Les *phénomènes* et *intervalles* se situeront simultanément à plusieurs niveaux et seront de natures diverses. Les rythmes des niveaux textuels divers se superposent les uns sur les autres, le rythme des unités plus petites s'imbrique dans celui des plus grandes. La superposition ou l'imbrication des rythmes crée des effets variés. Dans *Les fous de Bassan* d'Anne Hébert,¹ roman qui servira à illustrer ce qui précède, trois voix narratives jouent un rôle particulièrement important et réalisent des effets rythmiques différents en s'imbriquant dans l'ensemble du roman.

DANS LES FORMES PETITES et le œuvres brèves, on est surtout sensible aux effets formels et le rythme est marqué par ces effets. Un proverbe, un haïku, une des *Pensées* ou une des *Maximes*, ont un rythme formel facilement perceptible, déterminé par le retour de certains sons ou de certains mots, et par la structure de la phrase, de la strophe ou du paragraphe. Le rythme formel est le produit de la disposition des masses: syllabes atones et accentuées, pauses et phonèmes divers. C'est le rythme de la suite des signes, le rythme auquel les mots se suivent et se présentent à conscience, auquel le texte se dit ou se lit. On aura reconnu un concept voisinant avec ce que Gérard Genette appelle le *temps du récit* ou, plus fidèlement, le *pseudo-temps du récit*.² *Pseudo* dans ce sens qu'il est virtuel et ne se mesure pas: il n'y a pas de façon unique et figée de lire telle ou telle phrase. Soit. Mais on a de tout temps voulu reconnaître dans la phrase des indications formelles du rythme de lecture. Prenons la phrase: "*Elle me répond lapins, poules, jardinage, m'assure qu'il y a de l'ouvrage en masse*" (68). Le parallélisme de structure — paradigme de noms tirés du même champ sémantique et juxtaposition des prédicats — détermine des pauses et des accents forts; le vocabulaire familier — "*de l'ouvrage*" et "*en masse*" — appelle une prosodie de la langue parlée. Je tente de rendre ce rythme explicite par une notation qui, tout en étant imparfaite et générale, orienterait les scansions éventuelles:

Elle me répond lapins, | poules, | jardinage, |
 m'assure qu'il y a de l'ouvrage en masse.³

Le rythme formel subsiste dans les unités plus étendues que la phrase, bien qu'il y soit de moins en moins perceptible. Le paragraphe a un rythme formel, produit des longueurs relatives des phrases et du retour d'une phrase à l'autre de certains phénomènes. Le chapitre, la partie, l'œuvre entière ont tous un rythme formel déterminé par les rapports de masses des unités qui les composent. Pensons à la régularité très précise de *La Suivante* de Corneille dont les cinq actes ont tous le même nombre de vers exactement, ou au déséquilibre savamment mesuré de *Nedjma* de Kateb Yacine. Les rythmes formels, tout en se superposant ou en s'imbriquant, ne s'identifient pas forcément les uns aux autres; les rapports varient de l'harmonie à la dissonance.

Plus l'unité considérée est étendue, moins les éléments formels sont perceptibles et plus le rythme sera déterminé par des éléments sémantiques. Le rythme sémantique est défini à tel niveau par le retour d'un mot ou d'un thème, à tel autre niveau par le retour d'un événement, d'un symbole ou d'un personnage.

Déjà au niveau de la phrase, des phénomènes de sens contribuent à des effets d'accentuation. La synonymie, la gradation, l'antithèse sont parmi les effets sé-

mantiques qui influent le plus directement sur le rythme d'un énoncé bref. Et plus nous montons sur l'échelle des unités, plus grande est la part du sens. Le paragraphe est surtout rythmé par la distribution et l'importance d'éléments sémantiques: *nature de l'introduction et de la conclusion, complexité du développement central, présence ou absence d'une formule de liaison*. A plus forte raison, le rythme d'un chapitre ou d'un roman s'élabore et se développe en fonction de tout ce qui participe du sens: la durée que raconte la diégèse; sa continuité ou son caractère épisodique; la disposition des scènes, qui se suivent, s'appellent et se répètent; la disposition des symboles et des thèmes, des personnages et des décors; l'alternance des discours (narration et réflexion, description et commentaire métatextuel); les modulations de point de vue.⁴

Les rythmes dans un roman sont donc formés de phénomènes de deux natures: phénomènes formels et phénomènes sémantiques. Les rythmes *formel* et *sémantique* qui en résultent se produisent à divers niveaux — à l'échelle réduite de la phrase ou du paragraphe et sur l'étendue du texte — et s'imbriquent les uns dans les autres de diverses façons. Comme le dit Henri Meschonnic, il existe une "relation homologique des grandes aux petites unités";⁵ même si cette relation homologique se présente parfois comme effet de contraste ou, pour parler rythme, de *contrepoint*.

2

TOUT ROMAN PRÉSENTE l'imbrication des rythmes. Et le roman polyphonique, en juxtaposant de grandes étendues de texte faites par divers narrateurs, constitue un domaine particulièrement riche pour l'étude des jeux d'imbrication. Souvent, les voix narratives sont distinguées les unes des autres par des moyens dits stylistiques. Les différences stylistiques sont choisies en fonction de la structuration sémantique de l'œuvre. C'est le cas des *Fous de Bassan* d'Anne Hébert, poème narratif et en prose. Telle narratrice privilégie telle forme de phrase; tel narrateur telle autre forme. Tel narrateur réalisera dans son discours une structure rythmique qui reprend à échelle réduite la structure englobante; telle narratrice une structure qui s'oppose au rythme d'ensemble.

D'abord, le rythme d'ensemble des *Fous de Bassan*. La fréquence des changements de voix narrative, les longueurs relatives des parties ou "livres" qui composent le roman, les rapports temporels qu'entretiennent les narrations et le retour d'une narration à l'autre de certains événements influent tous sur le rythme d'ensemble.

Les première et dernière parties des *Fous de Bassan* sont racontées en automne 1982, les quatre parties du milieu datent de 1936.⁶ L'ampleur du saut temporel qui sépare la première partie de la deuxième comme de celui qui sépare l'avant-dernière de la dernière fait partie de l'expérience du rythme. Les narrations du début et de la fin sont loin, temporellement, de l'action racontée. Car il n'est jamais question de raconter autre chose que l'été 1936, qu'il s'agisse du meurtre des

petites Atkins ou, pour Nicolas Jones, du suicide d'Irène. Les récits des années 1936 à 1982 ne sont que récits secondaires, ils racontent les conséquences de l'été fatal. La distance temporelle qui sépare ces deux livres de l'action principale permet des vues synthétiques qui encadrent le roman.

Bien que très subjectif, "Le livre du révérend Nicolas Jones" constitue une présentation globale du village et un résumé de l'action. Introduction classique, dans une certaine mesure, qui identifie la matière du discours à suivre et donne l'argument avant le récit des menus détails. De même, la "Dernière lettre de Stevens Brown à Michael Hotchkiss" constitue l'épilogue. C'est une vue finale, prise à distance, qui résume les suites de l'action proprement dite. "Le livre du révérend," qui raconte le sort de Griffin Creek, et la "Dernière lettre," qui fait connaître la fortune de Stevens, se font pendants. Entre cette introduction et cet épilogue est raconté, en quatre parties, l'été 1936.

Par rapport aux vues d'ensemble du début et de la fin, le milieu du roman est l'endroit d'un développement; c'est une série de gros plans. La voix officielle de Nicolas Jones cède la place à plusieurs voix qui se succèdent ou qui alternent ("Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres"). Le résumé de l'été 1936 est repris en un foisonnement de détails, en une intensification rythmique encadrée par des narrations où dominent les fonctions rhétoriques de présenter et de conclure.⁷

Comme l'ensemble du roman commence par une introduction, les deux premières lettres de Stevens constituent une introduction au foisonnement central. On y voit l'arrivée au village: Stevens retrouve le ruisseau qui porte son nom (60) puis fait voir le village en plan général du haut d'une colline (61-4). Nicolas Jones a situé l'action dans le temps, Stevens Brown la situe maintenant dans l'espace. Cette nouvelle entrée en matière s'oppose au premier par le point de vue: après le représentant de l'ordre dominant, c'est un jeune révolté qui nous parle dans les "Lettres." L'attitude que formule Stevens par rapport aux notions d'autorité et de liberté, et sa sémantisation de l'espace, annoncent celles que formuleront les autres jeunes de Griffin Creek: Nora, Olivia et Perceval.

Après la vue synthétique de Nicolas Jones, Stevens Brown reprend de façon plus détaillée, en plan serré, les faits évoqués. A vrai dire, la répétition d'événements viendra plus tard; le barn dance est le seul événement important que répète Stevens (*NJ* 46-7; *SBI* 98-9) et les baignades quotidiennes de Felicity sont évoquées de façon indirecte (*NJ* 34-9; *SBI* 71). Plus que d'une répétition d'événements, il s'agit d'une reprise oblique qui nous fait voir de plus près le décor et les personnages. Le retour en arrière nous transporte sur les lieux de l'action, parmi les disparus qu'évoquait Nicolas Jones.

Le "Livre de Nora Atkins" est sensiblement plus court que les parties précédentes. Il se divise en brèves sections qui se suivent de près. Les phrases sont brèves aussi et étalent une symbolique du mouvement et du changement, de l'énergie⁸ et

de la liberté. Le noyau du drame approche progressivement et le rythme s'intensifie en passant de la voix officielle de Nicolas Jones à la voix engagée de Stevens Brown, puis à celle d'une des victimes.

La répétition d'événements contribue à cette intensification progressive. On reconnaît dans le "Livre de Nora Atkins," pour la première fois, plusieurs événements racontés par Nicolas Jones. Nora Atkins ne reprend pas seulement le barn dance (NA 123-24) mais plusieurs autres épisodes de la première narration: Stevens à la porte de l'église (NJ 30, NA 121); la rencontre avec l'Américain puis Nora et Nicolas Jones dans la cabane à bateau (NJ 40-44, NA 119); le suicide d'Irène (NJ 48-49, NA 129).

En plus de son rôle rythmique, la reprise d'événements, et même d'expressions, joue un rôle important à d'autres points de vue. D'une part, ces répétitions sélectives opèrent un tri qui aide à ériger certaines scènes et certaines images au rang de *motif*, voire de *symbole*. D'autre part la présence ou l'absence de tel événement dans telle narration, crée des rapports particuliers entre les personnages et ainsi contribue à l'organisation des structures actantielle et idéologique qui sont mises en œuvre. Les pièces d'un puzzle commencent à s'ordonner.

"Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres" poursuit l'intensification rythmique et la porte à son point culminant. Livre polyphonique à l'intérieur du roman polyphonique, deux narrations y avancent de front. La narration de Perceval et la narration collective des gens de Griffin Creek alternent. Le plus souvent en se relayant et en faisant avancer la narration, parfois en racontant les mêmes événements à tour de rôle.⁹ Les changements de voix sont soulignés par les sauts de page. Au lieu de former un ensemble, le discours est morcelé. A certains moments, la voix des Quelques autres est réellement collective, disant *Nous les gens de Griffin Creek*, à d'autres elle adopte un point de vue plus proche de celui d'un personnage, telle Maureen MacDonald (148-49, 175-77). Et la vitesse varie d'une section à l'autre: tantôt une voix résume un moment d'évolution, tantôt elle raconte une scène dans les détails. Toutes ces fluctuations de la voix narrative contribuent à l'intensification du rythme. Progressivement accentué au cours du roman, le rythme est maintenant doublé ou syncopé.

Ces hésitations et répétitions internes compensent la linéarité du récit. "Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres," pour la première fois, prend la relève là où les narrations précédentes se sont tues. Jusqu'ici, chaque nouvelle voix, en prenant la parole, revient sur le déjà – raconté: Stevens Brown revient à l'été 1936, déjà résumé par Nicolas Jones parmi des récits d'événements plus récents (la galerie des ancêtres) ou plus éloignés (son enfance); de même, après que Stevens s'est rendu jusqu'au 31 août, la narration de Nora revient au 15 juillet et se termine sensiblement au même moment que celle de Stevens. Stevens et Nora s'arrêtent à la fin de l'été, à la fin de la vie des cousines, bref à la fin apparente de l'histoire; Nicolas Jones aussi, malgré sa perspective temporelle, indique claire-

ment que le mal que fait Stevens constitue la fin de Griffin Creek tel qu'il l'avait connu. Perceval Brown et les Quelques autres vont au-delà de ce qui semblait être la fin, ils prolongent la diégèse et modifient la structure du récit. Nous ne lisons plus l'intrigue des cousines, celle-ci est devenue un élément dans une intrigue plus large, celle des habitants de Griffin Creek, intrigue qui comporte son propre point culminant et son propre dénouement. Plus que le meurtre des petites Atkins, l'enquête policière subséquente que doit subir la collectivité de Griffin Creek est l'événement capital de cette intrigue englobante. Se voyant soupçonnés et interrogés à tour de rôle par le policier McKenna, les gens de Griffin Creek éprouvent de la honte et de la méfiance les uns envers les autres, le désir de se protéger et l'impuissance devant les autorités, l'obligation de se soumettre à un pouvoir étranger. Libres de régler leurs propres histoires, les gens de Griffin Creek auraient pu encaisser le meurtre et passer outre. L'enquête policière abat leur structure sociale.

"Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres" comporte à la fin une esquisse de dénouement. Après l'aveu que Stevens fait à McKenna, Perceval observe l'automobile qui emporte Stevens et McKenna loin de Griffin Creek (193). Suivent une brève évocation d'une scène à la ville, où Stevens dépose une déclaration solennelle, et un plan général de la mer où se trouve désormais Olivia. "Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres" transforme donc l'intrigue du roman et raconte une nouvelle fin, mais d'autres fins restent à voir.

Avant-dernière partie du roman, "Olivia de la Haute Mer" clôt la partie du roman que j'appelle le foisonnement central. A vrai dire, cette nouvelle partie a un statut temporel équivoque. Elle ne porte aucune date et, en tant que narration d'outre-tombe, son énonciation se situe difficilement sur la plan strictement temporel. Olivia évoque des scènes qui vont de sa plus jeune enfance jusqu'au soir du 31 août, moment où le temps s'arrête (204, 224), mais d'où la narration nous parvient. La temporalité indéfinie aidant, un mouvement plus uni et plus calme s'installe. Les sections se suivent de nouveau sur la même page, ce qui atténue les pauses et les temps forts. Une détente rythmique vient couronner le foisonnement central, après la frénésie du livre de Perceval.

L'autre fin, la "Dernière lettre de Stevens Brown à Michael Hotchkiss," je l'ai déjà indiqué, est l'épilogue qui répond à l'ouverture de Nicolas Jones et qui encadre le roman.

Tel serait le rythme d'ensemble des *Fous de Bassan*. À la présentation synthétique et pondérée que propose Nicolas Jones, les récits de 1936 opposent la relativité, la variation des perspectives et des styles. L'intensification du rythme dans la partie centrale du roman est encadrée par l'introduction et l'épilogue. Le schéma rythmique global est repris dans la partie centrale: "Les lettres de Stevens Brown" et "Olivia de la Haute Mer" servant d'ouverture et de finale respectivement, "Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres" constituant le moment le plus intense du rythme narratif. Comment ce rythme d'ensemble est-il soutenu aux

niveaux des unités plus petites: les paragraphes et les phrases? Tantôt le schéma d'ensemble est repris en plus petit dans une narration, tantôt une narration manifesterait un rythme qui s'oppose au rythme global.

3

“LE LIVRE DU révérend Nicolas Jones” reproduit à échelle réduite le rythme de l'ensemble. La diégèse de cette partie suit le même développement que l'ensemble du roman. Au début et à la fin domine le présent de l'énonciation, c'est-à-dire l'automne 1982. Nicolas Jones raconte d'abord, entremêlé du récit de la galerie des ancêtres il est vrai, sa situation au moment où il écrit: descriptions de la maison, des jumelles, de la routine domestique. C'est le soir. A la fin, le jour point; Nicolas revient au présent et raconte ses préparatifs pour le service. Entre les deux, c'est la nuit et la rêverie pendant laquelle le révérend évoque son enfance et l'été 1936. Celui qui représente la communauté tout entière reproduit dans sa narration la structure diégético-rythmique de l'ensemble. Le premier récit prescrit en quelque sorte une structure formelle qui se caractérise par l'encadrement.

Chez Nicolas Jones ce schéma est aussi repris dans la structuration des unités plus petites, notamment au niveau de la phrase. Une phrase construite selon le même principe semble lui être caractéristique; je l'appellerai la phrase à encadrement. Dans une telle phrase, les groupes rythmiques du milieu sont brefs et souvent nombreux, encadrés par les groupes rythmiques plus longs du début et de la fin. Cette phrase joue un rôle important dans la narration de Nicolas Jones et plusieurs exemples se trouvent à chaque page:

En étirant le cou | on pourrait voir leur bicoques |
peinturlurées en rouge, | vert, | jaune, | bleu, |
comme si c'était un plaisir de barbouiller des maisons |
et d'afficher des couleurs voyantes. (13)

Voici qu'aujourd'hui, | à grand renfort de majorettes, |
ils osent célébrer le bicentenaire du pays, |
comme si c'étaient eux les fondateurs, | les bâtisseurs, |
les premiers dans la forêt, | les premiers sur la mer, |
les premiers ouvrant la terre vierge sous le soc. (13)

Massif sur des jambes courtes, |
j'ai la mâchoire carrée, | la tête grosse, | autrefois rousse, |
maintenant envahie par des poils blancs. (15)

Pas une once de graisse, | ni seins, | ni hanches, | fins squelettes
d'oiseaux. (17)

Depuis le temps que *je dis à l'une va |*
et elle va, | et à l'autre viens | et elle vient, |
je m'étonne de leur soudaine protestation.

(18, en italique dans le texte)

Le fils que je n'ai jamais eu, |
comment imaginer son visage, | la largeur de ses épaules, |
la force de ses mains, |
son âme torturée par l'étrangeté du monde. (20)

La première pipe fait des volutes bleues, | épaisses, | jusqu'au
plafond. (21)

Pas un geste d'homme ou de femme, | dans ce pays, |
qui ne soit accompagné par le vent. (26)

Je me désagrège à petit feu dans une demeure vermoulue, |
tandis que la forêt, | derrière moi, | se rapproche, |
de jour en jour, | de nuit en nuit, |
plante ses pousses de bouleaux et de sapins jusque sous mes
fenêtres. (27)

Le large visage plat d'Irène, |
sans un pli, | ni rien qui rit ou pleure, | lisse, | sans âge, |
éternel pourrait-on croire. (31)

Les maisons regorgent de fusils et de couteaux, |
soigneusement fourbis, |
durant les longues soirées d'hiver. (40)

La voici qui refait son visage de morte pour accueillir le pasteur son
mari, |
comme il se doit, | sans un cheveu qui dépasse, |
ni l'ombre d'une pensée sur son front lisse. (45)

Cette femme savait ce qu'elle faisait, |
pourquoi elle le faisait | et elle l'a fait toute seule, | la nuit, |
dans la grange pleine de foin nouveau. (49)

La voix de Nicolas Jones a perdu son velours, |
cassée et essoufflée, |
elle cogne contre les murs de bois. (54)

La préférence que le révérend porte à ce rythme de phrase se voit tant dans des phrases brèves que dans de plus longues. La détente rythmique finale est souvent soulignée par un vocabulaire littéraire, voire poétique, dans le dernier groupe bien que le vocabulaire réaliste et la langue familière n'en soient pas exclus.

La phrase à encadrement n'est pas le seul type de phrase qu'utilise le pasteur, loin de là. Mais sa fréquence et surtout l'homologie formelle qui lie cette phrase à la structure générale de la narration la met fortement en évidence. Comme l'ensemble du roman, comme "Le livre du révérend," la phrase du révérend produit une forme rythmique qui oppose un milieu fortement accentué à un début et à une fin que caractérise un rythme plus ample. Cette structure rythmique entretient un

rapport d'homologie avec les structures symbolique et thématique du roman. L'encadrement, tel qu'il se manifeste à ces trois niveaux textuels, est analogue à la structuration symbolique qui met en relief l'entre-deux et le parallélisme.

L'entre-deux est une image de l'emprisonnement. Dès l'incipit, autre phrase à encadrement, le village de Griffin Creek est présenté comme étant au centre, coincé entre la forêt et la mer :

/ / /
 La barre étale de la mer, |
 // / / // / //
 blanche, | à perte de vue, | sur le ciel gris, |
 / / / / / /
 la masse noire des arbres, | en ligne parallèle derrière nous. (13)

Selon l'orientation opposée, le village est de nouveau entre deux points bien définis, état formulé par le groupe récurrent *entre cap Sec et cap Sauvagine* (14, 40 ... 238, 244). Ces noms des villages voisins renvoient à une sémantisation des éléments mis en parallèle par l'image de l'entre-deux. Les personnages doivent décider entre le conformisme de la société à Griffin Creek et la liberté, à la fois fuyante et effrayante.

L'entre-deux, c'est aussi la frontière car il existe la possibilité de passer d'un état à l'état opposé. De là, la fréquence élevée des seuils et des fenêtres dans ce roman.¹⁰ Ainsi voit-on Stevens pour la première fois sur le seuil de l'église. Il se tient entre le rite religieux et la convention d'une part et le grand jour et la liberté de l'autre (28). Nora elle-même est entre deux âges. Fille, presque femme, on la voit dans sa propre narration à la fenêtre regardant la tempête. Cette phrase pleine d'antithèses expose sur un mode euphorique l'alternative qui est le plus souvent sentie comme une angoisse par les personnages, euphorique cette fois parce que la fenêtre est une protection :

Le nez contre la vitre, protégée par la vitre, recevant en pleine face des paquets d'eau, sans être mouillée, au cœur même du déluge, bien à l'abri dans une bulle transparente, je guette l'éclair violet qui, de place en place, illumine la campagne dévastée. (132)

Le parallélisme ouvre la possibilité à plusieurs rapports sémantiques, de l'analogue à l'opposition. On le voit dans les rapports qu'entretiennent les personnages mis en parallèle, les nombreuses paires du roman. Pensons aux jumelles Pat et Pam que Nicolas Jones ne réussit pas toujours à distinguer. Aux frères d'Olivia, Patrick et Sidney, que Stevens confond (97). Et aux cousines Nora et Olivia, que Perceval perçoit comme "un seul animal fabuleux [...] à deux têtes, deux corps, quatre jambes et quatre bras [...]" (31) et qui se voient elles-mêmes comme des "sœurs siamoises" (NA 121, OHM 221).

Stevens Brown et Nicolas Jones sont mis en parallèle grâce en partie à leur homologie rhétorique, c'est-à-dire en tant que voix encadrantes du roman, en

partie aux rapports d'opposition et de complémentarité qu'ils entretiennent. Nicolas Jones et Stevens Brown sont tous les deux des figures christiques. Nicolas Jones, en sa qualité de pasteur, est le représentant de Dieu. Il se dit "le Verbe de Griffin Creek" (19). Nora dit qu'il a l'"air confus d'[un] homme consacré que le démon tente comme Jésus sur la montagne" (128). Pour sa part, Stevens fait son entrée en scène à la porte ouverte de l'église, à contre-jour, "nimbée de soleil" selon Nicolas Jones (28), "inondé de lumière" selon Nora (121). Dans sa lettre du 2 août il écrit "[...] si quelqu'un ressemble au Christ dans ce village, c'est bien moi, Stevens Brown." (89) Et pourtant, Nicolas Jones et Stevens Brown sont aussi des figures démoniaques. Chacun s'attache à une des cousines, l'autre paire importante du roman. Chacun commet un crime. Chacun, en réévoquant après quarante-cinq ans les événements de 1936, confine sa rêverie à la nuit, métonymie de la honte.¹¹

Parallélisme ou alternative, les structures symboliques donnent toutes forme à l'angoisse de personnages pris dans une structure sociale de domination. Le révérend Nicolas Jones incarne cette structure sociale dans tout son personnage, à partir du métier qu'il exerce jusqu'à dans le rythme de sa phrase.

En passant du "Livre du révérend Nicolas Jones" aux "Lettres de Stevens Brown à Michael Hotchkiss" on passe à un texte moins oratoire et moins formaliste, plus familier que le premier. Ainsi, Anne Hébert oppose le pasteur, qui a passé une longue vie à fréquenter le chef-d'œuvre littéraire qu'est la King James Version et dont le métier est de prêcher, à un jeune homme, assez peu instruit et pour qui les mots ne sont ni lieu de beauté ni instruments de rhétorique mais autant de véhicules de l'expérience vécue. Son texte ne privilégie aucun schéma rythmique particulier, on définirait difficilement le principe esthétique qui lui serait propre. Prises individuellement, les phrases de Stevens Brown sont semblables à celles que l'on trouve chez Nicolas Jones, chez Nora Atkins, chez Olivia de la Haute Mer, chez Perceval et les Quelques autres.

En effet, aucun des livres des *Fous de Bassan* n'est monolithique. Chaque voix narrative présente une variété de phrases. Mais dans certains cas, un type de phrase ressort avec beaucoup de relief. Grâce à sa fréquence, mais aussi au rapport homologique qui le lie soit à des structures plus larges, soit à des éléments du contenu sémantique. C'est le cas des narrations de Nicolas Jones, de Nora Atkins et de Perceval Brown. Dans les autres narrations, il est moins facile d'identifier un schéma rythmique qui présiderait à l'élaboration de la phrase ou du paragraphe. Les narrations de Stevens et des Quelques autres ressemblent plus ou moins à celle de Nicolas Jones; la narration d'Olivia de la Haute Mer à celle de Nora. Mais les particularités de ces discours sont quelque peu estompées par une hétérogénéité stylistique plus apparente. Ces narrations, en se ressemblant, contribuent à la cohésion du roman et équilibrent les divergences stylistiques qui distinguent les autres narrations.

Anne Hébert ne cherche sûrement pas à distinguer absolument tous les narrateurs et narratrices les uns des autres. Bien qu'infléchi de façon particulière à certains endroits, la narration des *Fous de Bassan* reste poétiquement cohérente. Les ressemblances formelles, la reprise de certains mots d'une narration à l'autre, la cohérence symbolique révèlent qu'il s'agit autant de prises de vue diverses faites par la même instance narrative que de narrations successives et distinctes.

4

DANS LE CONTEXTE DE l'œuvre entière, "Le livre de Nora Atkins" produit une accélération très perceptible du rythme. Le livre lui-même est bref, beaucoup plus bref que les "Lettres" (25 pages contre 51); tout comme les paragraphes et les phrases qui sont plus brefs que ceux de Stevens. Les tranches de narration se suivent de près, n'étant séparées que par les interlignes. Les pauses fréquentes et les reprises rapides produisent un rythme accéléré, halètement de la hâte et de l'impatience, de l'enthousiasme et de la joie. C'est le rythme de l'immédiat, qui nous fait approcher du point culminant le l'intrigue.

Par contre, au niveau de la phrase individuelle, le rythme du "Livre de Nora Atkins" s'établit en contrepoint du mouvement rythmique général. Nora privilégie une phrase en expansion, dont les accents sont concentrés au début et dont le rythme s'amplifie vers la fin. Ce schéma général est perceptible même dans les phrases brèves que Nora préfère.

D'un bond | je saute à terre. (112)

Devançant l'aurore parfois, |
elle nous entraîne, | Olivia et moi, | en pleine noirceur, |
pour mieux voir venir la barre du jour. (112-113)

Le premier reflet rose sur la mer grise, |
ma grand-mère prétend qu'il faut barboter dedans tout de suite |
et que c'est l'âme nouvelle du soleil qui se déploie sur les vagues.
(113)

Nos mains, | nos bras, | nos jambes sont pleins de longues coulées
grises et froides. (115)

Vue d'ici, | en contrebas, | la mer semble immobile, | à peine ridée
en surface, |
alors qu'on sait bien, | pour l'avoir regardée de près si souvent, |
quels creux profonds, | quels pics neigeux |
naissent et meurent à chaque instant sur son dos énorme, |
au gré du vent et du remuement profond de l'abîme. (120)

Stevens debout, | inondé de lumière, |
l'ombre noire de son chapeau sur ses yeux, |
vient de faire son apparition dans l'encadrement de la porte. (121)

Sur ce même banc d'église, | côte à côte, |
 son épaule contre mon épaule, | Olivia et moi, |
 toutes deux enfantines et sans langage véritable, |
 adhérons de toutes nos forces à la parole de l'Écriture. (121)

La fine tige verte, |
 sa petite tête mauve et argent, | fleurie comme une quenouille pleine. (122)

Il met pied sur la grève, | me prend dans ses bras, |
 m'emporte et me cloue à l'avant de son bateau de pirate. (125)

Ce rythme en expansion, Nora le reprend au niveau du paragraphe. Le paragraphe commence le plus souvent par des phrases courtes, les phrases successives s'allongeant peu à peu. Dans certains cas le tout est précédé d'un incipit de paragraphe assez long; dans quelques paragraphes plus longs, une première expansion peut s'interrompre puis se reprendre une deuxième fois. Mais presque tous les paragraphes se terminent sur une phrase relativement longue:

Le foin est mûr. Je viens d'en examiner un brin, de tout près, d'un œil de connaisseur. La fine tige verte, sa petite tête mauve et argent, fleurie comme une quenouille pleine. Je cueille l'herbe à dinde, le jargeau et la verge d'or, tout le long du chemin. J'en fais un gros bouquet, piqué de brins de foin, en guise de feuillage. Ma grand-mère reçoit mon bouquet et la nouvelle du foin mûr, prêt à être fauché, sans grand éclat apparent, seul son œil vert semble planer au-dessus de toutes choses, acceptant et bénissant toutes choses, au-delà même de l'horizon. (122)

Des chants de coq passent à travers le rideau de cretonne, se brisent sur mon lit en éclats fauves. Le jour commence. La marée sera haute à six heures. Ma grand-mère a promis de venir me chercher avec ma cousine Olivia. L'eau sera si froide que je ne pourrai guère faire de mouvements. Tout juste le plaisir de me sentir exister, au plus vif de moi, au centre glacé des choses qui émergent de la nuit, s'étirent et bâillent, frissonnent et cherchent leur lumière et leur chaleur, à l'horizon. (111)

L'expansion rythmique, formée de groupes concis et contractés suivis de groupes de plus en plus longs, reflète la situation que vit Nora au moment où elle se raconte. Fille à la veille de devenir femme, nous la voyons au début de sa narration pelotonnée dans son lit (image de contraction), rêvant de liberté et d'ouverture (111); ou encore, elle se compare à un chat, bondissant vers un avenir qui embrasse successivement son entourage immédiat puis des horizons plus larges (112). Dans les deux cas, c'est l'image d'une fille qui prend conscience de soi et qui s'apprête à aller à la rencontre du monde pour réaliser ses rêves. Encore enfant, mais voyant venir la fin de l'enfance, elle rêve d'éviter l'emprisonnement où, en devenant femme, elle entrerait. Elle se voit au paradis terrestre, dans un pays lointain, luxueux et ensoleillé (120).

DES SIX NARRATIONS qui composent *Les fous de Bassan*, celle de Perceval Brown sort le plus de l'ordinaire. Même si on est peu touché par les questions de style, on ne peut que remarquer l'écart stylistique qui sépare "Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres" des autres narrations considérées globalement. Chez les autres narrateurs et narratrices, diverses formes de phrases "bien faites" sont réalisées; chez Perceval la phrase fragmentaire domine et ce n'est que rarement que l'on trouve des *phrases complètes*, dans le sens que donne à ce terme la grammaire normative. Le rythme de cette partie est haché et irrégulier suite de groupes brefs fortement accentués. Voici le début de la narration de Perceval.

Soulève le rideau. | La lune est là. | Dans la fenêtre. | Moi. |
 Enfermé tous les soirs dans la maison. | Obligé de dormir à huit heures. |
 Cric un tour de clef. | Enfermé dans ma chambre pour la nuit. |
 Pas envie de dormir. | Envie de crier. | Parce que je suis enfermé. |
 Serai battu si je crie. | Crier à cause de la lune. (139)

Ce début est typique du discours attribué à Perceval. La phrase est brève, rendue incomplète par les points nombreux et par l'ellipse du sujet ou du verbe copule. Rares sont les phrases qui dépassent une dizaine de syllabes. L'effacement de mots outils concentre et renforce les accents forts.

Cependant, la narration de Perceval n'est pas plus monolithique que celles des autres voix; il arrive au personnage de ponctuer son texte au rythme irrégulier de phrases complètes et assez longues. Il y met même des articulations logiques (*comme si, afin que*) et leur donne un rythme plus fluide que celui des phrases avoisinantes:

Ses yeux déteints, comme une chemise bleue déteinte, bougent tout le temps, comme s'ils voulaient regarder partout à la fois, sans jamais se poser nulle part. (150)

Elle s'ingénie à rester pareille afin que rien d'autre ne change à Griffin Creek. (154)

Malgré ces exceptions, le style qui caractérise Perceval est parataxique et hésitant. C'est un discours haché, tout fait d'arrêts brusques et d'explosions brèves. Le rythme irrégulier de Perceval reproduit le désordre d'un esprit qui constate l'expérience crue sans médiation intellectuelle. La logique et la syntaxe font place au détail isolé, c'est en quelque sorte la manifestation prosodique de l'hypotypose. Ce rythme participe de l'accentuation rythmique qu'apporte ce "Livre" au rythme d'ensemble.

Le style de Perceval est un nouvel avatar de la syntaxe moderniste hautement parataxique qui caractérise le roman hébertien depuis *Kamouraska*. Mais dans *Les fous de Bassan*, ce style est sémantisé. Dans sa "Dernière lettre," Stevens l'appelle "la voix primaire de l'idiot" (232). En tant que "voix primaire," ce rythme saccadé est propre à l'expression des sensations et à la description immédiate.

Anne Hébert l'introduit là où il s'agit d'insister davantage sur les phénomènes rapportés que sur la conscience qui les rapporte :

Leur fanfare se mêle au vent. M'atteint par rafales. Me perce le tympan. M'emplit les yeux de lueurs fauves stridentes. (NJ 13)

Je me pelotonne dans mon lit. Des pepiements d'oiseaux tout autour de la maison. La forêt si proche. L'épINETTE bleue contre la fenêtre. Les petits yeux noirs, brillants, des merles et des grives pointent derrière les rideaux. (NA 111)

Le lendemain je la suis dans le champ pour l'aider à arracher le plus de patates possible, afin qu'elle puisse se reposer le plus vite possible. Le bruit de sa respiration, sillon après sillon. La terre noire et glacée. De la neige poudreuse dans les creux. Le vent. (OHM 209)

Le changement de rythme qu'effectue l'introduction de ce style dans une narration ménage un effet d'insistance à certains moments. La voix oratoire de Nicolas Jones cède la place à la voix primaire après avoir raconté le suicide de son épouse, la voix posée d'Olivia lorsqu'elle n'en peut plus des souvenirs qui lui reviennent :

Faire le noir. Lâcher la nuit visqueuse dans toute la maison. M'en emplir les yeux et les oreilles. Ne plus voir. Ne plus entendre. Le passé qui cogne contre mes tempes. Laisser les morts ensevelir les morts. (NJ 49)

Quittons cette grève. Laissons les souvenirs disparaître dans le sable à la vitesse des crabes creusant leurs trous. Vienne la haute mer, fil gris entre la batture grise et le ciel gris. Fuir. Rejoindre la marée qui se retire jusqu'au plus haut point de l'épaisseur des eaux. Le grand large. Son souffle rude. Filer sur la ligne d'horizon. Epouser le vent, glisser sur les pentes lisses du vent, planer comme un goéland invisible. Palpiter sur la mer comme un grain de lumière minuscule. Mon cœur transparent sur la mer. (OHM 206-07)

La voix primaire, donc, on l'entend dès la narration de Nicolas Jones ; elle arrive à son apogée dans la narration de Perceval. Le rythme insistant et saccadé de la phrase fragmentaire reste fortement présent dans les deux dernières parties du roman. La voix primaire exprime bien la situation d'Olivia à certains moments où, transparente, elle observe le village et s'observe elle-même sans comprendre ce qu'elle voit, comme isolée dans une brume d'incertitude. Mais la résonance la plus importante de ce rythme est sûrement dans la "Dernière lettre de Stevens Brown à Michael Hotchkiss." Adopter le rythme saccadé de Perceval est même la volonté explicite de Stevens : "Hurler comme mon frère Perceval. Retrouver la voix primaire de l'idiot" (232). Plus il avance dans sa lettre, plus il fait sien ce rythme primaire. Il se sert de la phrase fragmentaire aux moments de la plus haute intensité, comme lorsqu'il raconte le meurtre de Nora :

La bouche vociférante de Nora à portée de ma bouche. Répète que je ne suis pas un homme. Dit à Olivia de se méfier de moi. Renverse la tête. Son rire de gorge en cascade. Désir fruste. Mes deux mains sur son cou pour une caresse apaisante. Son

rire hystérique sous mes doigts. Cette fille est folle. La boule dure du rire, dans sa gorge, sous mes doigts. Simple pression des doigts. Elle s'écroule sur les genoux comme un bœuf que l'on assomme. Son regard incrédule se révolte. (SB2 244-45)

L'effritement des formes qui se voit dans "Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres" souligne la destruction de la communauté qui résulte de l'enquête policière. Les structures de l'ordre s'écroulent, la honte collective de Griffin Creek est mise à nu. Comme la communauté, les formes s'écroulent. L'unité du livre disparaît et, chez l'une des voix, la syntaxe elle-même et le rythme fluide de la prose s'altèrent. Le fou du village et le chœur des aînés sont juxtaposés et font la chronique de la catastrophe.

"Olivia de la Haute Mer," malgré son importance sur d'autres plans, nous réserve peu de surprises sur le plan des rythmes formels. Son discours reprend pour la plupart des formes déjà vues dans la narration de Nora Atkins, tout en réalisant une grande variété de phrases. Olivia fait appel à la phrase en expansion mais aussi à la phrase fragmentaire, bref à toute la variété de formes phrastiques qu'offre le roman.

Là où le discours d'Olivia ressemble le plus à celui de Nora, c'est dans la formation des paragraphes. Chez Olivia aussi, le paragraphe commence par une phrase relativement brève et se poursuit en des phrases plus longues. Les paragraphes d'Olivia sont plus longs que ceux de Nora et cette longueur fait d'autant plus ressortir le mouvement d'expansion et le ralentissement rythmique qui convient au rôle de *finale* que joue ce livre dans le foisonnement central.¹² La ressemblance entre les discours d'Olivia et de Nora souligne le parallélisme des personnages. Nora et Olivia sont les seules filles/femmes à prendre la parole. Il serait possible de rapprocher leurs discours comme deux variantes du discours féminin, ou du discours d'esclaves rêvant de liberté. De même, il serait possible de regrouper les discours de Nicolas, de Stevens et des *Quelques autres* comme autant de variantes d'un discours masculin¹³ ou de dominants. Le discours de Perceval ne ressemble ni à l'un ni à l'autre de ces deux discours. Débile mental, fou du village, Perceval représente un tiers état, celui du marginal.¹⁴

Ajouter interligne

Dans *Les fous de Bassan*, trois rythmes distincts caractérisent trois voix narratives. Les voix de Nicolas Jones et de Nora Atkins présentent des oppositions archétypiques: la guerre des sexes, la guerre des générations, la lutte des classes. La voix de l'autorité masculine s'oppose à celle d'une fille encore assez jeune pour rêver d'un avenir fabuleux. Entre les deux se range Perceval, exclu de la classe dominante comme le sont les femmes et les jeunes. Cette distribution est soulignée par les formes et les rythmes du discours.

Les rythmes produisent aussi des effets variés en s'imbriquant les uns dans les autres. La structure de l'ensemble est celle d'un encadrement, structure qui partage

l'œuvre en trois parties ou mouvements. Après l'ample ouverture, le rythme s'accélère au mouvement central. La narration passe "de main en main, au fil de la danse" (124) en une succession de versions de plus en plus détaillées et morcelées. Le roman se termine par un épilogue au mouvement ample qui répond à l'ouverture. Cette structure rythmique, est un avatar de la structure symbolique qui oppose deux états l'un à l'autre et qui met en relief les seuils et les fenêtres. La narration de Nicolas Jones, produit d'un représentant de la classe dominante, s'harmonise avec la structure rythmique de l'ensemble.

Le mouvement central se divise en quatre parties dont les trois premières dessinent une intensification progressive à la fois du rythme et de l'intrigue. "Le Livre de Nora Atkins" appartient à ce mouvement central mais le rythme expansif des phrases et paragraphes s'inscrit en contrepoint de la tendance globale. L'opposition rythmique souligne les oppositions archétypiques où entre Nora.

Autre effet de contrepoint, la voix primaire de Perceval ne disparaît pas lorsque celui-ci se tait mais revient de plus en plus souvent chez Olivia et le Stevens Brown de 1982. L'irrégularité et l'hésitation ponctuent donc les mouvements lents et amples d'"Olivia de la Haute Mer" et de l'épilogue. La voix primaire conserve ainsi au roman qui se termine la tension qui fait ressortir le mouvement central. Comme en 1936, elle seule peut témoigner de l'écroulement des structures de l'ordre et de la convention. C'est la voix primaire qui exprime la transmutation d'Olivia et qui raconte le meurtre de Nora et les viol et meurtre d'Olivia, récit capital mais qui avait été tu jusque-là.

Dans *Les fous de Bassan*, la prosodie participe du réseau complexe de symboles. Chacune des voix narratives chante son air, fait sa propre poésie. Ensemble, elles grincent et se déchainent comme les instruments qui animent le barn dance (*OHM* 218). Le rythme de la phrase est mis à contribution dans ce poème narratif. Car, au contraire de ce qu'on dit, Anne Hébert n'a pas cessé d'écrire de la poésie. Elle l'affirmait dans un entretien avec André Vanasse, publié au moment même où elle terminait *Les fous de Bassan*:

André Vanasse: [...] on vous a d'abord reconnue comme poète. Puis, vous avez opté pour la prose. [...]

Anne Hébert: [...] j'ai été attirée très tôt par les deux, par la prose et par la poésie, quoique je n'aie jamais établi de différences entre ces deux types d'écriture. La prose, c'est une autre forme poétique.

André Vanasse: Sauf que, pour un certain nombre de lecteurs, il y a comme deux moments dans votre écriture. Après *Kamouraska*, il n'y a plus de poésie.

Anne Hébert: Il n'y en a plus sous la forme "poème," mais la poésie prend d'autres voies. Le poème est un coup de foudre, le roman est une longue histoire d'amour. C'est quand même une longue passion reprise jour après jour.¹⁵

Le rythme est une structure, et il entretient un rapport d'homologie avec les structures idéologique, actantielle et thématique d'une œuvre. Il est la figuration, l'icône des valeurs sémantiques du roman. La perfection du rythme dans *Les fous de Bassan* n'est qu'un exemple de la forme très recherchée de ce roman. L'attention qu'Anne Hébert porte à la forme témoigne du fait que la *poésie* n'est pas un genre qui s'oppose à la prose. C'est plutôt un niveau de perfection formelle qui se trouve aussi bien dans la prose et dans le roman que dans les vers.

NOTES

- ¹ Anne Hébert, *Les fous de Bassan* (Paris: Seuil, 1982). Toutes les références, données entre parenthèses, renvoient à cette édition. Les narrations individuelles seront identifiées par des sigles: *NJ*, "Le livre du révérend Nicolas Jones" (11-54); *SBI*, "Lettres de Stevens Brown à Michael Hotchkiss" (55-107); *NA*, "Le livre de Nora Atkins" (109-35); *PB*, la narration de Perceval Brown dans "Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres" (137-95); *QA*, la narration des Quelques autres dans le même livre; *OHM*, "Olivia de la Haute Mer" (197-225); *SB2*, "Dernière lettre de Stevens Brown à Michael Hotchkiss" (227-49).
- ² Gérard Genette, "Discours du récit," *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972): 77-78; *Nouveau discours du récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983): 22-23.
- ³ La notation des accents s'inspire de celle que propose Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme. Anthropologie historique du langage* (Paris: Verdier, 1982): 252-53. Les accents toniques sont notés par la barre oblique, /. Lorsque des accents toniques se suivent le nombre de marques est multiplié afin de mettre en évidence l'effet d'accumulation d'accents; la marque // indique donc un deuxième accent tonique de suite, non pas une syllabe deux fois plus accentuée que la précédente. Les pauses sont indiquées par la barre droite, |.
- ⁴ En esquisant cette liste (qui reste à approfondir, c'est entendu) je tiens à signaler ma dette à quelques textes de base pour une étude moderne du rythme. En plus des textes capitaux de Gérard Genette et d'Henri Meschonnic déjà cités: E. K. Brown, *Rhythm in the Novel* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1950); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957) et *The Well-tempered Critic* (Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1963); Joseph Pineau, *Le mouvement rythmique en français, principes et méthode d'analyse* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979).
- ⁵ Henri Meschonnic, "Pour la poétique," *Langue française*, 3 (1969): 19.
- ⁶ Je reviens plus loin sur la situation temporelle du livre d'"Olivia de la Haute Mer."
- ⁷ Voir aussi P. Merivale, "Framed Voices, The Polyphonic Elegies of Hébert and Kogawa," *Canadian Literature/Littérature canadienne*, 116 (1988): 68-82.
- ⁸ Neil Bishop nous propose une étude des images de l'énergie chez Nora, Olivia et Stevens: "Énergie textuelle et production de sens: images de l'énergie dans *Les fous de Bassan* d'Anne Hébert," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 54:2 (1984-85): 178-99.
- ⁹ Les début des recherches chez Maureen (*QA* 148-49; *PB* 150-51); les hurlements de Perceval (*PB* 151-52, *QA* 153); l'arrivée de l'hiver (*QA* 169, *PB* 171).
- ¹⁰ Sur l'importance de cette symbolique dans les trois premiers romans d'Anne Hébert voir Maurice Émond, *La femme à la fenêtre, l'univers symbolique d'Anne Hébert dans Les Chambres de bois, Kamouraska et Les Enfants du sabbat* (Québec: Presses de l'Univ. Laval, 1984).

- ¹¹ Nicolas Jones et Stevens Brown se ressemblent tellement qu'ils se confondent: "Dans toute cette histoire, je l'ai déjà dit, il faut tenir compte de vent" écrit Stevens dans sa "Dernière lettre" (SB2 246). Mais en croyant ou en prétendant se citer, il cite son double, Nicolas Jones: "Dans toute cette histoire il faudrait tenir compte du vent [...] (NJ 26). Clausule, s'il en est; en plus du *retour* de mots et de tout ce que cela implique sur le plan sémantique (distribution des personnages, sémantisation du vent), il s'agit aussi, par le rappel du début à la fin, d'effets *rythmique* et *rhétorique*.
- ¹² Il est inutile de reproduire ici de longs exemples de paragraphes en expansion. J'y renvoie simplement en citant la première phrase de chacun: "Les haies d'égantines n'ont plus de parfum." (199-200), "La mer miroite, chaque petite vague autant de petits miroirs agités doucement sous la lune." et "Je n'ai plus rien à faire ici." (204), "Le sable coule entre ses doigts." (205) "Ils ont beau m'appeler Olivia en rêve." (212), "La petite fille grandit très vite." et "La petite fille s'appuie sur la clôture." (213), "Elle l'a tout de suite reconnu dans la porte." (215), "Il est comme l'arbre planté au milieu du paradis terrestre." (216), "Les violons grincent et l'accordéon se déchaîne." (218).
- ¹³ P. Merivale va dans le même sens, à cette exception près qu'elle regroupe Perceval avec les autres personnages masculins: "Evidently the male characters of Hébert's story are to be seen as a fragmented consciousness, whose various narrative voices (Nicolas, Stevens, Percival, the anonymous plural inhabitants of Griffin Creek) are to be pulled together by the reader into the total of its fragmented narrative perspectives.", 80. Voir aussi Neil B. Bishop, "Distance, point de vue, voix et idéologie dans *Les fous de Bassan* d'Anne Hébert," *Voix et Images*, 9:2, (1984): 113-129.
- ¹⁴ Ce n'est pas la première fois qu'Anne Hébert fait appel au fou du village pour le faire témoigner de crimes que veut refouler la communauté. Voir le télé-théâtre, *La mercière assassinée* dans *Le temps sauvage* (Montréal: Hurtubise-HMH, 1967): 79-153.
- ¹⁵ André Vanasse, "L'écriture et l'ambivalence, entrevue avec Anne Hébert," *Voix et Images*, 7:3, (1982): 441.

THESE DRUGS

Erin Mouré

SNOW

Breathe this light. This breath of light, breathe. Fir light of snow. Fir light of the most famous branches. Table under the fir. Where we sit, changing our skis & lifting the frozen cans of juice out of our knapsacks, putting them in our coats next to our bodies. Small of the back. Breathe this light. Table between two firs, under two firs, under the snow light of darkened branches. Gully & the bridge over that. Snow. Red Earth campground & the trail to that. Snow urge between us, that. Cold hands & in our jackets, warm backs we have slept with, together, pasted hotly to.

WICK

The small of your back in winter, its candle pale light, the wick trembling, centre, uncentre, the light breath pale beneath it, small back, treasure I lean into, burrow of my darkest day by which the moon is clocked, upon which so much moon is reflected, its dark side too that won't answer for it turns as we turn, turns on its own measure, darkness, at night the moon tangles its wick in such darkness, I remember you, I remember falling for you, I remember April & the moon falling into me from the sky

BVM

If only there were a drug that could be injected into the vein or muscle to forget the infidelity of the other & end this agony. When I get up, I can't believe you are friends with the one with whom you once betrayed me. That she too knows "the small of the back." She the saint who can erase anyone erases me. I'm going out for coffee at 8, you say. Later it is 7. Then you are also eating something & will be home late. You make fun of her a bit. There is nothing to worry about, you say. I wish I was staying home too, you say. I bow over, you've left in your overcoat, this is narrative poetry of the worst & most transparent order, the door is shut. Outside, the snow. Please, I say, *BVM the drug give us this day now*. Where are you when I need you anyway, I say. Where are you. Image of your back. Blue vein, light of your arm. The snow fall. O the drug, I say.

TO SERVE

Sue Ann Johnston

At age 7
the age of reason
I was taught
by father
from the blue
Baltimore catechism
who made you
God made me

POEM

Why did he make you
He made me to know him
to love him
to serve him

Because I served him
I needed him
I needed him
to make me
over and over
again

He had many faces/
He was everywhere/
with a thousand eyes/
even though
I lay on the floor
beneath the large picture window
out of view
I hoped
from the man in the car
across the street
who waited for me
to become careless
and stand up

I listened
to the 10th power
for his movements
I crouched

to love him
to know him
know me
no me
who is this god
who demanded
I memorize
my function

NON-STANDARD DIALECT IN PERCY JANES' "HOUSE OF HATE"

Graham Shorrocks and Beverly Rodgers

IN THIS STUDY WE examine Percy Janes' use of non-standard Newfoundland dialect in *House of Hate*.¹ All page references to the text are based on the edition published by McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1970.² Janes was born in 1922, and published *House of Hate*, his second novel, when he was forty-eight. Growing up in Corner Brook, he spoke non-standard dialect at home, and 90% of the dialect in the novel goes back to that time (Janes, personal communication).

House of Hate spans the lives of four generations of one family — that of Saul Stone — as remembered and interpreted by one of his sons, Juju, but concentrates essentially on two of those generations, namely Saul and his wife, Gertrude, on the one hand, and their six children, Henry, Hilda, Raymond, Crawford, Juju and Frederick, on the other. The narrator, Juju, describes how everyone within the Stone household suffers from the hatred that Saul seems to feel toward all around him, and the hostility toward himself that he generates in his own children. The novel is clearly autobiographical, and some have seen little more than autobiography in it. For instance, Cockburn remarked that *House of Hate* was little more than "[thinly and unimaginatively] disguised autobiographical fact" (115). It is certainly true that Janes has admitted to an autobiographical element in *House of Hate*, but he has at the same time been most insistent that the work transcends mere autobiography (*Interview* 1f). In view, no doubt, of comments such as Cockburn's, Margaret Laurence spelled out the differences between fact and fiction:

Because this type of fiction is so frequently misunderstood and read mistakenly as a literal transcription of actual events, I think it should be made quite clear that this is not a separate area of fiction. As Janes himself has said (the quote appears on the dustjacket of the original edition), "I have added, subtracted, altered, arranged and invented." A novel based on a writer's experience is no less a work of true fiction than a novel which has nothing to do with the writer's own life. The art of

fiction lies in the ability to bring to life on the printed page a whole range of characters and events, and to explore meaningful and universal themes. In this sense it has nothing to do with simply recording the events of anyone's life. And, of course, if six members of a family set out and were equipped to forge a work of art out of their childhood's materials, we would get six quite different novels. (x)

We are dealing, then, not with reality, but with *realism*. *House of Hate* is a work of art, with a number of themes, such as hatred, fear, escape, the "hunt for love" (320), and the effects of Newfoundland's confederation and industrialization upon individual and family experiences. There can be little doubt about the main theme; as Janes himself observed: "There is really only one major theme in *House of Hate* and that is . . . the destructive force of hate within a family" (*Interview* 21f). This focus on the family — the central unit in our society — gives *House of Hate* a universal significance, which is enhanced by the particularity and realism of its Newfoundland setting.

The realistic quality of the novel is effected in various ways. One is Janes' use of place-names. Another is the use of nicknames. Each of Saul's children is referred to by a nickname: Ank (Henry), Flinksy (Hilda), Racer (Raymond), Crawfie (Crawford), Juju (the narrator), and Fudge (Frederick). But the most important device that Janes uses to create the realism so essential to *House of Hate* is direct speech — direct speech that is vivid and spontaneous in its use of non-standard dialect. Indeed, the dialect is an integral part of the story.³ Before looking closely at this dialect and its functions, however, it is appropriate to remind ourselves of some of the difficulties that writers face when using literary dialect:⁴ 1) Ordinary orthography is incapable of representing dialect speech in an explicit fashion, so that the writer's choice of conventions to represent particular sounds is inevitably subjective. 2) The writer is usually not a linguist, and may well not have a technical understanding of the dialect. 3) The reader has to try to make sense — again subjectively — of what is imperfectly represented by the literary dialect. 4) Writers are influenced by other dialects of the language. 5) Writers must be careful to ensure that readers who are not particularly familiar with the dialect represented by their literary dialect can still understand their writing, otherwise they limit their readership very severely. The desire to obtain as wide a readership as possible can lead to stereotyping, if the writer simply provides "those features which are popularly thought of as being what makes [the] dialect [of a certain region] distinctive" (Hiscock 114). 6) Spelling traditions exist among dialect writers and authors who use literary dialect:⁵ these can result in a lack of mimetic precision, and in caricatures and stereotypes. 7) Publishers can influence either the particular orthographical conventions used or the amount of dialect in a work.⁶ 8) Literary authors, no matter how gifted, are not writing for linguists. One result of the above considerations is that authors use literary dialect in a sporadic way, *suggesting* dialect speech rather than seeking to represent it with mimetic exactitude. Literary authors

are usually concerned with dialect as a stylistic means, the importance of which outweighs that of mimetic precision, which anyhow is neither possible nor desirable.⁷ As we have indicated, however, there are the dangers of the caricature, the stereotype and unrepresentativeness lurking in the foregoing considerations. It also follows from these same difficulties associated with literary dialect that scholars should avail themselves of the tape-recorder and of the opportunity to work with contemporary writers. The insights gained may then be of some help in analyzing the literary dialect of writers from the past.

WE BELIEVE THAT the chief functions of the dialect in *House of Hate* are as follows: (1) It provides a geographical, chronological and social setting for the novel that is highly realistic. (2) It is essential to the characterization of Saul Stone. (3) It reveals the characters of the other members of the Stone household—particularly how they relate psychologically to Saul and his “chilling” influence. (4) It helps to create vivid, spontaneous, highly realistic dialogue that gives the novel a decidedly dramatic quality at times.

There follows a brief sample of Janes’ literary dialect at the three linguistic levels of lexicon, grammar and phonology.

LEXICON

barky tea	— strong tea, probably unsweetened (narrator 23)
brin bag	— burlap sack (narrator 16)
hangashore	— slacker, one who shirks responsibility (Saul 23)
missis	— term of respect for a mature woman (<i>Dictionary of Newfoundland English</i> , 330) (Saul 22)
flounder	— strike over the head and knock down (Gertrude 274)
hulderin’	— smothering with affection, protecting, shielding (Saul 88)
lanch out	— give, pay out reluctantly [<i>launch out</i>] (Saul 47)
’low	— suppose [from <i>allow</i>] (Gertrude 61)
moochin’	— being idle, or playing truant from something (<i>Dictionary of Newfoundland English</i> 332) (Gertrude 178)
pony up	— pay up, “cough up” (narrator 114)
streeling	— slouching along; walking aimlessly and slowly, dragging one’s feet (narrator 135)

like a birch broom in the fits	—	extremely untidy, in a chaotic state [used of hair] (narrator 21)
saucy as blacks	—	very saucy [<i>blacks</i> = protestants] (Saul 88)
shocking	—	terribly (Gertrude 23)
wonderful	—	extremely (Gertrude 123)

GRAMMAR

In the system of personal pronouns, in the second person, *you* is singular and *ye* plural. The third person singular masculine has the old South-West of England unstressed objective form *un*.

Probably the most obvious feature of the verb is the generalized *-s* ending in the non-past tense (except with auxiliaries). Examples: *you keeps*, *you makes*, *I hates* (Gertrude 192); *I wants me tea!* (Ank 203).

A non-standard use of the progressive is evident in the imperatives: *Don't be bawlin'* (Gertrude 40, 78); *Don't be fussin'* (Gertrude 78).

PHONOLOGY

The convention *ee* represents dialectal /i:/ in *breekin'* 'breaking' (115), *discipleen* 'discipline' (88), *eece* 'ace' (52) and *mischeevious* 'mischievous' (84), etc.

The spelling *e* represents /ɛ/ in *ketch* 'catch' (103). *ai* represents [ɛ̃], an allophone of /ɛ/, in *air* 'either' (304).

/ä/ is represented by *a* in *lanches* 'launches' (47), and more particularly before /r/ in *accardin'* 'according' (52), *arder* 'order' (134), *drars* 'drawers' (66), *fartune* 'fortune' (123), *harse* 'horse' (37), *t'understarm* 'thunderstorm' (41), etc. The spelling *a* represents a different value, around [ə], in *fella* 'fellow' (66) and *yella* 'yellow' (111). Here we are dealing with low variants of the phoneme /ə/.

The Newfoundland use of /aɪ/ corresponding to standard /ɔɪ/ is widely marked: *b'y* 'boy' (47), *inj'y* 'enjoy' (277), *t'ilet* 'toilet' (87); *biled* 'boiled' (37), *jined* 'joined' (97), *pisoned* 'poisoned' (179), etc. Note the use of two conventions, *i* and *'i*, to represent the same phoneme in words which have the *oi* spelling in written Standard English. The diphthong /aɪ/ is represented by *eye* in *eye-Talian* 'Italian' (188) and *Eye-neece* 'Eunice' (124).

In geographical terms, the dialect used in *House of Hate* is a fairly generalized Newfoundland dialect. To attempt a very narrowly localized dialect would be to overtax both the reader and the orthography. That having been said, Janes does a great deal more than those authors who suggest a dialect by the merest handful of conventions; he gives us a reasonably strong impression of a variety of Newfoundland traditional vernacular, but without overfacing us. For instance, spellings such as *t'ick* 'thick' (131) and *mudder* 'mother' (71) suggest the [t̪] and [d̪], (or [t] and [d] — for alveolar variants occur too, and postalveolar variants in the environment of /r/), in contrast to standard [θ] and [ð] respectively, that are typical of many Newfoundland dialects. The feature largely reflects the influence of Hiberno-English — so many of Newfoundland's settlers having come from southern

Ireland. The vocabulary of the direct speech ranges, naturally enough, from words which are common to all varieties of English to words which are (more) distinctively Newfoundland. Examples of the latter are *baywop* 'person from an outport' (pejorative) (146), *bread-and-lassie* 'bread and molasses' (15), *all hands* 'everyone' (70), *firk around* 'move quickly and aimlessly'⁸ (157). Very considerable use is made of widely-known colloquialisms, vulgarisms and slang words and phrases:⁹ *crap* 'garbage, meaningless talk' (221), *gob* 'mouth' (37), *mug* 'face' (52), *knock up* 'impregnate' (31), and *chum* 'close friend' (57).

Saul and Gertrude did not, of course, come from Milltown (Corner Brook); they moved there at an age when their speech habits had been formed. Saul was born in Conception Bay, his family having come from Ireland. Gertrude came of a family that hailed from the English West Country. Born in Placentia Bay, she had later worked in St. John's. Although it might be tempting to see a trace of her ancestry in her use of the old prefix *a-* before a past participle,¹⁰ we should note that Saul also uses this feature: "'I've a hearrrd . . .'" (301). Similarly, the BE + *after* + present participle construction, which marks perfective aspect with recent time reference, is a feature of Hiberno-English that we might expect to find in Saul's speech, but it also occurs in Gertrude's: "'How many times am I after tellin' you?'" (Gertrude, 37; Saul, 170). We might note also Gertrude's use of the tag *sure*, e.g. "'We was only havin' a bit o' fun, sure'" (78), and further her use of the dental stops [t̪, d̪] (or alveolar stops [t, d]) rather than the interdental fricatives [θ, ð]. Again these are features that we associate mostly with Hiberno-English, but which have become quite general in many Newfoundland dialects. Proximity to Saul might account for some changes in her speech, but, more importantly, we would think, Gertrude had spent her "most impressionable years" (17) in "the thick Irish atmosphere" (12) of St. John's, where

The drawling, word-champing dialect that came to her naturally from dim origins in Somerset, with modifications added by the isolation and local conditions of Haystack, now became overlaid with the colonial Irish spoken by nearly everyone in St. John's. (17)

Such mixing of dialects is in fact typical of what has gone on in places such as St. John's and Corner Brook.

THE NOVEL SPANS the period 1892-1963. Newfoundland in 1892, when Saul was born, was, the narrator tells us, a barren and inhospitable place. The climate and conditions were harsh, and "bodily labour was the condition and law of his [Saul's] existence" (11). The literary dialect reflects the speech of working people in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Saul and Gertrude speak a non-standard dialect, and so do their children. However, as time progresses,

material conditions improve and opportunities arise. Thus, the narrator, who avails himself of an extensive education, loses much of his local dialect — at least as far as his active repertoire is concerned. (The dialect remains a part of his passive repertoire.) The speech of Hilda, Racer, and Crawfie also changes somewhat, as their social position improves. With the next generation, the effects of education are apparent. When the narrator returns home, and visits his eldest brother, Ank, he notes:

The old pattern was repeated in almost every other detail, with no appreciable change in morals, manners, or even in speech on Ank and Mavis' part, though later on I noticed that Ank's better-educated children were veering away from the traditional *patois* of our class. (199)

This change brings us to the social functions of dialect: it is very much a marker of social class — of social and educational status. Saul, who is illiterate, Gertrude and all their children to begin with are clearly labelled as working-class people by their speech, although eventually the narrator's speech changes as he pursues a higher education and leaves Milltown, and Hilda, Racer and Crawfie show signs of bidialectalism. Non-standard dialect use is indicative of group solidarity, of the degree of belonging to a group. Thus, when Juju returns home after confederation and finds himself involved in one of the family's card-games, his speech is subjected to mockery by his siblings:

“*Pawss*,” he [Ank] kept saying, imitating the way I pronounced the word “pass,” with a sarcastic grin and mocking inflection about as subtle as a fist in the face. The others all laughed with various degrees of sympathy (on Ank's side). (192)

They feel that “Juju is after gettin' high notions” (192).

Hilda and Racer have become at least to some extent bidialectal, as time has passed and conditions have improved.¹¹ Juju says of Racer:

I was amused at the way his careful realtor's English was totally forgotten and our childhood *patois* rushed back into his mind when he was heated with whiskey and anger . . . (219)

It is, of course, usual for speech to vary with context. Similarly, Hilda shows signs of bidialectalism, and of a degree of upward social mobility, as she “corrects” her own speech: “I hope Rome and me . . . and I . . . won't be like him and Mom when we gets old” (264).

While to the linguist a non-standard dialect is just as good as the standard form of a language—it is different from but not inferior to the standard—judgements of dialects within society at large are usually negative. The narrator seems to share the usual social attitudes toward dialect. For him dialect is the speech of a class (“the *patois* of our class” (199)); it is associated with the barren conditions, harsh life, poverty and “its Siamese twin ignorance” (319) of pre-confederation New-foundland. It is also, inevitably, the speech of his father, of a family characterized

by emotional poverty and ignorance, from which he wishes to distance himself. Hence we read of "the drawling, word-champing dialect that came to her [Gertrude] naturally from dim origins in Somerset" (17), of the somewhat disparaging "*patois* of our class" (199), and of "the gobbled syntax of unlettered Newfoundlanders":

"Aw, they needs a good lash in d' arse, the whole bloody lot of 'em," Ank would growl in the local *patois* which our family speech had hammered down from the Irish and West Country of our heritage and the gobbled syntax of unlettered Newfoundlanders. (36)

The use of the terms *patois* and *syntax* here might seem to lend to the narrator's utterance a linguistic authority which it does not in fact possess — Juju's judgement is a social one, but it is the social judgement that is important here.

Dialect is integral to the character of Saul Stone. It locates him geographically, chronologically and socially, as is indicated in our discussion of the contribution that dialect makes to the setting. And Saul's fate does indeed seem to be very firmly tied to time and place — to the harsh realities of pre-confederation Newfoundland. Indeed, so close is the tie that the narrator hypothesizes that the barrenness of the land, the harshness of the climate and conditions, and the resultant physical poverty may have led to a parallel poverty of the mind:

Might it not reasonably be, I asked myself, that he in turn had been blighted and desiccated and warped by the conditions of his own early years? . . .

Was there any truth in my idea that by some strange process of diffusion this physical misery and the implacable hardness it gave him somehow passed into his moral and emotional and spiritual nature as well? . . . (318f)

The narrator suggests too — for it would follow from the hypothesis — that Saul is not particularly unusual, that there is a "nation-wide inferiority complex," and that "emotional constriction — and from such causes — has always been a well-known feature of Newfoundland life" (319). To Juju, no doubt, Saul's strongly marked dialect speech is a part of that harsh, barren, poverty-stricken environment from which he himself craves escape. The brutality in Saul's nature is reflected by the coarseness and violence of his language, as he hands out one tongue-lashing after another:

"There's needer one o' ye acted right! . . . Ye ought to be ashamed to look me in the face. If I'd a done to me own fawder the half — no, the quarter — o' what ye're after doin' to me, I'd never a lived to tell the tale. . . . I goes to work and drags me guts out fer ye a whole lifetime, and I don't get no more t'anks for it. No sir. A kick in d'arse, and a foul word behind me back. Oh, don't t'ink I don't know! I've a hearrrd yer whisperin' and back-bitin.' Sure signs, ye'll get nutting more out o' me." (300-01)

Coarseness and violence in language are not the same as non-standard dialect, but for Juju we suspect that they are, for the three are generally inseparable in his father's speech.

Saul's character so dominates the novel, that other characters are essentially determined by the extent to which they are like him, by the degree to which they come to resemble him. It is possible that Hiberno-English features in Gertrude's speech indicate his influence on her although it is at least as likely that they result from her time in St. John's and the mixed character of urban dialects.

Ank, Saul's eldest son, although the first to rebel against his authority, finally turns out to be more like his father than any of the other children. When Ank cries out, "All I wants is a little bit o' time to meself" (43), we are reminded of the young Saul's dream of "the beauty of privacy" (30); similarly, when Ank complains (from being forced to make his younger siblings "stand sound") that "they needs a good lash in d'arse, the whole bloody lot of 'em" (36), we are reminded of how much Ank is already beginning to take on the worst characteristics of Saul. Even Ank's comment about Flinksy's getting married seems to echo Saul's response to the suggestion of Ank's own marriage: "Married!... Lord Jesus, ye're not hardly dry behind the ears yet." (48). As Ank grows older, the similarities between him and Saul seem to become even more disturbingly apparent. Consider the following excerpt from the middle-aged Ank's drunken mutterings:

"Old Man ... old bastard ... right after all ... maybe ... right after all ... goddam women ... never let you alone ... cunts ... never ... work yer guts out ... no t'anks ... expect no t'anks ... kick in d'arse ... that's all ... Lard Jesus ... kids ... cost a bloody fortune ... goddam slave ... that's it ... slave ... bringin' in money ... t'rew away ... finished wit' dat ... fuck it! ... nutting but work ... all work and no pay ... ha-ha- ... no more ... by Jesus ... never done nutting but work ... all work ... since when I still t'ought I only had it to piss through ... so they looks down on me ... young farts ... down on me ... me own flesh and blood ... Jenny, my duck ... sweetheart! ... what did I ever get out of it? ... fosh in d'arse ... curse 'em all! ... sufferin' Christ ... I'll kill 'em ... if they keeps on ... kill 'em ... kill ... kill ... kill..." (206-07)

Although Saul never drank, we can note parallels here between Ank's language and Saul's at many levels: similarities in the dialect (e.g. *Lard* 'Lord'), the violence of the sentiments (*kill*), and the coarse diction (*bastards*, *cunts*, *arse*, *fuck*, *piss*, *farts*). Despite the fact that Saul would never have used a word like *cunt*, Ank's words here remind us of a number of Saul's speeches, such as the tongue-lashing (300-301) cited above. Compare:

<i>work your guts out</i>	—	<i>work and drags me guts out</i>
<i>no t'anks</i>	—	<i>no more t'anks</i>
<i>kick in d'arse</i>	—	<i>a kick in d'arse</i>

Both men feel cheated by life; they resent the way in which they have had to work to support their families and the lack of any thanks.

HILDA IS THE ONLY one of the Stone children to have lived down her nickname. She has gained substantial contentment from her marriage to Rome and their thriving business, and has “risen above all obstacles and above her own and her husband’s limitations to a success in life far more genuine and impressive than anything we boys had achieved” (250). Her two main worries are her weight, and the fear that Rome might be too strict with their sons: “... but I don’t like the thought that they’ll grow up afraid of him” (260). Rome has never displayed any tendencies toward violence, but Saul’s legacy is all too evident in Hilda’s fear. In other respects, however, she is mature enough and sufficiently free of Saul’s influence to be able to pity him:

“I knows what he’s like, and I don’t forget what he done in times gone by. But I pities him too, you know. He’s gettin’ old, and sometimes I can’t hardly stand it to look at his face. So *down*. I hope Rome and me ... and I ... won’t be like him and Mom when we gets old. . . . We never knows what we’ll come to, Juju b’y. It don’t pay to be too hard on people — specially your own.” (264)

Hilda’s language is interesting here. We noted above that her “correction” of her own speech (“... Rome and me ... and I ...”) suggests bidialectalism, a degree of upward social mobility; it correlates with her material success, and with her improved social standing. In a number of other respects, however, her speech clearly remains non-standard: the generalized *-s* ending on verbs, *done* as a preterit, and the negative *can’t hardly*. Whether the “correction” that she makes to her speech here has anything to do with the presence of her newly-returned, better-educated brother is a moot point: it need not have, since the construction in question is something of a social shibboleth that is readily acquired and easily leads to hypercorrection. Furthermore, in this context it might be that Hilda is reassuring herself that she is able to overcome being “warped” — that she is able to distance herself from Saul, his manners, his way of talking, and his house of hate.

Racer appears to be bidialectal in his mature years. He was abroad for six years during World War II, and his subsequent business and prosperity demand a different variety of speech. Because, however, we are only exposed to direct speech from Racer within the family group, where his speech is dialectal and abusive, we are dependent on the narrator’s observation about “his careful realtor’s English” (219) for our knowledge of his bidialectalism. Such switching of codes is, of course, very natural.

Crawfie achieved a degree of success at school, and eventually secured a minor teaching appointment. When he returns home with his wife, Eunice, he still uses a number of non-standard features when talking to, say, Juju:

“You got no idea what it’s like down there, Juju b’y!” he began, his eye big with memory. “If you so much as looks at a girl sideways, people think you got to marry her. I was only after takin’ the wife out twice ...” (125)

In his argument with his father (132-135), however, his speech is much closer to the standard than Saul's:

"I see there's some people pretty quick and nasty with their tongue, and then when they're in the wrong they haven't got the manners to admit it, or the guts to stand up to what they said in the first place. Some people got more bark than bite, when it comes down to brass tacks." (134)

Crawfie's more standardized speech here is a reflection of his education and his employment. It also marks his distance from Saul at this time: he has left home, found a job and got married; he is also prepared to fight with Saul in defence of his wife, Eunice. Fudge, by contrast, does not succeed at school and does not manage to escape from the influence of his parents. He remains alarmingly immature. What little direct speech we have from Fudge is markedly non-standard: "'I haven't got no *plans*, Mom'" (272). "'Gimme sometin' d' eat, Mom'" (276). "'You knows I'm queer-lookin'. Can't get no girls'" (277). "'Anyway, I might as well inj'y meself while I got the chance. I believes . . .'" (277).

We have commented on some aspects of Gertrude's dialect. In that she is of the same generation and class as Saul, and remains close to him throughout his life, it is not surprising that she should speak non-standard dialect just as he does. The narrator, by contrast, acquires a high level of education, spends twenty years outside of Milltown, and consciously strives to distance himself from Saul and all that he represents. Thus, the narrator speaks Standard Canadian English. His accent has obviously changed markedly by the time he returns after an absence of eight years. Gertrude comments on his *ass-ent* ('accent'). The narrator protests that he does not have any accent, but Gertrude insists:

"Yes you have! You got that real Canadian twang. Some words you says I can't hardly understand you a-tall. I s'pose Newfoundland talk is not good enough for you now, after bein' away so long." (167f)

The narrator's vocabulary and grammar are standard — cf. the conversation in which the narrator defends his acquisition of a typewriter against Saul's complaints: "'I am independent, I say. I consider that I have full and complete liberty to act by myself. Is that clear? Is that finally and utterly clear, once and for all?'" His carefully measured speech stands in stark contrast to Saul's dialect — to "the gobbled syntax of unlettered Newfoundlanders" (36), as he calls it. He consciously rejects his father's speech, just as he rejects his father, and the country, climate and social conditions that he feels may have brought about the hatred in Saul. The rejection is a part of his quest to escape from hate (the first word of the novel) to love (the last word of the novel). Whether Juju detests the conditions in pre-confederation Newfoundland because they brought about the hatred in Saul (cf. 318-20), or whether he has rather transferred his detestation of his father to his surroundings (the island, its climate, its speech), as Horwood suggested (n.p.), is

a point that cannot be resolved here. Saul and the old Newfoundland are inseparable in Juju's mind, and the reader sees everything through the latter's eyes only. At any rate, his dislike of most things about pre-confederation Newfoundland is intense: even the shape of the coastline offends him! It is "like a graph gone mad" (11). (We suspect that confederation has effected few changes on that score.)

FROM THESE EXAMPLES it will be seen that the dialect in *House of Hate* goes far beyond mere local colour, or simple considerations of setting. The dialect speech is integral to the entire novel, providing a geographical, chronological and social setting that is essential to the novel's realism; and constituting a significant element within the characterization, not the least of which is to define relative psychological proximity to or distance from Saul. Thus, of all the children, Ank's speech most resembles Saul's and Juju's resembles it least.

Further, the vividness, realism and dramatic quality of the direct speech in *House of Hate* owe much to the fact that Janes' literary dialect operates at all three linguistic levels of phonology, grammar and lexicon. The caricatures or stereotypes that might result from only a handful of (relatively fixed) conventions are avoided in Janes' work.

TO CONCLUDE, JANES HAS, we feel, been successful in avoiding the more obvious dangers: he steers a fairly happy middle course between the incomprehensibility that would result from too detailed a representation of the dialect and the unrepresentativeness, lack of realism, caricatures and stereotypes that might have resulted from contenting himself with a few, highly conventionalized devices.¹² As has been illustrated, his literary dialect operates at the three linguistic levels of lexicon, grammar and phonology. Janes does not simply settle for a handful of conventions (perhaps at one linguistic level only) — a technique that would run the risk of his literary dialect amounting to nothing more than "token local colour."¹³ Rather, he has elected to represent dialect speech in a sufficiently detailed manner for it to fulfill the functions of setting and involved characterization discussed above. Dialect, then, is integral to *House of Hate*.

NOTES

¹ Thanks are due to George Casey, Tom Dawe, Bob Hollett, William Kirwin, Betty Miller and Harold Paddock for useful comments and suggestions. We are especially indebted to Percy Janes for reading an earlier draft and pronouncing our citations on tape. Such deficiencies as doubtless remain are our own responsibility.

² The same publisher's 1976 reprint (New Canadian Library No. 124) contains an Introduction by Margaret Laurence. The pagination of the text itself is, however, identical to that of the first edition.

- ³ Cf. Hiscock's comment on Lowell's use of dialect in *The New Priest in Conception Bay*. "One cannot separate Lowell's use of dialect from the story. It is as much a literary tool as, say, humour or foreshadowing." (114).
- ⁴ Cf. Shorrocks (1981) and Shorrocks (1988, 91f), where a number of these points are raised.
- ⁵ Cf. Brunner for an early but important demonstration of this basic fact.
- ⁶ The influence of publishers on literary dialect is a subject about which singularly little is known. Gash, in a rather informal account of negative attitudes to dialect generally, refers to his own experiences, as a novelist, of hostility towards literary dialect on the part of publishers, literary agents and editors. In Janes' case, there was no interference by the publisher (Janes, personal communication).
- ⁷ Cf. Chapman (74, 182-85). The cited comments of Thomas Hardy and George Eliot are particularly illuminating. See also Mace (18-22), Shorrocks (1981) and Shorrocks (1988, 91f).
- ⁸ *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, 176.
- ⁹ What is colloquial, vulgar or slang can of course be a matter of debate. However, the seventh edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* lists *chum* as colloquial, *crap* as vulgar, and *gob*, *mug* and *knock up* as slang.
- ¹⁰ For examples of *a-* before past participles in the South-West of England, see responses in Orton and Wakelin to the Survey of English Dialects questions IX.3.2-3, 5-7.
- ¹¹ Contrast with this the lack of change on the part of Ank and Mavis, as the quotation from p. 199 indicates.
- ¹² Reviewers and critics generally have applauded Janes' dialogue, no matter how censorious they have been in other respects. "... he handles idiomatic dialogue with much skill," Cockburn (116) (from an otherwise extremely negative assessment); "The language of the Stone family, brilliantly conveyed in Janes's book..." O'Flaherty (175); "Mr. Janes has a splendid ear for speech and idiom..." Porter (1); "The narrator has a good ear for dialogue..." Thompson (2); *Toronto Star*: "The author is obviously at home with the coarse, hodge-podge dialect, a technique that often degenerates into token local colour. Here it adds tart humour to a story that has none of the cuteness or stridency that can invade regional fiction, and a grasp of human nature that takes it beyond that category."
- ¹³ Cf. *Toronto Star*, quoted in note 12.

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BLACK HOLE

Mary Willis

It is there to remind us,
a hoofprint left
where the black goat ran
down the white altitudes
above death.
Instantly it filled,
a well of riddled space
where up is down
and out is in.

You can dream
of a dark pool
behind the mind's light,
the cold scent of the void,
a nocturnal flower.

You can play
for the highest stakes
and pitch your heart free
of earth's gravity
into that silky mouth.

You will not recognize
the unspeakable pull,
the hooded throat
until the last moment
before speech dies.

SHIPS

Erin Mouré

The parts of my life lived in darkness, with sore calves.
The parts of my life in the silence of my skin,
my own skin, such silence.
The parts of my life where I think: "kissing her neck,"
speaking the only way the skin knows to speak

semaphor

signals with flags

but I have no flags, I don't need to be seen
by ships in passing,
I have no need of this, but of lifting you slowly
into my arms
& pressing you to my chest, so that my chest,
which is blind & must use sonar

can see the waves crest

can see you

can see

books in review

COMPLICITY & RESISTANCE

HELEN M. COOPER, Adrienne Auslander Munich, and Susan Merrill Squier, eds., *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation*. U of North Carolina P, Cloth \$32.50; Paper \$12.95.

CLAIRE M. TYLEE, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64*. U of Iowa P, Cloth \$27.50.

THE ESSAYS IN *Arms and the Woman* explore the relationship between gender and war in texts ranging from antiquity to the nuclear age. The essays deal with images of women in male and female writing about war, and some embrace issues of race, religion, and class. Although the collection gives the rather unfortunate impression of being too disparate, it is held together by a predominantly anti-essentialist stance. The editors assure us that the purpose of these essays is to examine "the relationship between war and gender," showing the "deeply gendered mutual influence war and literary representation have had on each other," and to "identify and then interrogate the conventional war text, with its essentialist assumptions." The strength of this collection resides in its persistent questioning of the gender-identified association of women with peace and men with war.

The three editors' own contribution, "Arms and the Woman: The Con[tra]-ception of the War Text," reminds us that men were often driven to war because patriotic mothers and lovers encouraged them to heroic sacrifice. Their main focus is on the perpetuation of a gendered representation of war where

battle is "the sanctioned male alternative to woman's childbearing."

Readers expecting a celebration of women's resistance to war will be discomfited by the emphasis in several essays on female complicity in war. According to Patricia Francis Cholakian, Madame de Villegieu's *Les Desordres de l'amour* (1675) shows that women, denied access to public power, foster war through an exploitation of male erotic desire. Sharon O'Brien also explains Willa Cather's male-identified fascination with war as a reaction to the frustration women experience when passivity is imposed on them by their domestic role. Examining the diaries of Southern women during the American Civil War, Jane E. Schulz similarly concludes that women tended to suppress or displace what had really happened to them in order to produce male-identified narratives.

Of particular interest are essays questioning the assumption that war empowers women. According to James Longenbach, Ford Madox Ford feared that the First World War not only destroyed an "unruffled Edwardian era" but threatened the "already outmoded sexual codes of his day" from which he could not disentangle himself. More unexpectedly, perhaps, women tended to support the war because, as Virginia Woolf recognized, they hoped it would rip apart "Edwardian society as their own bombs could not" or because they felt that the feminist struggle had to be suspended in the face of the greater national crisis (Jane Marcuse's reading of Helen Zenna Smith's *Not So Quiet . . .* and Laura Stempel Mumford's analysis of May Sinclair's *The Tree of Heaven*). Even when women were active participants in the war (in the case of Esther Fuchs' account of Israeli war narratives), men feel threatened by female empowerment, treating female comrades as if they, rather than hostile states, were the real

enemy. These essays deal intelligently with the vexing issue of the liberatory potential of war for women.

I found Sara Friedrichsmeyer's sensitive analysis of Kathe Kollwitz's "evolution from political revolutionary to pacifist" particularly moving. Carried away by the "powerful desire to do her duty and by the rhetoric of sacrifice," Kollwitz initially supported the war, even approving of her son's enlistment. After the son's death, Kollwitz's painful struggle to keep faith with her son's idealization of sacrifice eventually gave way to an unequivocal rejection of violence that was the result of an *intellectual* effort rather than the discovery of some innate female identification with peace. This essay represents a persuasive denial of any inherent link between gender and war.

Although *Arms and the Woman* is rather broad in scope and disparate in historical and thematic choices, it is encouraging to find a collection of essays that tries not to fall easy victim to essentializing attitudes. My one major objection to these essays is that they rather naively assume that the relationship between text and history or text and experience is relatively unproblematical. For them the text is a transparent window onto phenomenological and experiential reality. On a minor note, it is also not entirely clear whether the reader is encouraged to applaud or to deplore women's overlooked complicity and aggression. On the whole, though, *Arms and the Woman* is a worthwhile contribution to an absorbing field of inquiry.

More unified than *Arms and the Woman*, Claire M. Tylee's *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* deals with many of the same issues but, concentrating on British women writers only, it is able to explore them more deeply. Responding to the claim that the First World War, especially the Battle of the Somme, constitutes a crucial event in the shaping

of modern consciousness, Tylee asks if women, who have not seen front-line action, have consequently been excluded from a "culturally significant experience." Intent on investigating "what part women's writing plays in the construction of a national culture," she suggests that the enfranchisement of women might have been "as important a determinant of modern consciousness as the Battle of the Somme." *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* is not only meticulously researched but offers a most thoughtful assessment of women's war books as both complicit with and resistant to the dominant ideology, an ideology expressing itself particularly through the idea of British Empire.

Aside from contrasting women's war-books with those of men, Tylee tries to do justice to the heterogeneity of women's responses to the conflict. May Sinclair's *Journal of Impressions in Belgium*, for instance, remains indebted to male values while St. Clair Stobart's *The Flaming Sword* condemns militarism as "maleness run riot" and seeks to promote women's values instead. Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* is once again shown to demonstrate a woman's blindness to both the realities of the war and the history of the women's movement. In contrast, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* is praised for its "penetrating indictment of British imperialism." Of particular interest are the chapters looking at autobiographical novels by H.D., D. H. Lawrence, and Richard Aldington which deal with the same events. This "trilogy" demonstrates most graphically that the Great War opened up an unbridgeable gap between men and women, reaffirming that gender values "are not only mutually exclusive, but mutually alienating."

Contrary to the popular notion that feminism gained much from the War, Tylee illustrates that, after the War, women lost the jobs they had gained to men

and also that ideologically three myths (the myth of the Somme, the myth of lost innocence, and the myth of Empire as a chivalric enterprise) resulted in masculinity being once more bound to "heroism in battle" while femininity was relegated to "dependent helplessness."

Aside from its recuperation of forgotten war-books by women, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* usefully examines how women imagine their relation to male-centered cultural myths. It is important to recognize that the "mythology of the British Empire" as well as the "Victorian ideal of chivalry" seduced many women writers into complicity with male values while other women writers were able to resist the dominant ideology, asserting, for instance, that the "myth of self-sacrifice obscures the fact that it was fundamental to the idea of masculinity that men do kill" while women do not. But, like *Arms and the Woman*, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* is, from the point of view of critical theory, rather unsophisticated: it reaches conclusions based on an indiscriminate accumulation of biographical, historical, and fictional data as if language were an unproblematical window on reality. Nevertheless, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness* is an important book, not least of all because, contrary to popular assumptions, it reminds us that the masculine and feminine worlds became increasingly "demarcated and exclusive," for women had to symbolize the values associated with home as a private sanctuary or as a repository of civilization, "values that had to be protected and fought for on their behalf."

EVERLYN COBLEY



BREAKING SILENCE

ROSEMARY SULLIVAN, *By Heart: Elizabeth Smart, A Life*. Viking, \$29.95 cloth.

MARY LYNN BROE, editor, *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*. Southern Illinois UP, Cloth, \$29.95; Paper, \$13.95.

THESE TWO BOOKS are important for several reasons, not the least of which is that they break through an, at times, deafening silence that has surrounded the life and work of Elizabeth Smart and Djuna Barnes. Smart (1913-1986), a Canadian expatriate living in England for most of her adult life and an intensely lyrical, personal writer, and Barnes (1892-1982), an American living in Paris during the dramatic 1930s and an equally intense though far more cerebral, and far better, writer, had some striking things in common.

Each was stunningly beautiful in her youth, each rebelled stubbornly and flamboyantly against conventional mores, each enjoyed lesbian relationships, each was an ambitious writer, and both have been discussed and remembered (when they are remembered) first as outrageous and second as marginal writers. Smart has been seen primarily through her turbulent relationship with the English poet George Barker, and Barnes still occupies a shadowy spot somewhere behind Joyce and Eliot. Neither woman could be described as a feminist, though feminists try to claim them, but both were passionate souls trapped in the gender of the woman writer which, in the early decades of this century, was akin to being caught somewhere (to borrow a phrase from *Nightwood*) between the "halt and the damned." Both Elizabeth Smart and Djuna Barnes spent approximately half their creative lives in silence, and these books go a certain way toward explaining the silences and illuminating how these women turned silence into the power of art. That I am still left feeling frustrated

and disappointed with both books and both writers is, perhaps, inevitable, for there is a point at which silence, whether enforced or willed, cannot be transformed into anything else and cannot be captured in words.

In her preface to *By Heart*, Sullivan asserts that "the purpose of this biography is to redress the silence that surrounded Elizabeth Smart." She begins with Smart's well-to-do, upper-middle class Ottawa family and the world of privilege, money and socializing in which Elizabeth grew up. At the centre of this world was the mother, Louise Parr Smart, apparently a neurotic, ambitious, manipulative and deeply conventional woman whom Elizabeth adored, feared and resented. In some senses, Louie is also the centre of this biography in that her personality, never satisfactorily accounted for by Sullivan, recurs again and again to haunt and control her second daughter. Although Sullivan is careful to stress Smart's desire to be a writer from early adolescence and to quote liberally from various unpublished and published sources (including letters, diaries and notebooks) it is nevertheless the mother who seems to dominate this narrative of Smart's life. Ironically, Smart turned herself, not into a great writer, but into a mother by bearing four children with George Barker whom she never married and with whom she could not live, and it was this procreative compulsion, as much as the continuous need to provide materially and emotionally for her children, that absorbed so much of her energy.

But Smart was not unaware of this biological trap: so why did she keep reinforcing it? If there is an answer to such a question, *By Heart* does not provide it any more than it makes sense of the wilful passion that drew Smart to George Barker. What made Barker so attractive to Smart? The fact that he did not allow Sullivan access to his letters only partially

explains the absence of analysis and explanation of Smart's destructive infatuation with him. I cannot help but feel that the psychology of Smart — a woman on the one hand so full of self-doubt and self-abnegation but on the other so selfish and rebellious — could be located more clearly in her relationship with Louie. Barker might also have been used to shed illuminating light on Smart, but Sullivan casts him as a haunting presence, an irresistible force at the edges of Smart's story.

Unfortunately, *By Heart* does not encourage me to re-read Smart's published work or convince me that it is as good as Sullivan claims it to be. Nevertheless, it is an interesting biography written with sensitivity and care. Sullivan's discussion of Smart's later years, the visits to Canada, the slow painful return to writing, the poetry readings, the publication of *The Assumption of the Rogues and Rascals* (1978), and her work on her "Mother Book," is especially well done, and her observation that "Elizabeth, like many women, had allowed what she called the 'teacher, chastiser, maestro of the masculine' to occupy her psyche and was only now [by the late 1970's] dislodging him" is a succinct appraisal of Smart's dilemma. It is clear, however, that Smart never dislodged the patriarchal conception of the feminine — or of the mother — and was still struggling with it in silence when she died.

Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes is a very different kind of book, but it too is inextricably bound up with silence — the self-imposed silences of Barnes' life, the gaps and suppressions within her texts, and the silences to which her works have, until recently, been consigned. But the work of Djuna Barnes bears up extremely well under the scholarly exegesis and analysis of the eighteen essays in this collection, and although we keep coming back to the life — for Barnes, like Smart, always wrote her life — it is

Barnes' work that is justifiably centre stage here.

These essays examine all aspects of Barnes' work, from her early journalism and playwriting, through the stories, early prose and visual art, to the novels *Ryder* (1928), *Nightwood* (1936) and the late, astonishing play *The Antiphon* (1958). There are several reminiscences by those who knew Barnes, a selected bibliography and, most important, a wonderful array of illustrations. These latter include some hitherto unpublished photographs of Barnes and her friends in Paris (notably Natalie Barney and Thelma Wood), and many of Barnes' own drawings (for example, of James Light and Joyce), illustrations of her work, and paintings. This book is worth having for these materials alone, and it is a must for anyone interested in Barnes, modernism and women's writing.

The essays themselves, however, are uneven. The editor's introduction is merely descriptive, though Broe is to be congratulated for bringing such a complex collection together at all. Jane Marcus, who has two essays on *Nightwood*, is repetitive, while Catherine Stimpson, who does the "Afterword" is too brief — especially since her insight into Barnes, whom she sees as silenced by her own acceptance of "literary tradition and authority as masculine," is a valuable key to reading Barnes in this context of predominantly feminist discussion.

Some of the essays, however, are excellent, and I would like to mention a few which make a particularly strong contribution to Barnes scholarship. All three pieces on *The Antiphon* are important: Meryl Altman, Lynda Curry, and Louise DeSalvo have tackled what is surely one of the most complex texts of modern literature, and with their help we are able, for the first time, to see the terrible beauty and power of Barnes' vision through the

complex language and symbolism she used to make the silence speak. *The Antiphon*, a play of Jacobean proportions, is 'about' incest, a father's rape of his daughter and a mother's silent complicity, but it is even more 'about' the daughter and mother violently destroying each other as a consequence and in fulfillment of the patriarchal law. It is a play, finally, about Barnes' own experience, and it has both the stature of Greek tragedy and the currency of Elly Danica's *Don't: A Woman's Word* (1988). Another essay of particular note is Frances Doughty's "Gilt on Cardboard," a discussion of Barnes' illustrations for *Ryder* and *Ladies Almanack*. Doughty, like Stimpson, argues that Barnes never relinquished her need for male validation which she locates in the visual language of Barnes' art.

Interspersed between the essays are quotations from others about Barnes and passages from Barnes' letters. The effect of these fascinating interludes is to return the reader to the writer herself and yet to leave the intransigent mystery of Djuna Barnes intact. Djuna herself provides no decisive help with the mystery because, as she once said: "I like my human experience served up with a little silence and restraint. Silence makes experience go further and, when it does die, give it that dignity common to a thing one had touched and not ravaged."

For all their similarities, Djuna Barnes broke the silence more often and to much greater purpose than Elizabeth Smart, and perhaps she paid the greater price for her art. Where Smart repressed and frittered away her talent in order to raise children, to socialize, to be in the world, Barnes lived a virtual hermit in her tiny Patchen Place apartment in New York dedicating what energy she had to her writing. Despite Sullivan's efforts in this biography, I suspect that Smart will remain minor, marginal, a cult writer, but

with *Silence and Power* Djuna Barnes finally receives the depth, variety and scope of critical attention she deserves.

SHERRILL GRACE

READING AROUND LAURENCE

PATRICIA MORLEY, *Margaret Laurence, The Long Journey Home*. McGill-Queen's, \$14.95.

CHRISTL VERDUYN, ed. *Margaret Laurence, An Appreciation*. Broadview Press/*Journal of Canadian Studies*, \$14.95.

WHEN MARGARET LAURENCE died in 1987, Canadian readers mourned the loss of a woman they had come to admire. That admiration has taken a number of forms, one being the series of publications that have followed her death, the titles and contents of which attest to the deep respect she has earned. Here, I am thinking especially of the collection edited by Kristjana Gunnars, *Crossing the River, Essays in Honour of Margaret Laurence* (Turnstone Press, 1988), and the special issue of *Canadian Women Studies*. On the whole, the books fall into three categories: those on Laurence herself such as Don Bailey's *Memories of Margaret: My Friendship with Margaret Laurence*; those on Laurence's work such as *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence*, and those that focus on both. The two books under consideration here — Patricia Morley's *Margaret Laurence, The Long Journey Home*, and *Margaret Laurence, An Appreciation*, edited by Christl Verduyn — fall into the latter category.

Reading these two books, I was fascinated by the way Margaret Laurence figures so prominently in, and exerts such an influence on, critical commentaries on her work — even after her death. There are many reasons for this impact, the

most obvious being that although published after Laurence's death in 1987, both these books incorporate material written and published long before. Patricia Morley's *Margaret Laurence, The Long Journey Home*, for instance, is a reissue of her 1981 previous book on Margaret Laurence. While the biographical and bibliographical information has been updated, the critical commentary remains untouched. When it appeared in 1981, only the second book-length study of Laurence, Morley's book earned a place in the history of the pioneering of Canadian literary criticism. For publication in 1990, however, it might have added more to our understanding of Laurence's reception had Morley incorporated some of the wealth of recent critical analysis on the issues she quite rightly targets as central to Laurence's African and Canadian writing: feminism, colonialism, and dispossession.

Verduyn makes a greater effort to illustrate the changes in literary scholarship in the decade between 1978, when ten of the eighteen essays appeared in a special issue of the *Journal of Canadian Studies*, and 1988, the date of this volume's publication. (Indeed, Verduyn's own 1988 essay, a description of the way in which Laurence's *The Fire-Dwellers* anticipates the kinds of theoretical concerns articulated by such feminists as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, is an excellent example of more current critical concerns.) Despite such textually-grounded criticism (also evident in essays by W. H. New, Evelyn J. Hinz, Sherrill Grace, David Blewett, & John Lennox), there is still a strong sense of the woman behind the fiction in this collection. Of the eight essays written since 1978, two are papers presented by Laurence herself, and two others respond to comments she makes within them. Verduyn justifies her inclusion of Laurence's two discussions, "Books That Mattered to Me" and "My

Final Hour," by saying, "It seemed inappropriate to construct a volume on Margaret Laurence without allowing her to speak for herself." This tendency to privilege Laurence's own readings of her life and art emerges in both these books and is clearly an expression of respect.

Curiously, what results from this kind of double focus is neither a portrait of Laurence nor a sketch of her work, but rather a sense of Laurence's developing literary vision. In these books, that is, we are introduced neither to the woman nor to the author, but to Laurence the reader. Let me explain.

Laurence's position is privileged in both these books for a number of reasons. Most obviously, they are both published to commemorate Laurence and her contributions to Canadian literature. More particularly, Verduyn's collection is published in part by the *Journal of Canadian Studies* to celebrate Laurence's contribution to the journal and to the Trent community. In the case of Morley's analysis, the emphasis on Laurence's commentary is more a function of the original series' biographical format. Since the critical analysis of Laurence's work is introduced by a short chronology, Laurence's reading of her own life and art is used as transition.

But there is more. It is not just that Laurence was alive, or that (as Patricia Morley explains) she was "a good judge of her own work," or even that she was willing to offer her opinions, but rather that during her career Margaret Laurence established herself as reviewer and commentator, and developed what Clara Thomas calls, "a powerful public presence." Indeed, as Susan J. Warwick's helpful "A Laurence Log" documents, and Patricia Morley's epilogue describes, writing book reviews and introductions consumed much of the time Laurence devoted to writing during the latter years. Given the surprising significance of this enterprise to the way she and her work

are perceived, it would have been interesting to find a more detailed analysis of the value of Laurence's non-fiction.

These books provide a solid introduction to the life, literature and concerns of one of Canada's most important writers. They also provide ready access for the student and general reader to material that has been out of print for a number of years.

NATHALIE COOKE

HETEROGLOSSIC MIRROR

Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence, ed. Colin Nicholson. Univ. of British Columbia, \$27.95.

Contemporary Manitoba Writers: New Critical Studies, ed. Kenneth James Hughes. Turnstone, \$12.95.

STARTING WITH Frederick Philip Grove, Manitoba writers have left their mark on the scene of Canadian literature. When Margaret Laurence, certainly among the greatest of them, died in 1987, many others were there to continue the tradition of good writing from this province. These two collections show something of the range of responses that Laurence and her successors have elicited.

Colin Nicholson's book on Laurence, which consists mostly of contributions specifically written for this publication, stands out from its predecessors by being the first edited by a European scholar and by being the first published in Britain and Canada simultaneously. It thus complements Canadian and American studies with insights won by British and French scholars.

Clara Thomas' introductory essay gives an overview of thematic criticism in Canadian literature which has served Laurence's work most extensively, ending with the conclusion that "Laurence's experiments with form and voice move *The*

Diviners into the critical domain of the 'post-modern'." David Richards re-interprets Laurence's African works as not so much stepping stones on her way to the successful Manawaka novels but as "darker and more interesting examples of failure to accommodate Africa to the grand fictional scheme."

The main focus of Nicholson's collection is on Laurence's Manawaka works. Three contributions concentrate on *The Stone Angel*. Among these, Simone Vauthier's contribution is one of the best in the volume. It analyzes the different ways in which the stone angel is the dominant image in the novel: "concrete object to the narrator," "textual object to the novelist," and "verbal construct which she explodes into a proliferation of images disseminated through the text."

Contributions on the works that appeared between *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners* include Elizabeth Waterson on the binary structure of *A Jest of God* against the background of early 1960s scientific concepts of doubleness, Coral Ann Howells on *A Jest of God* and *The Fire-Dwellers*, Nancy Bailey on Stacey's striving for feminine "Identity in *The Fire-Dwellers*," and Peter Easingwood on *A Bird in the House*.

In the five essays focusing more or less on *The Diviners*, as in much other recent work on Canadian literature, the writing and rewriting of history are at the centre of interest. Thus, Lynette Hunter underlines the constructive force that lies in telling the story of a world that is otherwise threatened. John Thieme compares the ways in which Laurence and Jack Hodgins incorporate Celtic myths into their works. Gayle Green views Laurence's work from a feminist perspective as does Barbara Godard.

The essay concluding Nicholson's generally insightful collection, Greta M. K. Coger's "Margaret Laurence's Manawaka: A Canadian Yoknapatawpha" is a

rather disappointing equation between real-life Neepawa and fictional Manawaka. Although based on actual interviews taped in 1984 it does not give students of Laurence's work much new information. It is one of the two essays that have appeared in print before, but I wonder whether it is really worthwhile reprinting such an essay in 1990 without at least making those minimal changes that would indicate that the author is aware that Margaret Laurence is no longer with us.

While Nicholson's collection presents views from the outside on one of the greatest writers to have come from Manitoba, Kenneth James Hughes' book gives us inside views on writers who are still in mid-career. Most, if not all, are or were at one time connected with the University of Manitoba as teachers or students, and several of them appear also as practising critics in the collection, writing about their fellow writers. In his preface, the editor situates the theory-oriented discourse of his contributors in our post-modern age of "infraparadigm changes," but although he points to the complexity of some of the approaches, with one or two exceptions they are not as jargon-loaded as one might have feared.

Hughes' explication of his own semiotic approach to poetry, which is appended to his quotation in full of George Amabile's new long poem, is very technical. Margaret Sweatman's impressionistic reading of "Arnason's Irony and Vision" relies "on several arbitrary strategies" and many somewhat didactic footnotes. In a structuralist vein, Birk Sproxtton comments on Wayne Tefs' first novel, *Figures on a Wharf*, and Herb Weil on Carol Shields' narrative control and tone. Debbie D'Aoust uses Bakhtinian theory in order to explore *Bloody Jack* by Dennis Cooley, and David Arnason proceeds to an interesting interpretation of Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* as deconstruction of the meta-

narrative of the cowboy. Charlene Diehl-Jones uses Lévi-Strauss's concept of the *bricoleur* in order to explain the structure of Sandra Birdsell's *Agassiz Stories*. Other contributors prefer to be less overtly theoretical: Wayne Tefs' personal essay on Patrick Friesen helps us understand the patriarchal Mennonite background from and against which Friesen writes in his poetry. Judith Owens provides a sensitive reading of Kristjana Gunnars' poetry, and Dennis Cooley comments on Sproxton's *Headframe* in this rather heteroglossic mirror of Manitoba criticism.

MARTIN KUESTER

DISENGAGED

VIVIAN DARROCH-LOZOWSKI, *Antarctica Body*. Penumbra Press, \$12.95.

DONALD HALL, *Here at Eagle Pond*. Ticknor & Fields, \$19.95.

ARITHA VAN HERK, *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Red Deer College Press, \$9.95.

ANNABEL PATTERSON, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry*. Univ. of California Press, \$45.00.

LANDSCAPE LINKS THESE four books, yet the most striking feature they share is a narrowly limited engagement with that subject. In Annabel Patterson's case, discussion of the pastoral landscape is understandably circumscribed by her focus on ideology. In the others, landscape is central to the conception of the work and their circumscriptions are less easily dismissed.

Antarctica Body and *Places Far From Ellesmere* both have their origins in brief excursions to polar regions, but neither is a travelogue in any conventional sense. Both adopt unconventional forms in order to present distinctively female conceptualizations of the polar landscape; both incorporate materials having no immediately apparent connection to the landscape at hand. *Antarctica Body* is the more extreme and less successful of the

two. It describes the "virgin" continent of Antarctica using a "postmodern poetics" that unites "words from science and alchemy, ice, fire, and memory" in "kinetic constellations" (to quote the blurb in the back of the book). The book works just well enough to suggest that such a project might produce interesting results, but Antarctica itself is lost in a welter of authorial self-indulgence, peculiar references to Paracelsus's alchemy, and tidbits of 'science' drawn from such sources as *The Crystal Connection* and Pons and Fleishman's cold fusion experiments.

Aritha van Herk's incorporated materials are more convincingly handled, and include autobiography, geography, history, travelogue, fiction and a literary-critical reading of *Anna Karenina*. Her book is divided into four sections which trace her transition from child to young adult as she moves from the small prairie town of Edburg, Alberta, to Edmonton, and to Calgary. The final section, which makes up almost half the book, describes a recent excursion to Ellesmere Island during which the author/narrator rereads *Anna Karenina*. The experience of growing up in a small town is evoked with authority, and the section extending *Anna Karenina* into the landscape of Ellesmere Island develops a good deal of momentum, though Tolstoy deserves some credit for that. The book succeeds in presenting a genuinely alternative, female response to the arctic landscape, but its fundamental premise — that long-established concepts of self and geography could be entirely reordered by rereading *Anna Karenina* in an arctic setting — would seem to be self-contradictory. For the setting to have such a dramatic effect, the author's engagement with the landscape must have been profound, but how profound could it have been if the trip was dominated by the rereading of a nineteenth-century novel? Behind both *Places Far From Ellesmere* and *Antarctica Body* looms the

exclusively male tradition of arctic writing: from exploration narratives through Farley Mowat to Barry Lopez's recent *Arctic Dreams*, a book that thoroughly deserved its ecstatic reception, but one whose unabashedly male voice and point of view implicitly demand a counterview. These books explore some of the ways in which such a counterview might be constructed, but both employ narrative consciousness too self-absorbed to engage such an extreme and alien landscape.

Donald Hall's collection of essays *Here at Eagle Pond* is easier to read, largely because it attempts less. The sincerity of his engagement with the people and landscape of rural New Hampshire where he grew up and to which he returned to live in 1975 is not in question, but his treatment of his subject is consistently superficial. His descriptions are effective, but the New England landscape he describes is already too familiar. When he goes beyond decorativeness and speaks of his own relation to that landscape and of the disfiguring enroachments of urban mass culture he limits himself to noting that unpleasant changes are occurring, as if any response but resignation were unthinkable. He worries that New Hampshire is going the way of Vermont, which he describes as overrun by "summering professors of philosophy . . . Dada poets from New Jersey," and "orthodepic surgeons [who] wear checkered shirts from L. L. Bean and play at being country folk." The distinction between himself and those he so cheerfully belittles is not obvious. He is, after all, a poet and ex-professor himself and felt compelled to dignify the family property with the title of "Eagle Pond Farm" when he returned to it. Similarly, in a frightening essay titled "I [Love] My Dish," he confesses to watching eight hours of television per day, and working with the thing on in front of him while he does, among other things, "late revisions in prose." He reassures the reader

(who might make a hasty connection between this habit and the virulent spread of urban mass culture) by dismissing the commonsense view that dependence on television may be morally or intellectually damaging as the cant of the politically correct. In one essay he describes New England as "underpopulated" and complains in others that the increase in population is destroying the life and landscape he loves. Too often the book sounds as if its meditations on old and contemporary New England were composed with a half-ignored television droning in the background. It is a very attractive book: red and green binding, blue slipcase, nice woodcuts by Thomas Mason, and it is probably available in little shops throughout New England.

Incongruities between a writing consciousness and its subject are not a modern development, and in *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* Annabel Patterson uses a history of the reception of Virgil's *Eclogues* to show that incongruity has been the rule as the pastoral mode has been disengaged from the world it represents and transmuted by succeeding generations of intellectuals. She shows it being employed as an allegorical veil for dangerous political commentary, as an emblem of the intellectual's position in society, as an allegorical representation of courtly life, and, showing the mode's flexibility at its most extreme, as a means of justifying rural poverty and the confiscation of communally held lands. Of particular interest is the discussion of a recurrent strain of interpretation which maintains that pastoral is, or should be, ideologically neutral. Aside from Virgil himself, writers discussed include Servius, Petrarch, Landino, Vivies, Marot, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Rapin, Fontenelle, Pope, Voltaire, Chénier, Wordsworth, Gide, Valéry, and Frost. The discussion is complemented by an examination of the illustrations done for the *Eclogues*,

many of which are reproduced, including some in colour. Despite its large scope, its focus on ideology, and a strongly articulated point of view, *Pastoral and Ideology* is not doctrinaire and bases its generalizations on specific examples and careful readings. Similar care has gone into the production of the book. This is a handsome volume that can be read with pleasure by anyone with an interest in literary or art history. It is required reading for those having a special interest in the subject of pastoral.

J. B. LANE

MEMORY'S PROSE KINEMA

TIMOTHY FINDLEY, *Inside Memory/Pages from a Writer's Workbook*. HarperCollins, \$27.95.

WHAT DO SIMONIDES, GIORDANO BRUNO, Wordsworth and Freud, Woolf and Findley have in common? All, in one way or another, are masters of the art of memory. And so, of course, is every great autobiographer. Think of Augustine, Rousseau and De Quincey busily recalling, recreating and confessing their pasts in order (as Eliade explains in another context) to free themselves "from the recollection of sin, that is, of a succession of personal events that, taken together, constitute history." Because childhood memories are, to quote Freud, "plastically visual," visual memory "preserves the type of infantile memory." Freud's earliest memories came to him as "regular scenes worked out in plastic form, comparable only to representations on the stage." "I could sum it all up in one scene," says Woolf, alluding to her step-sister's dream and its aftermath. "I find that scene-making is my natural way of marking the past. Always a scene has arranged itself: representative; enduring." And then she asks herself: "Is this liability to scenes the

origin of my writing impulse?" According to Findley, "Leacock was a master at creating scenes: the stuff of scenes and the shape of scenes seemed, very much, to be the basis of how he worked his wonders. How he avoided becoming a playwright, I cannot tell."

Inside Memory is a succession of (obviously) unforgettable scenes in which Timothy Findley dramatizes, re-enacts and so marks his past. "Memory is the purgative by which we rid ourselves of the present," he states; it is "a form of hope"; it is "survival." Significantly, he raises his autobiographical curtain by imagining a scene in a Chekhov play, "a moment of profound silence, broken by the words, 'I remember. . .'" What follows inevitably breaks your heart. A woman will stand there and others will sit and listen." Chekhov discovered not only "the dramatic value of memory" but also that memory is "the means by which most of us retain our sanity." When WFW asks Findley, in Section Seven of *Inside Memory*, to talk about his "particular view of sanity," he replies that those who insist on telling the truth are certified as "mad," shut up, turned off — "like a radio." The mad "don't like lies . . . this is why I seize upon these people as the heroes of my work . . . because they have this straight, flung-out connection . . . to some kind of absolute clarity. And that is what fiction is all about: achieving the clarity obscured by facts."

Facts blur the picture (Findley provides the example of inventing a pair of white kid gloves for Sir John A. Macdonald — in the Findley-Whitehead TV adaptation of *The National Dream* and *The Last Spike* — and thus outraging Pierre Berton's sense of the primacy of historical accuracy); "the pictures [scenes] in my mind are much more like photographs than the remembered images from life. This has to do with Juliet [Mannock, a friend, and the prototype for Juliet

d'Orsey in *The Wars*] and the particular way in which she comes into focus inside memory. I see her so vividly." Talking about painting, Findley says "the visions of my mind are very graphic. . . . And when I sit down to paint, I inevitably paint something that is in my mind." Perhaps, he modestly adds, "I have a talent to see. But not only "to see." Many artists (and non-artists) possess that talent. "And seeing somewhat of man's state," even the "worst" of us (in Robert Browning's words) may be able "to say [we] have so seen." Those with greater talents can say "what it is they saw." And "the best" — the Findleys — "impart the gift of seeing to the rest."

Scene after scene — the stages, wings and dressing rooms of various theatres; cities like London, Los Angeles and New York; the Northwest Territories; the Atlantic House Hotel, in Scarborough, Maine (setting of Findley sixth novel, *The Telling of Lies*); and, for me, the most profoundly realized location in the book: Stone Orchard, a fifty-acre farm where Findley has lived with William Whitehead (WFW) since 1964. Like Leacock's "little town" of Mariposa, and the town in Thornton Wilder's masterpiece, *Our Town*, Stone Orchard, on the outskirts of Cannington, Ontario, is grittily, sensuously realized yet also exists mysteriously on the outskirts of myth. This section of the book should be required reading for all new Canadians, that is, those born here but still under sixteen, as well as immigrants. For a "naturalized" Canadian like me, "Stone Orchard" catches something of the quintessence of whatever Canada is.

A cast of thousands — well, maybe not thousands but still a very large number of people leap into life, clearly focussed inside Findley's memory: Thornton Wilder and Ruth Gordon, his two major mentors; Ernest Thesiger and Wilfrid Lawson, two well-loved actors, brought back by the

mercurial messenger, Mnemosyne, from that "undiscover'd country from whose bourn / No traveller [normally] returns." Plus a whole history-play of friends and relatives, authors, agents and publishers; not to mention Gary Merrill wearing a skirt in public and Phyllis Webb talking privately on the telephone to a drunken Tiff. And then there's WFW who keeps Findley sober (or tries to), asks him leading questions (in "Alice Drops her Cigarette on the Floor"), stands naked on a table with his digit in a screeching smoke-detector, helps Janet Baldwin with her accounts (another brief but memorable scene), and is an unobtrusive but moving spirit throughout the entire book — as he has been throughout Findley's writing life.

Action packed — covering the period 1953-1990, with flashbacks to 1914, 1912 and even to the 1820s when Irish immigrant families established Cannington, *Inside Memory* is composed mostly of extracts from Findley's journals, notebooks, articles, lectures, radio-talks, introductions, though it also contains an interview and an excised section of *Famous Last Words*. Eighty-seven individual sections, achronologically arranged and as cunningly crafted as the narrative in the last-mentioned novel: a veritable "prose kinema" filmed on dozens of locations, lit by imagination's arc-light; a heavenful of stars glowing over an energetic world of character-actors all re-enacting their lives and their deaths (Marian Engel, Margaret Laurence, Gwen MacEwen, Ken Adachi, for example), all replaying the parts they have played in the life of a man who, in his imagined "Final Hour," calls himself "a hiding place for monsters."

Like Caliban, Findley is "an abominable monster," a "howling monster," a "most perfidious drunken monster"; but he is also a "puppy-headed" and "a brave monster." Shakespeare gives his monster some of the most beautiful lines in *The Tempest*: "this isle is full of noises, /

Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not." The Findley monster also makes marvellous music with words, thus providing a ravishing sound-track for his moving (autobiographical) pictures. As the tipsy Trinculo so lovingly puts it: "Well drawn, monster, in good sooth!"

JOHN F. HULCOOP

MULTIPLE FLOTTEMENTS

NAÏM KATTAN, *Le père*. Hurtubise HmH, n.p.

LOUIS CARON, *Le coup de poing*. Boreal, n.p.

CHANTAL HÉBERT, *Le Burlesque québécois et américain*. Presses de l'Univ. Laval, n.p.

LA LITTÉRATURE française et québécoise compte des réussites magistrales en essayistique, textes dont la lecture et surtout la relecture, au-delà des thèmes traités, imposent à l'esprit toute l'exigence et la rigueur nécessitées par la pratique d'une écriture qui doit, selon un théoricien du genre "faire coïncider la précision de son signifié avec la force de son signifiant." C'est sur cette formule qu'aurait dû méditer Naïm Kattan, auteur du recueil d'essais *Le Père*, lorsqu'il s'est proposé d'étudier les rapports historiques et trans-historiques au père.

Il tire ses exemples particuliers de l'étude des traits de la judaïcité par le biais des figures d'Abraham et de Moïse, lesquelles sont prétextes à des digressions où l'essayiste cède la place pour un bref moment au romancier dans une transposition de l'essai didactique à la fiction qui ne paraît pas heureuse. L'essai traitant de Mohammed et de la genèse de l'Islam, en tant qu'opposition entre une paternité autoritaire mais pacificatrice et une fraternité calamiteuse, paraît déjà mieux mené, la démonstration suivant une chronologie précise. Cette même chronologie historique bien étayée souffre ailleurs

pourtant de multiples flottements, voire d'incohérences, surtout en ce qui a trait aux textes abordant le nazisme et le communisme. Nous retiendrons parmi les essais les plus intéressants, ceux intitulés *L'Aufklärung* (Les Lumières) où sont explicités les rapports entre certaines grandes figures intellectuelles, Marx, Freud, Kafka et la religion israélite qui fut aussi du père. Ici, la fermeté du propos en dépit d'une fâcheuse tendance de l'écrivain à la tautologie stylistique ou à la redondance qu'une simple relecture aurait fait disparaître, suscite l'intérêt, et par le fait même, d'autres questions sur les relations complexes entre écriture et paternité (ou le refus de la paternité), interrogations dont l'auteur, à mon sens, effleure à peine les réponses. D'autre part, la partie du recueil qui aborde la nature de la figure paternelle dans la société et la littérature québécoise, souffre d'un esprit de synthèse qui confine à une superficialité invalidant cette étude comme analyse utile du corpus québécois. Devrons-nous dire aussi, hélas, que le *Don Juan* n'apporte pas davantage de perspective neuve sur l'étude de son mythe? Quand au texte qui clôt le recueil, traitant du colonialiste (dont on doit se demander si les longues allusions à T. E. Lawrence sont le prétexte de l'essai, ou si c'est le contraire), il présente des perspectives intéressantes surtout dans l'établissement d'une volonté parricide existant chez le colonisé à l'égard de ce faux père qu'est le colonisateur.

On regrette cependant que la plupart de ces essais didactiques, si c'est là le genre qu'a voulu pratiquer Kattan, soient desservis par un manque de rigueur formelle qui aurait imposé la clarté implacable de l'idée, par un style qui cède trop souvent aux séductions sulfureuses du chiasme barthésien ("fils de son père parce que père de son fils") aux redondances (fréquentes et indues), et aux coq-à-l'âne obligeant le lecteur à des pirouettes intellectuelles auxquelles renonce

pourtant l'auteur, sans compter de nombreux errements sinon dans l'argumentation elle-même, du moins dans son déroulement textuel. De sorte que les essais de Kattan, empêtrés par le jeu mal contrôlé de leurs signifiants au détriment de l'évidence claire de leurs signifiés, perdent une grande partie de l'impact intellectuel que l'on pourrait pourtant attendre de la thèse et de la perspective qu'il abordent.

Le coup de poing de Louis Caron, le troisième tome des *Fils de la liberté*, souffre hélas des mêmes travers, en même temps qu'il suscite chez le lecteur sérieux quelques réflexions qui n'étaient certes pas ce que Bakhtine appelle l'intentionnalité de l'auteur. Combien de temps encore l'institution littéraire québécoise sera-t-elle prisonnière de ce sophisme digne de de Mgr Camille Roy, qui veut que les sujets québécois, que la québécutude, que la québécuté, produisent automatiquement un bon roman. Que le contenu justifie en quelque sorte la forme? L'histoire "édifiante" de Jean-Michel Bellerose, jeune felquiste pris dans les événements d'octobre 70, venu chercher refuge en compagnie de son amie Lucie dans les marécages de Sorel chez son oncle Bruno, et de l'imbroglia terroristico-amoureux qui s'ensuit, est servie par une écriture fortement mimétique parsemée de multiples commentaires du narrateur insistant avec la légèreté d'un pavé sur le malheur ontologique d'être descendant de "porteur d'eau" ou de "nègre blanc d'Amérique." Et les commentaires des personnages de répéter ceux du narrateur avec la même subtilité éléphanterque. Et le narrateur-scripteur-auteur de n'avoir point lu attentivement son texte afin de l'expurger de toutes les petits coquillages, répétitions, redites, de tous les minimes clichés dont l'addition finit par user la meilleure volonté du lecteur, lequel, voulant lire quelque chose de réussi sur le terroriste québécois se tournera vers *Prochain Épisode*,

Trou de Mémoire ou vers *l'Enfirouapé* de Beauchemin.

D'un tout autre genre, et surtout d'un tout autre calibre est l'étude de Chantal Hébert sur *Le Burlesque québécois et américain*. Dans ce remarquable travail d'analyse, on confronte le théâtre populaire québécois tel qu'on le présentait dans les music-hall des années trente avec sa source qu'était la production américaine du même genre, que les artistes montréalais avaient d'ailleurs traduite et fortement adaptée.

Chantal Hébert, au moyen des théories d'analyse structurale et sémiotique préparées par le Groupe d'Entrevignes, ainsi qu'avec l'utilisation des modèles structuraux mis au point par Kongas et Maranda, dégage les paradigmes qui, à l'intérieur d'un corpus donné, québécois ou américain, renseignent sur les idéologèmes propres à chaque société. La rigueur des applications théoriques sur les textes, fort utiles d'ailleurs pour tout jeune chercheur en analyse de la sémiotique théâtrale, permet de dégager des résultats sociologiques fort intéressants et, par ricochet, justifient la pertinence de privilégier l'art populaire comme corpus d'analyse en vue d'identifier justement ces idéologèmes. C'est ainsi qu'Hébert peut réinterroger la validité de l'idéologie officielle de conservation, qui prévalait dans le Québec des années trente à la lueur de ses analyses structurales. Plus intéressantes encore sont ses conclusions sur le rôle et la valeur du personnage féminin présenté par ce théâtre populaire, lequel renvoie l'image d'une femme dominante, manipulatrice, indépendante, aux objectifs matrimoniaux ou matériels clairement établis, perception qui expédie aux orties toutes les Rose-Anna résignées pourtant véhiculées par la littérature officielle. Et on lira avec beaucoup de profit la conclusion de cet ouvrage où l'auteur aborde la dimension moderne du burlesque, ses liens avec l'idéologie, et surtout sa position par rap-

port à l'art plus élitiste des tragédies classiques. Hébert met en relief la fonction du rire comme élément probant de subversion, d'anarchie, de contestation, valeurs que l'institution préférerait désamorcer et banaliser en ne reconnaissant au burlesque que la tâche de divertir, sans vouloir voir que le rire est toujours symptôme d'autre chose. Cela, Chantal Hébert a su admirablement le démontrer, en produisant un ouvrage de référence obligé pour quiconque veut aborder la problématique présentée par toute forme populaire d'art au Québec.

DOMINIQUE PERRON

ARTIST-NOVEL

DAVID WILLIAMS, *Confessional Fictions: A Portrait of the Artist in the Canadian Novel*. U of Toronto P, \$45.00/\$17.95.

IN *Confessional Fictions*, David Williams opens up for virtually the first time one of the most important and fascinating genres of Canadian fiction, the artist-novel, and places it (to a degree unusual in Canadian criticism) within a context of Anglo-American influences and analogues, emphasizing Wilde, Joyce, Moore, and Pater. Nor can his selection of texts and authors be faulted: here are nine of the Big Ones, whether as artist-novels or just as "novels."

Williams' definition of the artist-novel involves, in part, an 'artist'-protagonist — Mrs. Bentley, Munro's Rose, David Canaan — making life imitate art, in an aesthetic "defense against real self-knowledge." Their manipulation of other people according to the requirements of their aesthetic visions, with a Wildean privileging of "beautiful" lies, turns murderous, by Williams' reading, in Dunstan Ramsay and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. Finding "humanism," which privileges self-knowledge, "in the very citadel of Canadian post-modernism," which sup-

posedly privileges instead the thematics of the failure of language, makes it possible to have a contemporary "artist-novel" after all. These are estimable, and largely successful, projects.

The introductory section, on the aesthetic theories and the exemplary artist-stories of late Victorian literature, is somewhat longer and more entangled than necessary for subsequent analyses. However, its main point, the interconnection of English aestheticism with twentieth-century Canadian fiction, is engrossingly illustrated by that deceitful emissary of European culture (an "intermediary," as old-style comparatists used to say, if ever there was one), F. P. Greve, who, as Grove, infiltrated much decadent symbolism (through his self-"portrait of Dorian Greve") into the subtexts of what we once thought was "prairie realism." Here, where the connections are the most direct, Williams' argument is at its strongest. But similar Wildean parallels claimed for *The Stone Angel* are far less convincing than the excellent, if marginally relevant, Biblical parallel Williams draws.

Whether Buckler is best seen as parodying Thomas Wolfe's inflated late-Romantic artist-hero, by ironically undercutting his own egotistic, pretentiously sensitive protagonist, I am not sure, but this interpretation makes *The Mountain and the Valley* seem a better book, or at least a more interesting one, than I had previously supposed. And it is more persuasive than the similar suggestion that Kroetsch (in *Badlands*) is rewriting *As for Me and My House*, parodying for example, Ross's "fossil remains." Atwood's *Surfacing* looks far more like what's being "re-written" in Anna's "dialogue with her father's text."

There are neatly subtle transitions, from Buckler to Roy via the allegorical places of "Entre"mont and "Alta"mont, respectively, and from Roy to Munro via

spatial form as emblemized in Roy's photograph album, a "figure of time turned into space." Roy's *The Road Past Altamont* is seen as Joycean in its linked epiphanic story sequence and imagist in its "tapestry" of the "frozen moment in the flow of time." Excellent, but I wish Williams had taken some account of its being written in *French*. On the other hand, his rather finicky approach to Sinclair Ross and Alice Munro, two of the subtlest writers in Canadian literature, by quoting excessively from critics of the Diary form, for instance, or of the photography-fiction nexus, makes their books seem even subtler (and less inviting) than they really are.

I see the heart of Williams' book in the essays, near the beginning and at the end, respectively, on Davies' *Fifth Business* and Findley's *Famous Last Words*. The Davies chapter provides a gripping close reading of Dunstan Ramsay as the most "unreliable" narrator since, say, James's Governess in "The Turn of the Screw." Ramsay's slightest gesture of self-approval is seen as "calculated ambiguity," covering up villainous moral frailties. His deliberately misleading narrative stance neatly corresponds to the "'magician's subtle technique of misdirecting the attention of his audience'" of which, as an experienced conjuror, Ramsay speaks. His story, circularly, "closes as it opened, with a proxy who throws [Dunstan's] snowballs for him." I am taken in by this very seductive reading, until I return to Davies' text, where I find (as before) a rich palimpsest of possibilities and ironies, some DR's and some RD's, including a muddling-through to a "Jungian identity," and the comic "heroism" of a figure for whom Davies feels, and transmits, considerable affection. To all these I now *add* Williams' reading.

For some reason, Findley is not given equivalent credit for distinguishing his own, and preferably also the reader's,

moral judgment of his protagonist from that which Mauberley self-justifying seeks to convey. Williams argues that Findley errs in adopting the "aesthetic" position, thus remaining morally neutral in the face of the "work of art" which Mauberley's life, including Mauberley's fascist sympathies, his sycophantic cultivation of the Windsors, and his arranging a murder to promote their convenience. Mauberley's narrative "reifies the triumph of beauty over truth by letting the aesthete speak," says Williams, as if he had not, a mere two hundred pages earlier, found an unreliable narrator, condemned out of his own mouth, in *Fifth Business*. I find this a grave misreading of *Famous Last Words*, which is, if anything, *too* obvious in its directing of our moral judgments.

It is as if these stories were detective stories, on the order of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Once we figure out that the narrator (Dunstan Ramsay, Mrs. Bentley, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley) 'dun-it,' our readerly obligations are over; the skilful close reading that has gone into these discoveries has *simplified* these complex characters and their complex narratives.

PATRICIA MERIVALE

MAN & MYTH

FRANÇOIS DUMONT, *L'Eclat de l'origine; la poésie de Gatien Lapointe*. l'Hexagone, \$14.95.

BERNARD POZIER, *Gatien Lapointe, l'homme en marche*. Co-edited by La Table Rase (France) and Shena (Italy). Ecrits des Forges, n.p.

JACQUES HÉBERT DID a great service to Quebec literature when he launched in the early 1960s the Editions du Jour, making inexpensive paperback editions of new writing readily available. They sold in drugstores and the 5-and-10 and then Hébert took the considerable risk of creating a book club, mailing the choice of the

month to subscribers along with a list of titles available at a discount. The Club was promoted at the Salon du Livre de Montréal in 1962 with six titles for a dollar and then, or in one of the early selections, I received my copy of Gatién Lapointe's *Ode au Saint-Laurent*. It was already from the second printing (a further 1,000 copies) which gives some idea of the runaway success of this great poem. These are some of the important facts of the Quiet Revolution (I cannot vouch for all of them). This page in Quebec's publishing history deserves to be properly documented and recorded.

I still open my copy with emotion and nostalgia. The elegant white, glossy cover, printed in black, blue and green, colours of the earth, sky and water in which this noble poetry is grounded, is a silent witness to the commitment to literature and to quality in the arts of those heady days. The impact of that one work can scarcely be exaggerated. Cécile Cloutier said this of it when it appeared:

L'Ode au Saint-Laurent is our genesis, vibrant with restless patience, in which, time, only with difficulty, becomes permanence, in which man is a being who stands tall, open to a world of mystery.

Twenty years later the same critic affirmed the centrality for every Québécois of this 'great love letter which speaks (to them) of fire, trees, roots, language and the land. As essential as the river itself.'

Lapointe was ambitious when he wrote the *Ode*. The Quiet Revolution got off to a hesitant start; Quebec's reawakening was cautious and full of uncertainties. The poets of the early 1960s spoke of suffering and the contradictions of being Québécois. Lapointe by contrast has the hubris and the eloquence of a prophet:

j'ouvre à l'homme un champ d'être
I open up for man a place to be

This one line gives the measure of his ambition, ontological, universalist, mes-

sianist. The pattern of that line is one repeated scores of times with constant, elegant variation: the present indicative, almost invariably in the first person, of vigorous, active, transitive verbs, predicating the world and the whole field of man's experience, playing on abstract and concrete, literal and metaphorical. Lapointe owes to Anne Hébert and to the Symbolists before her a belief in the creative power of words to name and so give life.

je nais dans tout ce que je nomme ...
tout commence ici au ras de la terre ...
Je donne parole à tout ce qui vit ...
L'homme de mon pays sort à peine de
terre ...
La parole de l'homme est ma seule présence
Je réduis la distance entre chaque être
Je célèbre chaque chose qui vit

The influence of Paul Eluard, on whom Lapointe wrote a thesis at the Sorbonne, and the more poetic side of Surrealism, can also be felt in this vision of harmony and community. François Dumont remarks, in the first of the books reviewed here, on the perfect and rare coincidence between a literary work and the 'horizon d'attente,' the expectations of its public, of the Québécois, when it was published in 1963. Quebec was just ready for this humanist, holistic, healthily physical celebration of being alive and literate in North America in the 1960s.

Je suis un mot qui fait son chemin dans la
terre ...

The *Ode* is a poem which announces its own poetics, words springing from the poet's hands as his dialogue with the land unfolds.

The simple sentence patterns, the basic vocabulary and verb forms made this poetry ideal material even for beginners in French and I was using it in this way only two years after it appeared. It provided a good initiation to poetry and to the writing of the time.

François Dumont's essay on the poetry of Lapointe was written as a thesis, ad-

mirably structured and presented, clear and extremely concise. It is in two parts, the first half consisting of brief chapters elegantly written, devoted to Lapointe's published work, eleven collections of verse one of which was a selection of the poet's work read by him on disc. The second half is the thesis proper, in three chapters, on the theme of the myth of origins or beginnings; one chapter on the theory of the myth, one surveying Quebec poetry from this perspective and the third examining the place of this theme in the poetry of Gatién Lapointe. The titles chosen by Lapointe for his books, *Le Temps premier*, *Le Premier Mot*, *Le Premier Paysage*, "Fauve d'aurore," lines such as 'je nais dans tout ce que je nomme,' already quoted, and the pronouncement of Cécile Cloutier: 'L'Ode au Saint-Laurent, c'est notre genèse à nous . . .,' all point to the centrality of this motif for Lapointe. He has been seen as having more in common with the great originator Jacques Cartier than with more recent cultural tendencies in Quebec. François Dumont, a poet and philosopher himself, was particularly well equipped to tackle this important topic. He is at ease with the theories of Eliade, Blanchot, Barthes and Poulet. The simplicity of Lapointe is deceptive and like all simple things requires to be handled with a good deal of sophistication.

For thirteen years from 1967 to 1980 Gatién Lapointe published nothing. The poems that appeared in 1980 under the title *Arbre-Radar* dazzled the critics by their modernity, their density, their sensuality. Lapointe coined the phrase 'tremblement de corps' ('fleshquake' as we say 'earthquake') to describe the burst of images and sensations which rip through his new work. But those thirteen years were not inactive if they were silent ones. Lapointe worked tirelessly as teacher at the Université de Trois-Rivières, as lecturer and as publisher, giving many young

poets their first chance through the *Écrits des Forges*, the publishing house he set up in 1971 with the help of his students.

Bernard Pozier was one of those who regarded Lapointe as their 'père en poésie' and his *Gatién Lapointe, l'homme en marche* is a fervent tribute to the mentor and friend with whom Pozier worked closely for over ten years. Pozier attended Lapointe's lectures and his creative writing workshops and worked with him in his recording sessions. He offers us a compendium of personal tributes, critical comments on each work in turn, unpublished articles and poems by Lapointe, a selection of short extracts from the critics matched by Lapointe's own views on his writing, details of the publication of each of the works and a series of eleven previously unpublished photographs by Serge Mongrain, variants, translations, transcriptions from tape and Lapointe's own selection of 27 key phrases from his work. Listed baldly like that, the contents may sound a bit of a rag-bag. It would be unfair to give that impression. The literary comment is well-written and faithfully observed. True, the book would have gained by being more scholarly, though that was not Pozier's intention. There is no bibliography, the details of each of the works are of the first edition only, not of subsequent editions or translations, and there is no chronology of the writer's life, something this book cries out for. We know that some of the material published in *Ode au Saint-Laurent* in 1963 had already appeared in *Cité libre*, *Liberté*, *Maintenant*, *Le Devoir*, *La Presse* and in *Mercurie de France*. We want to know when and whether there are any significant variants. There was a revised edition of the *Ode* in 1964. Pozier makes no mention of it.

But Pozier's book works. It works as a vibrant testimony to a visionary writer, an inspiring teacher and an exciting companion in the literary cause. A portrait of

the whole man emerges, demanding and warmly encouraging, working to his own fiendishly high standards and urging others to meet them too, wanting to create in Trois-Rivières, in spite of the stigma of provincialism and the remoteness from important cultural centres, a place where poetry was possible and where it could flourish. Quebec in the 1960s and in 1980 was on a new threshold ripe for the myth of new beginnings. Gatién Lapointe was there as man and myth.

CEDRIC MAY

TEXT & IMAGE

MARTIN BARKER, *Comics: Ideology, Power and the Critics*. McClelland & Stewart, \$24.95.

ROBERTA E. PEARSON and WILLIAM URICCHIO (eds), *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero*. Routledge \$17.50.

SILVIE BERNIER, *Du Texte à l'image: le livre illustré au Québec*. Presses de l'Université Laval, \$32.00.

Du Texte à l'image is an insightful overview of illustrated books in 20th century Quebec. After an introduction defining the object of the study ("tout livre composé d'au moins une illustration, mis à part la couverture"), the first part is devoted to a theoretical chapter summarizing current trends in the analysis of text-image relationships, followed by a survey of Québécois illustrated books published since the 19th century. In the second part, Bernier proceeds to analyze examples typifying various approaches to the "intersemiotic practice" of text illustration throughout the first half of the century.

She successively examines two pictorial interpretations of *Maria Chapdelaine* (Suzor-Côté's 1916 realistic pencil-work vs. Clarence Gagnon's 1933 post-impressionist watercolours); the work of the dime novel publisher Edouard Garand; R. Choquette and E. Holgate's 1931 art

book *Metropolitan Museum*; two poetry collections illustrated by A. Pellán, and the work of Roland Giguère. Bernier's hypothesis is that text illustration underwent a clear evolution during the period. With avant-garde movements, books increasingly tended to become "objets d'art"; the supposed analogy between text and picture shifted toward an interplay based on the gestural dimensions (*gestualité*) of writing and drawing.

Bernier's account is articulate and well-written. In terms of content, one is surprised by the author's probably deliberate oversight of P.-E. Borduas's *Refus global*. Concentrating on lesser known works is understandable, but such a study ought to have included more than a few passing allusions to Borduas.

The Many Lives of the Batman is a collection of ten essays covering various aspects of the comic book character Batman as an American cultural phenomenon. The contributions include a historical survey of the character, interviews with former Batman writers, an analysis of the economic rationale behind the film *Batman*, and a deconstruction of the myth, aptly entitled "I'm Not Fooled By That Cheap Disguise."

The chapters which focus on the audience, or rather audiences who "consume" Batman in comic book, film, or television series form. Despite incomplete data, Patrick Parsons has produced an impressive assessment of comic book readership since the 1930s. There are chapters on audience response to the 1989 motion picture and the 1966 TV show, and Andy Medhurst explores the homosexual theme in the perennial Batman-Robin team.

Finally, there is Jim Collins' post-modernist essay, written in a Jamesonian vein, on the intertextuality in recent Batman texts. Collins' work illustrates the diversity of approaches which characterizes *The Many Lives of the Batman* and, like the other essays, proves that the

scholarship of comic strip art has come of age.

Barker's initial claim is that all analytical approaches to comics are flawed by their ideological slant. He exposes some of these flaws by examining several British comic books to substantiate his contention. Barker resorts to Barthes, Propp, Voloshinov, and other theorists to analyze several British comic books: an adventure magazine, a nonsensical horror strip, and a magazine for young girls. He methodically undermines the traditional criticisms levelled against these strips and their likes, and convincingly questions the validity of such concepts as informed by "identification" and "stereotype."

Subsequently, Barker addresses psychoanalytical approaches, and to a larger extent post-structuralist theories, arguing for a "subject" constituted by discursive practices. He explores the idea of a "comic book/reader relation" and formulates the hypothesis that "juvenile comics . . . propose a relationship to children, and offer [...] an imaginative conversation with them about 'childhood'" — and in fact address the issue of adult authority. Finally, he compares his approach with Dorfman and Mattelart's classical Marxist interpretation of Donald Duck comics as vehicles of American imperialist culture.

Barker is the first cultural critic to reappraise all interpretive approaches to comics systematically. Although he thereby singles out a number of misconceptions, he also destroys more than he constructs. For instance, he seems not to take into consideration the ideological potential of artwork and totally dismisses the fact that comics are mostly read by adults all over the world.

JEAN-PAUL GABILLIET



FRESH PERSPECTIVES

KAREN CONNOLLY, *The Small Words in My Body*. Kalamalka Press, n.p.

LINDA ROGERS, *Woman at Mile Zero*. Oolichan Books, n.p.

ANN TRACY, *Winter Hunger*. Goose Lane Editions, n.p.

THE MOST STRIKING FEATURE of each of these three books is their exploration of narrative perspective. A struggle with perspective in order to arrive at voice is both theme and structure of Connolly's poems. Rogers' strongly voiced prose poems accommodate dual perspectives through parody. And Tracy designs her novel to speak the inadequacy of the narrator everywhere and so thematize the limits of narration.

Connolly's first book of poetry, *Small Words*, is divided into three sections, the first of which comprises four suites. The apparent discreteness of the parts is countered by linkages, particularly of metaphor and theme, among the sections so that the book has a coherence; but there is such radical variation of structure, voice and quality among the parts that the book is jarringly uneven. In the first section the voice is personal, often grandly self-righteous, as in, "You taught me the one truth you understood: / the remarkable cheapness of all blood, / even my own. / Now I should cry thank you. / I should be glad." Some entire poems should have been edited out, and likely the whole "Grave Digging" suite. Within poems, while she can get her lines to do double duty at times, at other times they drain energy from the poem: "Slamming Doors" where "No, it is not love, / It is my heart / It is my heart / slamming doors" is an obvious example of the poet's not trusting the reader to detect a line's ambiguity, and not trusting her own craft to lead the reader. But if the lines are sometimes clumsy, the linebreaks are wonderful:

consistently clean and surprising, they bring a dimension of characterization to the narrator in "I Know All This": "I can tell by the way / the grass in the background / is the same shade of light as his eyes / and the sky is related to this colour / that shines / and shines." As for the relationship of this to the other two sections of the poem, they compose an overall structure of thesis, antithesis and resolution in the variants on perspective: the highly personal, body/blood/bones poems of the first part contrast with the social body of the other as constructed in the second section, poems of Northern Thailand. Here the voice becomes detached, less explicit in its judgements; the addressee, too, is indefinite and so generalized: pronouns (I, you) become uncertain, detachable and as impersonal as "anyone." "In daylight the rice is greener than anyone's eyes, / Stands slender in sun-silvered water. / [...] / The people smile at you / with the faces of cats, / clean-boned, beautiful, / alive." The (personal) green eyes of the first part counter the (impersonal) green rice of the second and in the third part a muse/virago figure combines them in dramatic alliteration, ushering in poetry: "She has the grace of grass lengthening green, / effortlessly, grass that sees as cats' eyes see, / through darkness, / grass thick and fleshed enough to eat." This (third) section explicitly seeks conciliation between the personal and impersonal perspectives in art. Connolly writes in her final poem of a poet tutored by "the Woman":

She is already here, saying,
No you fool, snuff your poor metaphors,
don't write it like that. Say,

hearts like lemons, fresh, brighter
than the purest gold, and
better smelling.

{...}

She has no use for the muddy comfort of
misery.
She has never needed excuses.
If you are bleeding, she chuckles and says,

How rich the colour is! / How
healthy you are!"

In the end, the formal synthesis structuring this book seems unsatisfactory because the book is so uneven; the second section is better crafted than the first, and the third has too much smug superiority in the voice. But the command of overall structure, and the skill with detailed crafting of lines, breaks and images makes this a remarkable book still delightful after many readings.

Linda Rogers, in her latest collection *Woman at Mile Zero*, possesses a confident voice which comes through without asserting itself. She takes a mocking voice, a stance of resistance to and exploitation of cliché. In these poems the tropes of symbolism (shadows, dreams, ghosts and mirrors) are parodied, but parody is an ambivalent form — exalting what it undercuts — and where the content presents doubles of all sorts the structure is indefinitely self-reflexive. There is an atmosphere and a sensibility which overwhelms the reader at first; it is sensual, magical, intoxicating. But this book does not lend itself to prolonged scrutiny or close reading. The coherence of the book gives it impact, particularly on a first reading, but Rogers' pieces are not so intricately crafted as Connolly's. The extended metaphors are stiflingly repetitive, and the hyperbole is too heavy-handed to support subsequent readings.

Winter Hunger is a horror story, a novel that leans for its underlying plot rationale at one time to psychological realism, at another time to myth and another time to supernatural phenomena. I am not well versed in the horror genre, but it seems to me this book suffers from causal uncertainty. For instance, the academic forays into psychological motivation and suggestion defuse the effect of the irrational. However, since Tracy is using the aboriginal mythic figure the Wendigo, had she summarily rationalized the Wen-

digo cult through the anthropologist/narrator it would have seemed reductive and patronizing. The narrative voice falters as his perspective changes, as he becomes less detached and "academic" and searches for a framework within which to comprehend phenomena. Tracy shows an insensitive anthropologist who is reductive and patronizing but who comes to acknowledge something beyond his logic. In a way, this is a novel about a man who is overcome by forces he had denied, and which he has no apparatus to comprehend; but his wife, who is especially empathetic to the aboriginal culture, is also overcome by forces she seems to have no critical distance from. This book presents a breakdown of Eurocentric rationality which has apocalyptic consequences insofar as cannibalism indicates social breakdown. The similarities with both Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* and Musgrave's *The Charcoal Burners* make this a difficult book to place. As a literary work, it is well written: the characterization is excellent and serves to augment the plot, which too is intricate and surprising. My early impression was that the characters were rather flat, but of course it is a first-person narrative and the narrator is a rather boring, unimaginative academic. That what seems to be supernatural phenomena are described through him perhaps creates the causal uncertainty, since his orientation is strictly to the rational; and since he does not relate to the cultural conditions of the community the terms in which he recognizes or accounts for phenomena are obviously inadequate, but we have only his perspective. Unfortunately, the result is that the reader is distanced from the plot of the novel, and the psychology of the narrator—which is foregrounded—is not particularly intriguing. But the relationship between narrative perspective and plot definitely is intriguing.

SUSAN MACFARLANE

SECRET ITINERARY

HÉLÈNE MARCOTTE, *Clandestine*. Poésie Le-méac, n.p.

THIS SLIM VOLUME has great appeal. It is well printed on fine paper with an elegant typeface and an aesthetically satisfying disposition of text on page. The burgundy ink of the title on the front cover tones well with the lithogravure by Monique Charbonneau which accompanies it and which positively enhances the pleasure this book gives. The young woman depicted in the foreground in the wide-brimmed, floppy hat framing a pale face with sensuous, red lips tight closed, and dark, dreamy eyes, half turns towards the sombre, faceless man standing in a featureless, snowy landscape. The long shadows indicate moonlight. The themes of night and cold and separation are prominent ones in *Clandestine*. The title refers to the secret intimacy which is the world and the lot of women, on which note the poem closes:

c'est toujours la chute mesurée les lèvres
closes
les pas livrés aux hasards l'absence qui
demeure femme
it is forever this measured fall lips tight
closed
footsteps at the mercy of whims and caprices
an
absence without end woman

But behind this lack of presence and control lies the affirmation of the primacy of desire and a cry for freedom:

ô monde né de la caresse et fait pour elle
(elle seule)

and a few lines later this variant:

ô monde né de la caresse et fait pour notre
liberté (elle seule)

Those lines come from one of the three longer pages. The norm is a page of 3 or 4 lines, occasionally 7 or 8, short pages which mirror the enforced mutism of the

central figure. These rare longer pages reflect an impatient desire for a more didactic mode:

je t'y apprendrai l'explosion des fruits

The future tense, the unbridled force of the language, point to the restrained violence and unrequited passion underlying this text and giving it its strength. One verb betrays a *québécois* voice:

j'ai refait le même trajet des siècles durant
à corder les rancœurs

Women have centuries of experience in stacking away their resentments.

But there is one other source of the appeal of this slim volume, what the French call the sonorities of the language. The oft repeated 'v' and 'f' sounds give a velar, velvety softness to the texture of this verse. A well-deserved Prix Octave-Crémazie 1988, but can the publisher claim that this poem signals the revival in the fortunes of Quebec poetry? Thirty years ago we would have offered a nationalist reading of the poet's fear that the will to survive is wearing thin:

j'use la patience de survivre

CEDRIC MAY

MIN(ED) FIRE

PHYLLIS WEBB, *Hanging Fire*. Coach House, \$12.95.

"I WILL GO ON adventuring, changing, opening my mind & my eyes, refusing to be stamped & stereotyped. The thing is to free one's self" (Virginia Woolf, 29 Oct. 1933). "I had to then break out of that really limiting form [the ghazal or anti-ghazal of Webb's *Water and Light*]. That really becomes part of my method, I think; I am constantly finding new ways of doing and saying things and then — I myself am constantly changing" (Phyllis Webb, 24 Oct. 1990. In an interview with

Sonja A. Skarstedt, *Zymergy Literary Review*, Spring 1991).

Hanging Fire, Webb's tenth volume of poetry, validates her self-critical claim, as well as reconfirming a resemblance to Woolf I've commented on before. Neither woman is/was content to repeat a previous performance, or even to play the same role twice. "Who is this I infesting my poems?" Webb asks in a poem called "Performance." Thus she draws attention to the many *personae* who inhabit her books:

I am the mask, the voice, the one who begins
those lyrical poems,
I wandered lonely as a cloud . . . I hear the
Shadowy Horses, their
long manes a-shake . . . I am of Ireland . . .

Webb, Wordsworth, Yeats. Man, says Wilde, and woman too, "is least herself when she talks in her own person. Give her a mask, and she will tell the truth." The earnest, alas, often dismiss masquerades as frivolous occasions; accuse maskers of insincerity. Yet what "people call insincerity is," according to Wilde, "simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities. . . . Technique is really personality."

The paradox, unexplained by Wilde and mostly ignored by post-structural critics, is that Stravinsky — whether we are listening to *Firebird*, *Dumbarton Oaks* or *Abraham and Isaac* — is always recognisably Stravinsky. Webb varies her techniques (very few living Canadian poets come close to equalling her extraordinary range) and so multiplies her *personae* (both within this volume and from book to book), but the truth she tells is always Webb: "God how I suffer to get this down. . . . / . . . / . . . Always this me":

I cannot surprise you. Not with the blue jay's
return. Not with the velvet yellow of
pansyface,
not with my held back fire. Apocalypse.
Every-
thing predictable in the book. . . .
.....

... The spring of the mouse-
trap sprung, we are caught — thus and so
— in
this pose, shadowed beyond doubt.
(“‘Krakatoa’ and ‘Spiritual Storm’”)

Difference can be measured only in terms of already identified sameness.

In *Trio* (1954), the poet's *persona* confronts “distress,” “despair,” “defeat” and “death”; reports “the giant crack / in the spine, / the central agony”; yet also celebrates the “Zen Buddhist Who Laughs Daily.” In *Trio*, however, “patience” holds violence in check (as it does in much of the poetry that followed, up to and including *Naked Poems*), transforming “pain” into a “lucid cargo.” Things changed in *Wilson's Bowl*. And here. In the first section of *Hanging Fire*, ominously/wittily entitled “Tour de Force,” the poet is “mainly working with violence. . . . And reactions to violence. Power and force. *Force*, perhaps, more than power. Tour de *force*!” Webb's latest volume explodes preceding “Model[s] of the Universe”; erupts in the “all-paroxysmal / sexual storm . . . / . . . / . . . (*spiritual* for him, / *timbre* just right, *pinhead*)” of “‘Krakatoa’ . . .”; blazes forth in “‘Eidetic Image’”; clenches its fist in rage, in “‘Temporal Lobe’” which Webb has called “a raging poem”; issues “*Terrorist directives*” in “‘You Have My Approval’”; flashes and crashes like the “car / . . . at the bottom of the hill; / its motor purrs like a sick cat, / and you read this as contentment” (“‘The Way of All Flesh’”). The last line of this poem, also the last line of “Tour de Force,” measures the tonal difference, the intensified attack, of the voice in *Hanging Fire*. Such ferocious ambivalence, such withering contempt ironically masquerading as deadpan description, makes another rage-clenched fist and packs a punch more lethal than that which threatens to smash “A Suite [Sweet] of Lies” in *Naked Poems*.

Dedicated to the memory of three dead

poets, *Hanging Fire* takes its title from the poem that ignites the second section of the book, also called “Hanging Fire.” “*Furioso*,” the first word of poem and section, is echoed in “*con fuoco*,” the last two words of the last poem in this section. Blazing in between are the (forgotten?) fires of Dresden; the Chernobyllic horrors of “the China syndrome” (punningly deconstructed in the fragility of “‘Dresden/China’”); “‘The Unbearable Lightness . . .’”; the “mystical fire’s/wild mandala”; the proleptic “‘fire next time’”; the “Flashes of Tienanmen, flashes of here, the Tsars’ old/palace guards, the troops, the ‘clashes’”; the “Long Suffering” of revolutionaries like the Mandelas (“Burned out of her house again, she carries the flame”), and of “the dead and gone” — Gwen MacEwen, bpNichol, Bronwen Wallace: Shelley’s “unacknowledged legislators,” Webb’s “plenipotentiaries,” who keep the “long suffering” alive, fill it with “*Action*.”

Having assumed the *persona* of a “flame-eyed Flamenco” dancer whose “castanets’ death/rattle” accompanies her own foot-stamping (“I put my foot down on/such nonsense of ever-/lasting gloom” — “‘A Model of the Universe’”), the “poet” combines a “*Musical interlude*. Tralalala-la,” with a “crisis of lambency,” acting out “the / death of the lyric poem / the death —” (“*Passacaglia*”) in four concrete poems, and a three-page prose (-poem?)/journal entitled “‘To the Finland Station’”; and exploring the “pleasures of pain” (“‘The pleasure of the text’”) with the obsessive glee of a verbal pyromaniac (“firebugs”). Despite its name, this section is another *tour de force*; and so are the “Scattered Effects” (Section III) that burst apart, like Anaximander’s “silly / wheels of fire,” becoming “gold flecks, flicks / of day ascending” (“‘Evensong’”), “auras of / fanatic gold” (“‘Anaximander’”), “poems, like fists / wearing birthstones and bracelets”

(“There *Are* the Poems”), “Bronwen’s Earrings,” and the Pharmasave on Salt Spring Island (“Paradise Island”) “ablaze with irrelevance and consumer goods.”

In discussing “To the Finland Station,” and two of the concrete poems, “Lenin Skating” and “Mother Russia,” begun after reading a Lenin biography, Webb explains that she realized she “had to deconstruct the myth” (deconstruct the *Father of Communism*?). Of writing “Mother Russia” she says: “That was great fun because I was deconstructing [Lenin’s] speech at the Finland Station in 1917.” What makes this entire volume a *tour de force* — a guided tour of force, of “various adversities . . . which all culminate in fear,” is the way in which it simultaneously does and undoes itself, constructs and deconstructs “A Model of the Universe.” As “lambency” implies (“a crisis of lambency”), min(e)d fire is brilliantly playful; it *fro-licks* (see “Attend”) around “heavyweight” subjects like unbearable *lightness*, turns fire-storms into “*Ignis Fatuus*”: “foolish fire, jack-o’lantern, will-/o’-the wisp. Marsh light from decomposing matter. / Delusional systems. Us.” We embark on an “infectious cruise” up the “river of biologic ‘soup’” (“Seeking Shape. Seeking Meaning”) into the “Heart of the jungle darkness. / Hot death. Rousseau and Conrad” (“Cue Cards”) only to be confronted by

the rufous humming —

bird bounced in the spray of the hose as I
watered the
roses. Inspired — roses, hummingbird, and
me — precisely
because of the boredom of how things are,
and nectar.

(“Anaximander”)

“*Technique is all / a test of the artist’s / sincerity. Oh / we are sincere, we go / for the blade, cut close / to the bone.*” These ironic lines (returning us to our Wilde beginning) are part of “The Making of a

Japanese Print,” the final four-part poem in the book and, Webb thinks, “overtly feminist.” Poet-as-artist imagines Harunobu, Japanese print-master — whose entire *oeuvre* (an expert tells us) “*est un hymne consacré exclusivement à la beauté de la femme*” — as he engraves his wood-blocks and prints them up into a picture of the “Heron Maid.” “Each block is laid on / with extreme caution.” “All moves are dangerous,” not only for Webb-as-Harunobu but also for the reader-as-Heron Maid: she “steps / on her wooden blocks / off the path” (“Imprint No. 4”). This “green playing field” is min(e)d; will explode, like the cat on the mouse (in “Cat & Mouse Game”), if I put a foot wrong: “The field surges behind me / with fun & names / disrupting the bloody text.” “Heron Maid” turns out to be “A fake”; but “A woman emerges at last / on the finest paper, cursing / his quest for the line / and this damned delicate fan.” I *hear* the woman cursing: “She is also winter and tells me / more about herself than Harunobu / wanted to know” (“Imprint No. 3”). The “factitious, apparently pleasing” figure from “the floating world” deconstructs the song of Cymbeline’s sons: “Fear no more the heat o’ the sun, / Nor the furious winter’s rages.” Winter-woman, like the cat in “Messages” (which is the poem itself) “prances towards me down the ramp[age?] of the poem,” quick, with “the power of the cat.” “She moves towards me. She is here — / Hiss Hiss.” *Explode*, from the Latin, *ex-plodo*, “to drive out by clapping . . . to hiss from the stage.” Who? Harunobu? Critic? Reviewer? Is his performance that bad? *His his.*

JOHN F. HULCOOP



NEAR BALANCES

KAREN PIETIEWICZ, MIKE CHEVRIER & JACQUES LALOUETTE, *Lights Over the River*. Mosaic, \$9.95.

CYRIL DABYDEEN et al. *Six Ottawa Poets*. Mosaic \$10.95.

Lights Over the River is a collection of work by three Sault Ste. Marie-based poets: who share a restrained language largely stripped of ornamentation, a straight-up confessional stance, and a marked wariness of sentimentality, expressed in a posture of remarkable irony. But re-reading discloses very real, very revealing differences.

The strong irony in this work largely takes the form of a wry and very unusual distancing of the writer from the utterances of the persona. Karen Pietkiewicz, the first writer in the collection, certainly exhibits her share of irony, but at the same time her work seems to be the most self-revealing. Also like the others, Pietkiewicz occasionally uses language a bit heavily-handedly, stepping out of her normally simple, non-florid voice:

... a distant, cynic, cosmic expectation
of imminent destruction and decay.
I shape the cold tips against me; rail
the puerile death, the doubtful resurrection.
"Evergreen"

Mike Chevrier's work is as self-focussed and confessional as Pietkiewicz's, but with Chevrier the ironic distancing that is a mark of the whole collection is at its strongest. And it has a definite and distinctly dark edge.

It has been said
that hate
is a good thing

An important
and necessary
mechanism for survival

I knew this
was certain
when I met you

"Nihilistic Revery"

Jacques Lalouette at first exhibits the same elliptical attitude, but his directness and the strength of his imagery are by far the strongest in the book. Lalouette tantalizes us by the use of what might be called 'free-standing' metaphors so seamlessly constructed and seemingly 'natural' that the reader feels s/he is supplying or inferring the deeper levels of signification, a process particularly well illustrated in "Mother Cow." Lalouette is determinedly non-sentimental. Despite this lack of easy sentimentality, however, the poems of all three writers are self-contained units. In the end it is this refusal to indulge in unwarranted, inorganic sentiment that I find to be the most compelling feature of this collection.

Six Ottawa Poets is a 'heavier' book, the poets on the whole better-known outside their local area. By and large the work is written with a greater emphasis on the music and rhythms of language, and is intellectually more dense.

Cyril Dabydeen's poetry exudes the sense of one overwhelmed by the reality his poetry is intended to contain. The sound is rich, the grammar convoluted and self-preoccupied to the point that one has to go over it a few times to make sure one has not missed anything. At times I felt he was stumbling a bit; the images intense but somewhat unfocussed, overlapping, jamming into each other so that none gets the room it needs to be most effective. There is an acknowledgement that reality is in the end too mysterious to be truly 'captured' by anybody.

Mark Frutkin's poetry is without a doubt my favourite in either collection. This work is economical and precisely focussed. A central tactic in Frutkin's probings is the odd, manic reversal of conventional reality:

... freeing the cities
from the walls, fish to eggs,
bird back into assembling shell,

sea into the mouth of God,
stars into the void.

"Reinventing the World"

This is the glimpse in the mirror, revealing in reverse the asymmetry for which the familiar eye normally compensates, cancelling it out. And I believe that this approach reveals, maybe paradoxically, a respect for described reality similar to Dabydeen's, where in some respects that reality ultimately remains strange and elusive.

Frutkin also pays a great deal of attention to sensory experience and the colours of detail, through the finest, most assured use of language in either collection. The beauty of his craft is nowhere more evident than in the exquisite "Paperweight":

The words held down by it
breathe heavily
or a plover's trined toes
marking
the sand
Skirting the ruffled page
as it breaks, breathes, sighs
and withdraws again
into the heart.

Seymour Mayne's work is distinguished by intellectual density. His poetry is complex and biblically based, the imagery tangled, sometimes obscure, the language often self-consciously rhetorical in an almost classical sense. A reader lacking a good grounding in biblical allusion will have a problem here, a problem only made worse by the fact that these are excerpts from larger cycles. This poetry would have been more justly served in a book of its own, with the room for a dense, complex structure of context to be built up, to provide an animating background for each piece.

Whereas Frutkin explores reversal, Claude Paradox writes about disconnection. This poetry is focused and intense in a spare style in which the self seems curiously withdrawn. There is less reliance on the sound of language, but the poetry is undeniably effective on its own terms. In

fact, it is almost 'found' poetry, experience lifted wholesale, from everyday experience:

The fan from a Coke machine starts up
and makes me nervous, distracts me
from the lines of a poem . . .

"It's No Accident"

Paradox gives no glib resolution; only the dominance of what is apparently random — and whatever might lie behind it — over not only our interactions with others but even our inner lives.

Enid Delgatty Rutland is the most strongly and openly emotional (dare I say sentimental?) writer in either collection. She starts off with a personal tribute to Margaret Laurence, a poem which more than any other in the book relates directly to a particular person and event, and one which is given a specifically narrative, non-introspective function. Rutland is intimate and easily approachable. In this poem, however, the familiarity seems misapplied and accords ill with the sweeping, somewhat distant invocation of the last two lines.

The last writer, Nicola Vulpe, has clearly political concerns, but does not focus them to the point of appearing to toe any particular ideological line. The language he uses is invested with a rhetorical, almost incantatory sweep, which extends even into the more explicitly personal pieces.

There are more archaisms in this book than in *Lights Over the River*, but they work more often here, less there — the Ottawa six are probably better poets. But *Lights Over the River* is just as interesting a book because of the delicate, subtle balances and near-balances between the writers.

ANDREW BROOKS



DRAMATURGIE QUÉBÉCOISE

ROBERT WALLACE, *Producing Marginality: Theatre and Criticism in Canada*. Fifth House Publishers, \$19.95 cl.

PRODUCING MARGINALITY gathers a series of well documented essays which examine the complex relationship between theatre, criticism and social history in Canada. Wallace's text is not only a stimulating and important study of contemporary Canadian theatre from the early 1970s to the late 1980s but it also informs the reader on the political, economic and intellectual contexts that shape the perception, production and reception of theatre in Canadian culture.

In his *Preface*, Wallace defends his "particularist" view which seeks to challenge the dominant patriarchal discourse. The *Introduction* grounds his materialist and post-structuralist approach to theatre and stresses the need to forge or reconceptualize the notions of marginality and regionalism. Attacking the conservatism that has inhibited the vitality of Canadian theatre, Wallace aims at establishing a constructive dialogue that would in effect address and redress the relationship between the critical, financial and political institutions.

The first essay entitled "Growing Pains," previously published in *Canadian Literature* in 1980, explains the commercial shift in Toronto's alternative theatre companies in the 1970s and the compromising measures (mostly artistic) they had to make in order to stay afloat. The growing dependency on government funding bodies has stifled the innovative and experimental production of Toronto's alternative theatres and worn down their vitality as Wallace demonstrates in his second essay "Getting Tough," which studies the burdening economic situation of theatres in Ontario between 1982 and 1986. The

third essay, "Producing Marginality," from which derives the title of his text, is the longest, the most provocative and the most interesting essay. Analyzing the state of theatre and criticism in Canada, he examines the material conditions of theatrical production and critical evaluation. The essay delves into the consequences of an aging audience, conservative programming as well as financial constraints of budget-conscious government funding bodies who militate against the risks of challenging art. As a result, Wallace ascertains that theatre in English Canada has been reactive to, rather than generative of, ideas about the function, the direction and the potential of theatre. Wallace also questions the selection process of peer members on government boards, the "objective" criteria that govern their ruling on funding thereby controlling the existence or demise of theatre companies. Wallace is at his best in this essay, arguing most convincingly that as the system stands "judgement is relative and evaluation is political." The last two essays "Understanding Difference" and "Where's it coming from" focus on the artistic and cultural relationships between theatre in Quebec and in Canada (read Montreal and Toronto). Wallace contrasts theatrical practices in the two contexts and describes the approach in Canada as playwright-centred, literary and hierarchical as opposed to what he perceives in Quebec as a collective, non-literary, innovative approach to theatre. Also underlined are the differing attitudes on the function(s) of art, its role in the shaping of cultural identity and the role of government in their respective contexts.

From its beginning, Wallace's study attests to the open-ended nature of his critical discourse. However, his conclusions are not without certain ambiguities. If we are to accept his thesis according to which ideology is a construct, then are we not to see in his selection of autobio-

graphical details also a conscious construct of his subjectivity? There are also problems in his perception of Quebec theatre as marginal. Many artists in Quebec do not see themselves as marginal or producing works that are ex-centric; rather, they are conscious of their role in (re)building their society by promoting their language and culture. Theatre artists in Quebec may be considered marginal within the Canadian or North American contexts but few are considered marginal within their province. Wallace shows how a *national* vision has contributed to the vitality of theatrical productions in Quebec and to the cultural regeneration of its people, but what he recommends for theatres outside of Quebec is to "(re)produce marginality," to cultivate diversity. What is still not clear is whether Wallace perceives diversity to be a means or an end? Also, the interchangeable use of the terms "Canada" and "English-Canada" needs to be problematized, and given the parameters of his study, it is surprising that he has little to say about either black theatre, a Toronto institution of 15 years, or about native theatre.

Nevertheless *Producing Marginality* merits serious attention and will undoubtedly become an important text for researchers, practitioners and students of Canadian Theatre.

SUZANNE CROSTA

NEW WRITING

From Ink Lake: Canadian Stories, selected by Michael Ondaatje. Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$24.95.

Coming Attractions 90, eds. David & Maggie Helwig. Oberon Press, n.p.

THESE ARE TWO selections of short Canadian texts that are quite different from each other, not only in size but also in content. While *Coming Attractions* stems from a tradition of introductions to new

and innovative short story writing and writers, Ondaatje's collection is a two-fold thing: on the one hand an overview of Canadian achievements in this genre, on the other a thematically motivated selection of texts about what it means to be Canadian. This thematic dimension also explains why excerpts from novels and memoirs are included here.

From Ink Lake is a highly readable selection of English- and French-Canadian texts (the latter in translation) offering a wealth of material for every reader and especially for anybody abroad trying to find introductory material about Canada. Ondaatje admits in his introduction that any "anthologist goes mad trying to be fair and dutiful" and thus resigns himself to giving "an angular portrait of a time and place."

The collection includes forty-nine texts by forty-six mostly contemporary authors (double entries for Alistair Macleod, Keith Fraser, and Margaret Atwood) most of whom are major names in Canadian literature. While most stories invite their subsuming under certain headings, whether they be historically, geographically, sociologically, or politically motivated, others — like Hugh Hood's brilliant conjuring up of the spirit of old-time baseball in "Ghosts at Jarry" or Glenn Gould's whimsical essay about northern Ontario and Petula Clark's songs — defy classification.

A first group of texts approaches Canada from a historical perspective: some describe old-world myths still haunting the New World; others give rather straightforward historical information in an anecdotal or autobiographical fashion, while yet another group offers us more or less whimsical or metafictional versions of history. After these historically motivated stories, the reader is introduced to the various regions of Canada: stories are set in the prairies or in Québec, in such metropolitan centres as Montreal or in

small rural communities, on the West Coast or in the Maritimes, on the Mackenzie, the St. Lawrence, or some northern lake.

The voice of the Natives is upheld by Chief John Kelly in his impressive political statement, "We are all in the Ojibway Circle." Clark Blaise gives the ultimate view of the difference between bilingual Canada and monolingual America: "That was what I'd noticed most all the way down, the incompleteness of the signs, the satisfaction that their version said it all." Margaret Laurence and Margaret Atwood bring another taste of otherness into this volume: Laurence by writing about Canadians in Africa, and Atwood by problematizing the role of immigrants to Canada, a theme which is then dealt with by numerous other authors. The role and needs of women in an often oppressive society are the topic of many other contributors, most explicitly so in an excerpt from Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*.

Among the formally innovative authors, the first rank belongs to Sheila Watson. Her "Antigone" gives us a strange but brilliant version of Greek mythology in a New World context. Keath Fraser models one of his stories on entries in *Roget's Thesaurus*, and in the other tells the chilling story of a female journalist captured by guerillas in Cambodia. Rudy Wiebe offers a novel perspective on Albert Johnson's story by giving us its fragments in reverse order, and Carol Shields muses that the scenes included in her story are "much too fragmentary to be stories and far too immediate to be memories."

The interest in *Coming Attractions 90* is to introduce good new Canadian writing in the form of the short story. In other words, it is here that we can expect literariness and formal experimentation. Peter Stockland, the first of the three authors included, starts off with a timely story that describes the mood of a Qué-

bécois town during a recent provincial by-election. In this and two more stories, Stockland focuses on the rather less endearing qualities of characters whom he shows to be caught in inescapable and unintelligible threatening situations.

Three of Sara McDonald's four stories derive from her work on "postcard stories" and present intriguing sometimes self-reflexive short character sketches. The fourth one, "all I ever wanted was the moon," is more traditional, showing the first-person narrator torn between her two lovers.

The stories I found most interesting in this volume were Steven Heighton's. He bases two out of three on his personal experience of Japan, making use of the stereotypical expectations that North Americans and Japanese have of each other. In "The Battle of Midway," an ironic situation develops from the clash between Japanese hosts' sense of decorum and the behaviour of their foreign guests who think they have accommodated to the Eastern way of life. "A Protruding Nail" then symbolizes the difficulties experienced by a student in this society who objects to being streamlined according to her teacher's demands. Switching between first and third-person narration, the third story, "Sounds of the Water," impressively describes a boy's reaction to the disintegration of his parents' marriage.

While *Coming Attractions* can be read in one sitting and gives us a closer look at the personal styles of three promising writers, *From Ink Lake* is a collection of superb writing that all readers looking for inspiring and inspired texts about Canada will find a rewarding book.

MARTIN KUESTER



JOURNEYS HOME

JOHN MURRELL, *Farther West and New World: Two Plays by John Murrell*. Coach House Press, \$12.50.

ALLAN STRATTON, *Words in Play: Three Comedies*. Coach House Press, \$16.95.

THE *Odyssey* is the epic archetype for a journey home: Homer chronicles how, after travelling for ten years, Odysseus overcomes seemingly impossible obstacles to reach hearth, family, and rest. Like their classical predecessor, John Murrell and Allan Stratton chart journeys home. Murrell explores the deep human drive to find a place that his misfit characters can call home; Stratton, the comic impulse to discover "home" in relationships with others.

In this two-play collection, John Murrell reflects his characters' preoccupation with place in his titles, *Farther West* and *New World*. *Farther West* tells the story of May Buchanan, a 19th-century prostitute and madam, who moves from Rat Portage (Kenora, Ontario) "farther west" across the country to Vancouver, hoping for freedom from social and sexual oppression. Ultimately, however, even the frontier of British Columbia confines May, and in a desperate attempt to leave a lover, she is shot and dies after dragging herself to a ship bound "farther west" to China. This character's search for a place to call "home" seems always frustratingly beyond her grasp, and finally, tragically, beyond the horizon.

New World is set across the Georgia Straight: outside Victoria, B.C. This play, too, has the edge-of-the-continent feel to it, a fact that the characters constantly discuss. It brings together three siblings — Bob, Larry, and Bet Rennie, each from a different country (Canada, United States, and England respectively) — as well as their assorted relations: Bob's gay lover from Quebec, and his photography apprentice from "Anglophone Canada";

and Larry's wife and daughter from California. Chekov-like, the characters move on and off the stage, exchanging witty and pointed remarks, each of them experiencing private (off-stage) or public (on-stage) epiphanies about their life and where they will continue to live it. New relationships — and consequently, new journeys — emerge at the play's end: Bob's lover leaves with Larry and his wife for California; Larry's daughter and Bob's apprentice leave for the moonlit waters of the Pacific; and Bob and Bet remain on the beach in front of Bob's ocean-side home, Bob resigned to his now-single existence, Bet to abandoning British soil. Like *The Cherry Orchard*, the title *New World* epitomizes its characters' longing for the stability of place as home.

In Stratton's plays, "journeys home" concentrate less on the setting, "home," than on the journey itself — physical, emotional, or spiritual. As its Harlequin-esque title suggests, *Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii* charts how, through travel, romance and new relationships can happen. In this comic farce, the characters' journeys converge at the home of Doris Chisholm, and following the tradition of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, they find "home" in long-lost familial relationships: Doris discovers her illegitimate daughter (by a teenage lover, now her husband's first wife's second husband); Doris's husband discovers his legitimate son (by his first wife); his first wife, a new relationship with her second husband; and Doris's husband's now ex-lover, an adopted home with the Chisholms. In this play, then, "home" is "home-life," a communally-shared space, given meaning by familial relationships.

By contrast, *Joggers* explores how perverted relationships pervert homelife, and make home a place to escape from. Subtitled "a nightmare," this play is a cross between the black comedy of Joe Orton and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. After his car

breaks down, Daniel travels to an isolated farmhouse with the aid of a mysterious group of joggers. Initially relieved that he has a bright refuge from the darkness and snow, he quickly discovers a world in which "home" means poisoned lovers, child abuse, and his own imprisonment. Daniel unwittingly sets off a chain of events that leads logically to the conclusion of this absurd, black comedy: because the characters cannot leave home, murder and suicide become their only escape from intolerable relationships.

And in the "fable," *The 101 Miracles of Hope Chance*, the journey is not to nor from a physical home, but a quest for a spiritual home. Employed by shady evangelists, a nurse-come-miracle worker discovers that "home" is not the material, false "house" of television preaching. Instead, it is the spiritual, true "home" of *caritas*, in which she can express her spiritual inspiration in human terms: Hope heals the broken body of the man she loves.

Murrell and Stratton are accomplished playwrights who explore with confidence and dexterity the theme of journeys home. The plays read well, are handsomely presented by Coach House Press, and intelligently introduced by Urjo Karela (for Murrell) and Stratton himself. For a fascinating trip, try both.

JILL TOMASSON GOODWIN

SURVIVAL

COLLEEN CURRAN, *Triple Play*. Nu-Age Editions, \$12.95 pa.

VITTORIO ROSSI, *Scarpone*. Nu-Age Editions, \$12.95 pa.

WITTY, WELL-CRAFTED realism is obviously alive and well in English-speaking Montreal. Colleen Curran and Vittorio Rossi bring little of stylistic innovation to their work, but they both excel at colour-

ful portraiture in a humorous, compassionate vein.

If there is a common thread that links Curran's trio of one-acts, it is the theme of surviving love's labour lost. Adrift in the debris of failed romances, dreams and friendships, Curran's whimsical characters toy with the tactics of survival with results that range from the tragic ("El Clavadista") and bittersweet ("A Sort of Holiday") to the farcical ("Amelia Earhart Was Not a Spy").

Curran banks heavily on the interplay of eccentric opposites caught in slightly exotic or unlikely situations for her effect, and does so with varying degrees of success in these short comedies. "Amelia," which centres on a disastrous dinner party organized by Karen to get her jealous, gay roommate of six years to warm up to her bluff he-man fiancé, provides the slightest but most lively combination of physical humour, witty repartee and situation comedy in the collection. "Holiday," despite its warmer human touch, is less effective, the initial owl-and-the-pussycat duelling between a repressed touring lecturer and a slightly dippy mother of three mellowing out a little too neatly into a shared passion for Stephen Leacock. It is "El Clavadista" that really displays to best advantage Curran's ability to transform her gently loopy mediocrities into creatures of greater complexity and dignity; in a world where love, heroism, and foreign adventure have all been reduced to cheap tawdry showmanship, there is a certain painful integrity in Claire's decision to make her own death, at least, a spectacularly real gesture.

Rossi's *Scarpone* also deals with the fragility of human dreams, but unlike Curran's gentle, wistful, largely feminine world, Rossi's exuberant tempest in a shoebox is unmistakeably male territory. His examination of the "macho" pursuits of power, money and "scoring" amidst the multi-ethnic working classes of Montreal

most readily invites comparison with the work of David Fennario; there is the same oppressive sweatshop atmosphere, the same sharp eye for realistic, naturalistic detail and the same colourful dead-beats trapped at the bottom both by their own ignorance and the stupid, vicious machinations of the system.

But Rossi is less interested in exploring the possibilities of Marxist redemption than in mourning the evolution of business from an intimate, personal affair between human beings to a centralized, impersonal machine with increasingly little room for either the eccentric and colourful or the honest and decent. When Rosanna, the prim, business-like supervisor, assures Stan, the long-time manager of Scarppone's shoe store, that "this is not personal. It's strictly business," he has no way of telling her that in his books, the two are one and the tendency of modern business to separate the two constitutes a fatal flaw in the system.

On that level, *Scarppone* works with all the precision of a classical tragedy. Stan the representative of an older more humane tradition of salesmanship is eking out his final day on the job after twenty years of service. Yet even before the funeral meats have been prepared for his retirement fête, Stan's would-be heirs, Dino and Giancarlo, have started plucking greedily at his not-quite vacated robes of state. The frantic manoeuvrings of of these amoral, shallow successors to prove themselves the wave of the future are finally rendered absurd by the home company's stunning announcement that the position is to go to an outsider — and only long enough for him to close down the store as economic deadwood. The day that was to climax with a company and store-wide celebration of Stan and the tradition of long service and dedication he personifies, ends in catastrophe with almost everyone, including the crude but dynamic Dino and the guest-of-honor

himself storming out of the doomed store. Literally and figuratively, it is the mediocrities, Rosana and Giancarlo who are left on the scene to clear up the mess.

Rossi's most vivid and loving touches are undoubtedly lavished on the vicious rather than the virtuous, and particularly on the energetic attempts of his Italian duo to turn their francophone customers into dupes, their unloveable fellow-Italian, Rosanna, into a pliant pawn, and every attractive woman into a sexual conquest — all with a glorious lack of success.

However, the humor floats lightly over the very real fears and frustrations of Rossi's would-be giants, and a sense of a larger innocence lost. The character of Stan in particular serves as a poignant elegiac keynote throughout the play, his final shoe sale to a particularly old and faithful customer constituting the play's one deeply moving love scene. It is in moments like that, that Curran's gentle, exotic "Mariposa Belles" and clavadistas, and Rossi's earthy shoestore seem to meet together briefly in a common spirit of tears beneath the laughter.

MOIRA DAY

PROCESS OF DISCOVERY

KENNETH RADU, *A Private Performance*. Vehicule, \$12.95.

CAROLYN K. JANSEN, *Birds of a Feather*. Vehicule, \$12.95.

KENNETH RADU AND Carolyn K. Jansen wrestle with the underside of life in their new collections of stories; in doing so, they make demands on the genre and the reader which continue the process of discovery — of self, of community, of form — which is a feature of the Canadian short story.

Radu's *A Private Performance* is a powerful, disturbing plunge into damaged

psyches, lives that crumble at the edges, and worlds which contain few sanctuaries. These diverse explorations of dark worlds are drawn together by their common sense of rage and outrage. The characters are caught in lives which limit them and which permit few avenues of escape. Their frustrations bubble inside, sometimes bursting outward in violence, sometimes turning even more inward, eating away at the fabric of their being. One glimmer of hope is found in humour, the black comedy which finds its laughter in the bleakness of existence, but which transforms it, albeit momentarily.

There is Igor, the voyeur, in "The Picture Window." Sentenced to a lifetime of caring for his brain-damaged wife, Igor becomes obsessed with the Merrimans who live next door. Through their picture window he gains access to their private world of parties, nudity, sex. He vows that they will not invade "his privacy," but instead he enters theirs. The explosion of rage at the end of the story — Igor shatters the window with a skillet — results from his awareness that "Life's not a movie" and from the deep seated hostility fostered by his own restricted circumstances. Most of the marginal or ruined lives in this volume contain a similar seed of rage. Radu explores it in various ways, revealing it as not only destructive of the individuals, but of their worlds. Anne, in "The Truth-Teller" carries with her the cold anger of sexual abuse. Raped repeatedly as a child by her brother Henry, she returns to Halifax to attend his funeral. But confronting the past does not liberate her. Even though she thinks that "People overcame. Went about their business. The world continued," she finds no comfort in "those anodynes." And her cold, controlled world, the one which erects these anodynes, is not free either.

The title story presents the most poignant and evocative mixture of rage and

comedy. "In the paleontology warehouse Peter dust[s] bones," while at home his mother becomes a character in a history that is not even her own. She appropriates Russian culture, language, a place in its history, and cultivates a cosmopolitan persona despite her real Saskatchewan roots and her growing poverty. Both mother and son retreat into fantasy worlds in order to ward off their anger about the world in which they are forced to live. The picture of Peter, alone in the drawing room, jumping to his feet to hail his mother's virtuoso piano recital is comical; but the laughter cuts right to the bone, showing us the pain of madness and constriction.

Birds of a Feather, Jansen's first collection of stories, vividly realizes the lives of women in a small Ontario town. The stories are linked by their focus on the women, their jobs at Beadleman's Poultry Processing Plant, and their common history of repression. Jansen's takes us into their world by introducing a first person narrator in the first story; even when Leenie is not present we continue to see through her eyes because of her strong voice. Rape, murder, black magic, and the eccentric and perhaps mystical Ray combine to make these stories a blend of the real and the fantastical.

The first story, "The Spiked Collar," opens with a funeral — "Arlene Dolores Hillbrook Died in Childbirth, Age 16" — and it explores the small town prejudices and taboos about female sexuality, teen age pregnancy and death. That Arlene was raped comes as no surprise, for this is a town whose placid surface does little to conceal the violence that lies below it. From this story we slide backwards and forwards in time throughout the rest of the volume, coming to know the extraordinary characters who live here. There is Arlene's mother Dolly, whose fondness for a good time prompts the 'better' citizens to label her a whore; Ray, the town

drunk who fights to regain custody of her kids and becomes a witch in the town's mythology; Chris, whose son cannot see beyond the chicken blood and feathers and opts for a life as an actor in Toronto; and Bertha, whose son is paralyzed and whose mission in life is the stamping out of the sins of drink and sex. The stories come alive because we believe in these characters. Their lives are filled with frustration, tedium, and just making do. The bleakness of their lives is stark, but the way they cope draws us to them. The final story, "Birds of a Feather," is a superb work of magic realism, as Leenie is drawn to Dolly and Ray and joined by the dead Arlene in a plot to kill Arlene's rapist Howie Jones. Whether it is a dream or whether it occurred matter little since it brings the story of Arlene full circle, while also rounding off the exploration of the community of women. Finally, it also illustrates the range of possibilities for short fiction, since this collection accepts no standard format or approach.

MARY ANN GILLIES

TALL TALE/VIVID DETAIL

JAY CONNOLLY, *Dancewater Blues*. Oolichan Books, \$11.95.

DOROTHY SPEAK, *The Counsel of the Moon*. Random House, \$22.95.

SET IN BRITISH COLUMBIA'S central Okanagan valley — though a preface notes the "liberties [taken] with geography" — Connolly's first novel, *Dancewater Blues*, suspensefully organized around flashbacks, details 65-year-old Brady Stuart's obsession with recapturing and reconstructing his adolescent meeting with Naitaka, the mythical beast popularly known as "Ogopopo," a name taken from a jaunty music hall ditty of the 1920s. It is the "valley's mascot," the local equivalent

of the Loch Ness monster, but also "a huge rainbow trout, a drifting log, or simply the mysterious dance of the lake itself."

Brady's desire to encounter this creature who first gave his life meaning is transformed into a zealous mission to save Naitaka from the clutches of villainous tourism developer Cal Cranston. The novel's rendering of the commercial face of the Okanagan valley is highly effective and evokes the wonderland of kitsch — a world of waterslides, RV parks, and burger joints — which scars the beautiful landscape. In his search for the beast, Brady recruits Roy Silverheels, a member of the Okanagan tribe, caught between the nihilism of his father and the implications of the stereotype of the "good Indian," "an Indian who acts like a white man." Quixotically, Roy and Brady, after numerous misadventures, which are largely initiatory trials purifying them for the heroic quest, set off with a fiberglass mockup of Naitaka's head to fake an attack by the monster and draw public wrath down upon the wicked Cal.

Both characters seek a route to their absent fathers through the long-necked, alternately fearsome and pathetic Naitaka, described in passages loaded with sexual overtones. Brady longs for a second birth, through a type of union with Naitaka, who embodies the spirit of his father. In this way, Naitaka, "the lake's great water god," acts as a catalyst for the enlightenment of the major characters, and the "dancewater blues" is a native incantation — both suicide note and praise song — addressed to the creature.

The nature of Naitaka, like the reasons characters seek, dread, or disbelieve in him, is for much of the novel shrouded in secrecy. In the case of Patricia and Therese, who are in many ways indistinguishable characters — the female characters share a terror of the phallic monster; Therese's concluding realization might

double for Patricia's—this secret provides an opportunity to test psychological depths, but this device is most effectively used to develop the novel's most interesting characters: Eugene Silverheels and his son Roy, who learns that "some men let things outside themselves stand in for their imaginations." While the novel itself may be regarded as an example of the appropriation of native culture, the "stealing of stories," a process which has contributed to Eugene's destruction, the native characters are well-drawn. The wounded Eugene and Roy are believable in ways that the improbably aged Brady and Therese, and the indistinguishable mob of townspeople are not. *Dancewater Blues* aspires to be a narrative about the intersection of myth, history, and belief, but succeeds as an effective tall tale of monster-hunting adventure.

The Counsel of the Moon is a set of stories about the lives of girls and women, many of which were previously published elsewhere. This debut volume of Dorothy Speak's work bears signs of careful, skillful crafting. Despite their occasionally over-determined closures, the stories are finely developed, often structured around the juxtaposition of triangles of lovers and rivals, and the individual's moment of realization, the vision of "those with a special kind of blindness."

"Six O'Clock Express," for example, is a story about a school girl's initiation into the sexual politics of the workplace, and her seduction by "the role of temptress." It is also the story of Daisy, "your proverbial fallen woman," Connie's friend, mentor, rival, and double, who, the adolescent Connie believes, "had such a ripe theatrical life, having been beaten by her husband, and living now with an older, glamorous man, and being lusted after by all the fellows down in the plant." The stories often progress to an awkward moment when the narrator feels a sense of disjunction from present experience, a

"kind of disbelief one experiences when looking through photographs of old, half-forgotten holidays."

Set in small towns with names like Mount Pleasant and Harmony, and focused on the relationships of daughters, mothers and grandmothers, these stories are filled with the lonely, the lost, the mundane, and the eccentric, like Jenn's mother in "Foreign Landscapes," "an expert at helplessness when it suited her" who "had always desired . . . a man she could throw things at." Another is Aunt Miriam: "Her head was long and peanut-shaped, as though she'd had a violent birth. She had a full, unattractive lower lip and the large penetrating eyes of a psychic. Her hair was teased into a gauzy dome in a style called a beehive. At a younger age, she'd taken a secretarial course, then traveled on a ship all the way around the world and come back manless." Eventually she is rescued in her own home town and finds delight in a fantastical two-month marriage to "an itinerant ski instructor." The power in the portrayal of such characters rests in the snatches of vivid detail, the ear for the precise word, the narrator's deft irony, and the almost compassionate sensibility which informs the individual pieces. This collection heralds a short story writer of enormous talent and promise.

OLIVER LOVESEY

MALE EXPRESSION

JOHN LENT, *The Face in the Garden*. Thistle-down, \$14.95.

REG SILVESTER, *Wishbone*. Coteau, \$21.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

FRED STENSON, *Working Without a Laugh Track*. Coteau, \$21.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper.

THREE RECENT WORKS by Western Canadian male writers coincidentally cover the spectrum of the three major literary styles that dominate current literary practice:

symbolist, postmodernist, and realist. In addition, each work, in its own way, deals with the more particular problem of male expression so that the two issues—esthetic practice and male utterance—become intertwined. Writing, in varying degrees, about the problems of their gender, these writers illustrate how much these problems are a matter of how our major forms of esthetic practice, although male-dominated, are still inefficacious in expressing male feeling.

Significantly, all three works (and all three literary styles) are grounded in the legacy of impressionism, the twentieth century's recognition that chaos rules the universe but that the artist must try to merge with this chaos yet avoid being swallowed up by it. An attempt to overcome the problems of isolationism, an impressionist aesthetics is particularly male in that it focuses on the sense of separation that a technological society feels as a result of its alienation from the natural rhythms of the elemental world. Each one of these works proclaims its impressionist heritage by attempting to bridge this gap, yet each also finds itself thwarted by the very terms of the paradigm which it has adopted.

The work which deals most directly and most ambitiously with this issue is John Lent's thinly disguised autobiography, *The Face in the Garden*. Here, Lent's third-person protagonist is specifically involved in a mission to break down the barrier between subject and object and to end his exile from natural process and from his own body. Desiring to "let his mind become all this heat and green and light," he forsakes antic drifting for the stasis of a bucolic Vernon, a stable relationship, and a poetry that is silent listening and recording rather than speech or expression. In keeping with the impressionist creed, such an abandonment of speech is actually an abandonment of the authoring ego and the installing, in

its place, of an elusive presence caught up in the process of perception.

However, Lent's protagonist, Peter and, it seems, Lent himself refuse to synthesize the impressions by means of an active consciousness. Paradoxically, as Lent's book progresses, its protagonist loses the sense of self that would make a recovery of sensation meaningful and that would allow for a self-expression of the pain of male isolation. Instead, Lent engineers an escape from the pain of self-awareness, and nowhere is this more evident than in the shift to poetry in the last third of the work. Here, an analyzing consciousness is replaced by a verse that, in its imagistic terseness, is more coldly remote than engagingly elemental. The work, bravely attempting to break out into the world, ends up being more withdrawn.

Reg Silvester's recent book, *Wishbone*—a collection of linked short stories—does not concern itself directly with either the problems of male expression or with the problematics of an impressionist aesthetic. Yet it too, in its own way, "succumbs" to chaos and silences the male voice though it seems to have transcended these issues with its sophisticated postmodernism. On the one hand, Silvester's postmodernism provides him with an advanced understanding of Lent's dire situation, his seemingly unavoidable movement towards Beckettian nihilism. However, true postmodernist, Silvester does not try to halt this development. Instead, he accepts the nihilism as a given and tries, heroically, to counter it with an emphasis on fictionality. The result is a reaffirmation of the male ego and male assertiveness rather than an attempt to correct it.

Adopting the converse of Lent's self-negation, Silvester moves toward what Peter Thomas (in his book on Kroeetsch) has described as a Romantic narcissism that in either denying or usurping Otherness creates its own kind of isolationism.

Such isolationism plagues not only Silvester's characters — males and females alike caught up in their private fantasies — but also his figure for the artist: the manipulative clown of the story, "Caution: Carpenter." Both God and fool, the carpenter artist turns out to be surprisingly similar to Lent's protagonist, trapped in a quest for self-denial as he moves from point of view to point of view in an endless deferral of meaning that avoids coming to grips with past experience. Egotistical, the carpenter's work is also an abdication of the ego as it replaces Lent's garden of poetic repose with its converse: an Eden of the preliterate where everything is tumultuous genesis, chance, and absurdity, a realm of the inauthentic, the uncoded, and the unwritten.

Fred Stenson's collection of short stories, *Working Without a Laugh Track*, is the least aesthetically adventurous of the three works. However, his mostly male protagonists are also the most open to scrutiny: their egotism and isolation is exposed rather than effaced by flights into rarified aesthetic realms. Writing, for the most part, in a realist mode, Stenson includes just enough of the characters' phantasmic inner life — much in the manner of Alice Munro — to create a tension between surface stoicism and latent despair, as in the final and most successful story, "The Bleeding Birth of Day" where an obstetrician, confronted by a sterile marriage, experiences ironical intimations of rebirth. It is this story which comes closest to unmasking the contradictions of the male psyche. Yet, this realist mode also has limits. It also follows the impressionist insistence on a phenomenological showing of experience rather than a telling of it. Effective at highlighting the moment-to-moment particularities of male experience, it is unable to look beyond them towards a wider realm where rebirth might, in fact, take place. What is needed for male expres-

sion is a visionary aesthetics that directly and keenly exposes male culpability in the past and more ambitiously offers solutions for the future.

JOHN LEBLANC

HERITAGE

GEORGE RYGA, *The Athabasca Ryga*, ed. E. David Gregory. Talonbooks, \$14.95.

IN *The Athabasca Ryga* E. David Gregory brings together several of George Ryga's incomplete manuscripts of juvenalia and later retrospective writings about his life in Athabasca and the Athabasca region. Gregory has selected from "the best" of Ryga's unpublished works, all of which were nearly completed at the time of his death in 1988. Although we are not told what criteria have been used for inclusion, the collection contains a good range of literary genres (essays, short fiction, dramatic scripts, and excerpts from the novel "The Bridge") conveying Ryga's deep and often ambivalent commitment to his ethnic and cultural background and to the geographical setting that helped shape his imagination.

The manuscripts have been gathered into five distinct sections: "Looking Back: Athabasca in Retrospect"; "Childhood Memories: Selections from 'The Bridge' (1960)"; "Athabasca Images: An Essay and Two Fragments"; "Poor People: The Athabasca Stories"; and "Birth of a Playwright: Two Early Scripts." Also included are a selected chronology of published and unpublished works and a valuable fifty-nine page Introduction in which Gregory traces the major events in Ryga's biography. We move from Ryga's early and teenage years when "the focus of his existence remained his childhood home, a pioneer homestead in Deep Creek in Northern Alberta," to an equally important section on Ryga's successful but controversial stay at the Banff School of Fine

Arts (1949-54) where he was praised for his literary talent and blacklisted for his political views. An account of Ryga's crucial trip to Europe in 1955 illuminates how his introduction to revolutionary politics in Poland, Bulgaria, and Finland exerted a strong influence on his later politics and art. The rest of the biographical profile concentrates on Ryga's career as a well-known Canadian writer, a status which he achieved in 1962, the year of his "breakthrough." His success was precipitated by "Indian," a play written for television, the medium through which he refined his craft as a playwright. Gregory has done a commendable job of synthesizing the biographical material and interspersing it with pertinent excerpts from Ryga's fiction, articles, newspaper interviews, and a speech to an academic audience.

The manuscripts are in their own right instructive about Ryga both as a man and an artist, but they are also an indispensable adjunct to the study of his better-known works. From this point of view, perhaps the most engaging selections are those dealing with Ryga's youth and his ideas about the relationship between politics and art. "Looking Back: Athabasca in Retrospect," for example, consists of two essays in which Ryga explores his profound engagement with the past and its relationship to his art and thought. The earlier of these essays, "Notes from a Silent Boyhood (1967)," written in the same year as *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, records his life as a schoolboy and worker in Athabasca: the teachers who influenced him; his avid reading of various literatures; his first experiences as a wage-labourer; and his departure from Athabasca to experience "the world in upheaval over the horizon." The writing is evocative and impressionistic, anticipating Ryga's mature fiction. The later "Essay on *A Letter to My Son* (1985)" is an eloquent critique of the politics of multi-

culturalism or "ethnic rediscovery," a trend which he describes as "fast becoming a secondary industry" of coffee-table books on "crafts, cookery, placenames, origins," and on compilations "of immigration settlements" in various regions of Canada. The timely plea for a Canadian literature that is vital, "disruptive and disturbing" underwrites most of the fictional and dramatic pieces in the anthology.

VIVIANA COMENSOLI

UNE SOCIÉTÉ, DEUX PARCOURS

MICHELLE CAMBRON, *Une société, un récit. Discours culturel au Québec (1967-1976)*. l'Hexagone, \$19.95.

SIMON HAREL, *Le voleur de parcours. Identité et cosmopolitisme dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine*. Le Préambule, n.p.

A L'HEURE où la spécificité québécoise est l'objet d'importants enjeux constitutionnels, peut-être conviendrait-il de la définir en des termes autres que d'ethnicité et de langue; peut-être faudrait-il délaisser la représentation monolithique qu'en donnent les politiciens et se mettre à l'écoute des discours social et littéraire québécois. C'est à cette opération que se livrent Micheline Cambron et Simon Harel dans des essais dont la perspective critique et l'objet spécifique sont distincts, mais qui se complètent admirablement: la première, en analysant sous un angle sociologique le "récit commun" qui structure les discours culturels tenus entre 1967 et 1976, et le second, en étudiant sur le mode psychanalytique la représentation de l'étranger dans la littérature québécoise, depuis les années soixante jusqu'aux plus récentes oeuvres post-référendaires.

Un peu à la façon dont Marc Angenot a dégagé les conditions d'émergence des oeuvres littéraires dans le cadre du dis-

cours social commun de la France de 1889, Micheline Cambron cherche à reconstituer le discours diffus et souterrain qui informe certains textes singuliers qui ont ponctué une décennie fort déterminante dans l'histoire du Québec. L'originalité de cette étude tient au postulat de départ, selon lequel tout savoir participe d'un récit et tout discours peut être lu comme récit. Cela conduit l'auteure, au terme d'une démonstration assez convaincante qui s'appuie sur les travaux de Greimas, Ricoeur et sur la pragmatique du langage — mais qui néglige cependant Foucault — à analyser des discours culturels appartenant à différents genres selon les paradigmes propres au récit (construction du sujet, logique des actions, temps et espace) ainsi que les déterminations éthiques et épistémologiques qui les modélisent.

Comme premier élément du corpus, Micheline Cambron a choisi les chansons du défunt groupe Beau Dommage qui, de 1974 à 1977, a connu un succès critique et populaire rarement égalé. L'analyse permet d'esquisser les traits d'un sujet nostalgique du passé, dont les actions ne visent aucune transformation, qui évolue dans un univers clos et en fusion avec la collectivité. Cet immobilisme est toutefois contrebalancé par un principe d'ouverture, par des mécanismes de mise à distance tels l'ironie et l'hétérogénéité langagière. Le modèle, et partant l'existence d'un récit commun fondamental, se voit confirmé par l'étude d'une célèbre série d'articles de Lysiane Gagnon sur l'enseignement du français dans les écoles québécoises, où se fait jour un même noyau hégémonique. Dans les monologues d'Yvon Deschamps et *les Belles-Soeurs* de Michel Tremblay, le même pacte fusionnel ainsi que l'éradication du futur et de l'ailleurs que l'on retrouvait chez Beau Dommage et Gagnon dénotent une axiologie de l'aliénation. Mais à un second niveau d'articulation qui est celui de la

pragmatique, de la relation avec le public, ces textes accusent une déchirure du tissu social, une distance entre le code des personnages — caractérisé notamment par le joual — et le code du spectateur. En démontrant comment cette distanciation esthétique par rapport à un réel représenté de façon réaliste devient l'objet même du discours dans *L'homme rapillé* de Gaston Miron et *L'Hiver de force* de Réjean Ducharme, Micheline Cambron rejoint la thèse d'André Belleau. Pour ce dernier, comme on le sait, la malaisée cohabitation du code savant et du code populaire constitue une des données originales du roman québécois. Pour sa part, l'auteure d'*Une société, un récit*, par le choix stimulant d'un corpus en apparence hétérogène et par sa systématisation de la notion de récit — qui gagnerait cependant à prendre en compte certains acquis de la narratologie —, ouvre à l'ensemble des discours la réflexion sur cette disjonction entre le récit hégémonique et la distanciation esthétique qui, conclut-elle, apparaît indépassable dans le contexte québécois.

Si l'essai de Micheline Cambron nous donne à lire le récit commun d'une société, l'ouvrage de Simon Harel, en ce qu'il interroge la représentation de l'Autre dans le roman québécois contemporain, aborde la question de l'identité par le versant contraire, celui de l'altérité et de la marge, perspective à ma connaissance inédite et qui comble une lacune certaine. Situé au carrefour des travaux du groupe "Montréal imaginaire" et des recherches sur l'hétérogène (dont celles de Régine Robin), *Le voleur de parcours* emprunte à la fois au vocabulaire de la psychanalyse et aux thèses de Georges Simmel et de l'école de sociologie urbaine de Chicago parce que la découverte du cosmopolitisme et de l'étranger, dans l'imaginaire québécois, correspond à l'arrivée en ville. À travers un ensemble de romans choisis en fonction de leur problématique identi-

taire, Simon Harel cherche à voir comment, dans une littérature qui depuis un siècle se veut un récit de fondation et de consolidation de l'identité, les interventions narratives du sujet de l'énonciation et des acteurs romanesques tracent les formes diverses de l'appropriation d'un espace "nouveau": Montréal, lieu de diversité culturelle.

Cette topologie du déplacement, du parcours a pour objet premier les romans du groupe Parti Pris, dont la tentative de réappropriation symbolique du milieu urbain s'inscrit sous le signe d'une lutte de libération face au capitalisme anglo-saxon. Sans pour autant porter de jugement de valeur, Harel postule que la reconstitution d'une identité indivise nécessite l'expérience du morcellement cosmopolite; ce à quoi se refusent, dans leur dialectique binaire, dans leur reconquête fantasmée et autoréférentielle, les textes de Paul Chamberland, André Major, Pierre Mahieu et Jacques Renaud. Dans des pages qui, à mon avis, constituent une contribution significative aux études ferroniennes, Harel démontre ensuite comment *La nuit* s'avère un roman évolutif, en ce que la parole est donnée à l'étranger, qui prend la figure de passeur, d'intercesseur entre le francophone et l'anglophone, entre la banlieue et la ville. Si une certaine ambiguïté persiste du fait que dans ce roman de Ferron, l'hybridation actorielle demeure le fait de l'Autre, un pas décisif est franchi avec *Volkswagen Blues* de Jacques Poulin et *Une histoire américaine* de Jacques Godbout, où est mise en scène la découverte de l'altérité et de la pluralité culturelle, où est questionnée l'identité québécoise dans ses fantasmes de fondation. Mais comme le souligne l'auteur, dans ces deux romans qui se donnent à lire autant comme réappropriation d'une appartenance continentale que comme revendication d'une singularité culturelle, la création d'un pacte interculturel n'est possible qu'en dehors du Québec, là où

l'étranger n'est pas menaçant. De conclure Harel, deux voies s'offrent à la littérature québécoise: soit une réappropriation mimétique d'un étranger à la fois idéalisé et rejeté, pulsion d'agrippement à une identité héritée du terroir — comme dans *Le matou* d'Yves Beauchemin, qui fait cependant ici les frais d'une analyse un peu facile —, soit cette traversée des signes qui caractérise certaines oeuvres récentes, où l'étranger devient un véritable interlocuteur. Dernière perspective qui est ici privilégiée puisque c'est dans la transversalité que l'imaginaire québécois saura renouveler sa spécificité.

Si certaines redites et une articulation quelque peu laborieuse du propos théorique appelleraient un travail d'édition plus serré, il n'en demeure pas moins que *Le voleur de parcours*, à l'instar d'*Une société, un récit*, entraîne la critique québécoise sur des chemins jusqu'ici trop peu fréquentés.

ANDRÉ LAMONTAGNE

INCERTITUDE

ANTHONY PURDY, *A Certain Difficulty of Being. Essays on the Quebec Novel*. McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, n.p.

ON DÉPLORE souvent, à juste titre, le nombre insuffisant d'ouvrages de langue anglaise consacrés à la littérature québécoise. De telles études exercent pourtant une fonction essentielle de diffusion auprès du public non spécialiste en même temps qu'elles apportent au lecteur francophone un point de vue et une perspective critique souvent différents. C'est à ce double objectif que répond le récent ouvrage d'Anthony Purdy qui, tout en introduisant aux textes marquants du corpus romanesque québécois, les ouvre à certaines interrogations caractéristiques de la narratologie anglo-saxonne, soit les rapports entre la réalité et la fiction ainsi que l'intentionnalité auctoriale.

Le format choisi, un recueil d'essais, témoigne d'une volonté de saisir chaque texte dans son contexte historique propre et dans son individualité, ce qui justifie la pluralité des approches théoriques. La cohésion interne de l'ensemble repose sur la prospection de cette "certaine difficulté d'être" par laquelle Hubert Aquin définissait le problème ontologique du Canada français et qui, selon Purdy, informe le dispositif narratif du roman québécois. La lecture fonctionnelle et pragmatique du récit privilégiée ici permet, tout en intégrant d'autres types d'analyse, de mesurer les continuités et discontinuités discursives, l'écart entre le projet initial et le résultat final: l'expression d'une incertitude à la fois ontologique et narrative.

Cette incertitude, le critique en retrouve tout d'abord la trace dans les préfaces des romans canadiens-français du XIX^e siècle, où les auteurs se défendent d'écrire un roman. L'analyse des stratégies rhétoriques déployées dans ce type de "paratexte" révèle quel sens particulier prennent les prescriptions de lecture dans le contexte de l'institutionnalisation de la littérature canadienne, comment elles peuvent être interprétées à la lumière du "conflit des codes" (Belleau). Cette notion, qui trouve ici une application inédite, gagnerait à être reprise, de façon à renforcer l'unité entre les différents chapitres — ce qui n'est fait que tardivement, dans la postface de l'ouvrage. L'hésitation générique trouve cependant écho dans les pages consacrées à *Menaud, maître-dra-veur*, oeuvre dont le style est tantôt associé à l'épique, tantôt au romanesque. Au terme d'une analyse stylistique et thématique détaillée, Purdy affirme que le problème de réception critique posé par le texte de Félix-Antoine Savard en est, en quelque sorte, l'objet même: le récit d'une épopée frustrée devenue roman. La thèse est séduisante: la folie de Menaud serait l'expression de l'inadéquation du projet épique de Savard à un monde en transi-

tion, de la dissolution involontaire de l'intention narrative première dans l'espace romanesque.

L'étude consacrée à *Bonheur d'occasion* est le lieu d'une comparaison avec *The Road to Wigan Pier* de George Orwell, deux romans qui ont pour objet un univers et une classe socio-économique étrangers à leur auteur. Alors que chez le romancier britannique, ce problème de représentation est résolu par la création d'une figure intermédiaire, Gabrielle Roy transgresse la technique novatrice qu'est la focalisation interne, initialement choisie, par des interventions nécessaires au maintien de la cohérence idéologique. Le recours au concept d'"implied author" s'imposerait peut-être dans cette analyse qui entretient une confusion entre l'auteur et le narrateur omniscient, mais qui autrement conjugue très bien la narratologie à une lecture socio-économique du quotidien. L'ambiguïté narrative prend un sens différent dans *Poussière sur la ville*, roman dont la forme génère un conflit entre la logique de la vie et la logique du récit. Reprenant les diverses interprétations auxquelles a donné lieu le discours paradoxal d'Alain Dubois, qui entend subordonner la connaissance aux événements cependant qu'il anticipe la récapitulation narrative, Purdy suggère un mode de lecture propre à mettre en valeur l'oeuvre d'André Langevin, qui pave la voie aux romans des années soixante en questionnant la réciprocité entre le monde et sa représentation narrative.

C'est selon les mêmes termes, auxquels s'ajoute un troisième élément, la logique de l'Histoire, qu'est analysée l'incertitude qui traverse *Prochain épisode*. Un retour éclairant aux essais d'Aquin — et plus particulièrement "La fatigue culturelle du Canada français" et "l'Art de la défaite" — étaye l'argumentation, à savoir que la modification du projet narratif, dans *Prochain épisode*, sert le récit de la décolonisation. De cette étude, on retien-

dra aussi l'examen détaillé des modalités d'énonciation du roman d'espionnage, tradition souvent évoquée à propos du roman d'Aquin, mais trop peu souvent circonscrite. Enfin, s'interrogeant sur le succès populaire de *Kamouraska*, Purdy s'emploie à démontrer la cohérence narrative et l'univocalité d'un récit en apparence hétérogène et polyphonique pour ensuite l'associer, en reprenant les catégories de Barthes, au texte de plaisir et au lisible plutôt qu'au texte de jouissance et au scriptible. S'opposant aux critiques qui voient dans *Kamouraska* l'expression d'une poétique postmoderne, l'analyse — qui se refuse toutefois à engager véritablement le débat — rattache la vision totalisante du roman à l'esthétique moderniste.

Dans son avant-propos, où il se fait sur plus d'un point le censeur de la critique universitaire, Anthony Purdy regrette que trop peu d'ouvrages érudits aient la modeste ambition d'être utile. À cet égard, *A Certain Difficulty of Being* comblera plusieurs attentes de l'étudiant: chaque essai va au cœur des textes canoniques du roman québécois, attire l'attention sur les problèmes d'interprétation qu'ils posent et introduit à plusieurs des concepts-clé de la théorie littéraire. L'essai intéressera également le lectorat plus spécialisé par sa perspective d'ensemble, qui s'avère stimulante et jette un regard nouveau sur une incertitude séculaire.

ANDRÉ LAMONTAGNE

DRAMATURGIE COLLECTIVE

MONIQUE ENGELBERTZ, *Le Théâtre québécois de 1965 à 1980 — un théâtre politique*. Niemeyer, n.p.

LE TEXTE DE Monique Engelbertz, fruit d'une thèse de l'Université de Cologne en Allemagne, se veut une contribution à l'étude de la dramaturgie québé-

coise. L'ouvrage se divise principalement en deux parties: la première, la plus dense, renferme deux chapitres à multiples sections et porte sur la dramaturgie individuelle; la deuxième, comporte un seul chapitre d'une quarantaine de pages qui traite de la dramaturgie collective. Le dessein de son étude se prononce de façon très modeste: "Le but de ce travail sera atteint si nous arrivons à éveiller la curiosité du lecteur européen pour ce phénomène littéraire et si nous pouvons permettre au lecteur québécois la redécouverte d'un événement dont il fut le premier et le plus directement concerné."

Le premier volet de son étude se concentre sur le contexte socio-historique et politique du Québec. Engelbertz souligne d'entrée de jeu que l'emploi du joual et le choix de sujets "québécois" [problèmes qui touchent le quotidien] de la part des dramaturges auraient éveillé la conscience politique et culturelle du peuple québécois. Selon l'auteure, les dramaturges à l'instar de Jean Barbeau, Claude Germain, Michel Tremblay non seulement auraient redonné à la nation "l'estime qu'elle avait perdue depuis longtemps" mais auraient aussi engagé "le public dans leur entreprise de libération nationale." Elle passe à l'analyse du théâtre historique, c'est-à-dire les pièces critiquant l'oppression britannique, la complicité de l'Église catholique et la dimension tragique des héros québécois pour peser par la suite les conséquences de cet héritage historique sur l'identité individuelle et collective des Québécois à l'aide d'un éventail de textes dramatiques et d'abondantes citations. Il ressort de son analyse l'image d'un peuple colonisé, dépossédé et impuissant laquelle les dramaturges essaient de renverser en forgeant une nouvelle vision qui réhabiliterait le passé et tracerait les voies d'un nouvel avenir. La dernière section traite des événements plus récents tels que la visite du Général de Gaulle en juillet 1967, la Crise d'octo-

bre, la montée et la victoire du Parti Québécois ... et leur retentissements sur la production et la représentation des pièces telles que *Hamlet, prince du Québec*, *Le Chemin du Roy*, *Une soirée en octobre*, *Cérémonial pour l'assassinat d'un ministre*, *L'Affront commun* et maintes autres.

Le deuxième volet de son étude nous donne un aperçu de la dramaturgie collective. L'analyse est basée sur "des commentaires, des critiques et des interviews." Elle se donne pour but de relever le caractère "collectif," "populaire" et "militant" de ce mouvement théâtral au Québec. Il est dommage que le texte de Renate Usmiani (auteure citée deux fois par Engelbertz); *Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada* lequel tranche, lui aussi, la question des créations collectives soit passé sous silence.

Or l'étude d'Engelbertz n'est pas sans faiblesse. Il est impossible de ne pas soulever le discours critique de l'auteure lequel est fort problématique. L'auteure amorce son étude en nous signalant que le théâtre québécois continue à avoir "des difficultés à émerger des ténèbres." Elle fait table rase des oeuvres dramatiques publiées avant 1965 et elle écarte péremptoirement certaines pièces parce qu'elles ne se conforment pas à sa grille de lecture. En guise d'exemple, les pièces de Marcel Dubé et de Gratien Gélinas sont exclues "[...] puisqu'elles sont créées pour une couche sociale aux critères culturels restrictifs. Lorsque des allusions à la situation politique québécoise y transparaissent, elles ne transgressent en rien les données politiques et culturelles bourgeoises dont en fait elles représentent les intérêts." La méthodologie qu'elle s'est proposée est tout aussi ambiguë à en juger par sa déclaration: "[...] l'attrait de l'inconnu explique l'orientation particulière donnée à notre étude, celle du théâtre politique." Bien qu'elle cite Brecht, Pronko et autres théoriciens du théâtre, l'analyse d'Engelbertz demeure largement

sociologique: le texte dramatique est perçu comme un document "réflétant" fidèlement les données sociales de la réalité québécoise. En outre, il convient de signaler certaines imprécisions telles que la gênante référence aux élections du premier "Président" du Parlement du Bas-Canada, ou celle aux "immigrants francophones sur le continent anglo-américain" ou celle à la rue Main "de son vrai nom l'avenue Sainte Catherine." Malgré ces faiblesses, la consultation de ce texte est sans doute utile mais une certaine mise en garde est nécessaire.

SUZANNE CROSTA

CAGE DE FER

ANNE HÉBERT, *La Cage* suivi de *L'île de la Demoiselle* (théâtre). Boréal/Seuil, n.p.

LE THÉÂTRE D'A. HÉBERT tient à l'Oratorio et il célèbre l'interdit. Si le ton est sacré, le sujet est cependant profane. Moins connue que son oeuvre de romancière et de poète, la production théâtrale d'A. Hébert commence en 1952 avec *Les Invités au procès* (poème dramatique). Il s'agit d'une pièce radiophonique où on trouve, dans une atmosphère surréaliste chargée de signes prémoniteurs, les préoccupations avec l'injustice du châtimement, l'ardent désir de vivre, l'attrait qu'éprouvent des êtres frémissants de vie pour la mort croupissante; bref, déjà toute la thématique hébertienne.

La Mercière assassinée, un téléthéâtre de 1959, bascule entre une atmosphère de songe et la réalité d'un meurtre de vengeance. C'est l'idiote du village, comme dans *Les Fous de Bassan* (1982) qui éclaire le mystère: *Quand je chante c'est comme si je touchais des choses interdites*. Achille fait partie, comme le bossu de la pièce radiophonique, de l'ameublement de la vie seigneuriale qu'on trouve dans le roman *Les Chambres de bois* et dans les poèmes *Le Tombeau des rois*. La pièce

la mieux connue d'Anne Hébert est *Le Temps sauvage* (1966). La jeunesse réclame l'accès à la vie et dénonce l'isolement, l'aveuglement, le sentiment de culpabilité de l'ordre ancien des parents.

Si les trois premières pièces se déroulent hors du temps historique et dans un espace chargé de symboles mais non identifiable, *L'île de la Demoiselle*, publiée en 1979, jouée en 1974, ainsi que la dernière pièce, *La Cage* (1990) font revivre l'histoire de la Nouvelle-France. Le récit de Marguerite de Nontron et du sieur de Roberval commence à Saint-Malo et se déroule en pleine mer et sur l'île du même nom dans le Saint Laurent, en 1540. D'autre part, l'histoire de la Corriveau, condamnée à la pendaison et à l'exposition dans une cage, se passe après la conquête de 1759, sous le régime britannique. Cette pièce commence simultanément en Europe et au Canada et se déroule par la suite à Saint-Vallier.

Dans les deux pièces, la mort n'est pas réservé aux innocentes condamnées. Ni Marguerite ni Ludivine ne seront exécutées, alors que le capitaine et le juge (les puissants), eux, mourront. Ils meurent de jalousie et d'envie ou encore de leur pauvreté originelle comme l'expliquent les fées noires dans *La Cage*.

Dans chaque cas c'est autour d'une intrigue simple mais subversive que la pièce se déroule car la tragédie est convertie en conte de fée. La stylisation de la réalité s'opère par un montage composé de réseaux concentriques servant à contrôler la distance du lecteur/spectateur. Dans *La Cage*, la arratrice (Babette), fille adoptée par la Corriveau, et le Narrateur, dans *L'île de la Demoiselle*, annoncent, à distance les didascalies, expliquent les hors-scène et parfois participent à la scène en guise de chœur.

D'autres voix encore, anonymes, servent d'orchestre et élaborent une danse autour de l'intrigue principale. Dans *La Cage* ce sont les fées blanches et noires

ainsi que les sept péchés capitaux, alors que, dans *L'île de la Demoiselle*, ce sont les pêcheurs, les matelots, les badauds, une religieuse, un forçat.

Pour ce qui est des personnages principaux, on note que dans les deux pièces les hommes et les femmes se classent en typologies bien distinctes. Les uns, sensibles et rêveurs, possèdent une bonne dextérité manuelle (l'un est artisan charpentier, l'autre peintre), ils sont courageux mais destinés à l'effacement même s'ils font l'objet de la passion de l'héroïne. D'autres, pourtant plutôt faibles psychologiquement, détiennent le pouvoir, et représentent l'autorité (l'un est capitaine de vaisseau, l'autre est juge). Par contre, les femmes, ont une typologie plus complexe, moins prévisible. Elles sont belles ou laides, jeunes ou plus âgées, mais elles sont vives, avec des valeurs sûres, une volonté inébranlable et un instinct sans remords. On pourrait, d'ailleurs, classer de la même manière les personnages principaux, hommes et femmes, des romans d'A. Hébert.

L'organisation concentrique des airs (la voix des personnages principaux), des récitatifs (les perspectives des personnages mineurs), des chœurs, nous renvoie davantage à la forme rituelle de l'Oratorio qu'à la représentation théâtrale. Cette organisation particulière ne reflète donc pas une réalité extérieure, en dépit des points de repère historiques, mais un cérémonial où gestes et langage sont prescrits selon une norme culturelle et religieuse. Le langage devient davantage performatif qu'illocutoire. La narratrice Babette entonne l'incipit: *Au commencement, il y eut deux petites filles dans l'ombre de leur naissance... tandis que les bonnes et les mauvaises fées étaient lâchées,... pour présider... aux cérémonies des dons et des augures.*

La puissance et la beauté de ce théâtre réside dans l'impact de la parole théâtrale sur le lecteur/spectateur. Il semble y avoir

un écart le discours tenu par les locuteurs et leur position discursive. Les fées, dans leur désir de "faire," déclarent en chœur leur mission, parodiant la naissance du Christ: *grosses à craquer et bien prêtes d'accoucher, nous sommes lourdes d'étranges merveilles cachées ... Nous cherchons deux enfants nouveau-nés. L'étoile qui nous guida ... s'est éteinte soudain ...* Babette met fin brusquement à leur danse euphorique: *Quelle pagaille! Il est temps que j'intervienne et délimite nettement les territoires.* Le locuteur (singulier ou collectif), semble oublier la nature de sa position et de son rapport avec son interlocuteur et s'adresse directement au spectateur. Ce changement soudain de registre et de direction produit un effet sinon de comique au moins d'étonnement. Le dialogue devient, ainsi, en cours de route, un monologue.

La tension et l'étrangeté produites par ces contradictions entre les conditions d'énonciation et le contenu du discours donnent aux personnages une forte autonomie. Pour cette raison il semble que la véritable action se passe ailleurs et que les personnages (individuels ou collectifs) ne sont pas porteurs d'une idéologie personnelle univoque.

Cependant, on reconnaît bien le monde imaginaire d'A. Hébert: le pouvoir de l'eau, la menace/l'attrait de la noyade, les cris/les appels impérieux des oiseaux de mer, le leurre de l'antinomie (bon-mauvais, blanc-noir, beau-laid), la tendance à se protéger avec la parure (soit les loques de la pauvreté, soit le reliquaire des bijoux anciens). On retrouve aussi la détermination féroce des individus sous l'impulsion du désir. A cause de leur ambiguïté les personnages qui agissent sous la dictée de l'amour ou de la crainte sont les plus polyvalents.

Il semble, cependant, que *La Cage* qui modifie le cours connu de la légende dans un cérémonial profondément enraciné dans la tradition judéo-chrétienne, affirme

du même souffle son indépendance de cette tradition. Hyacinthe, amoureux de Ludivine, implore et menace John Cressa: *Le plaisir extrême que vous ressentez dans l'accomplissement de votre tâche vous déshonore, M. le juge. Resaisissez-vous pendant qu'il est encore temps. J'appelle de toutes mes forces ce peu de liberté qui existe encore en vous. ...* La remarque finale de Babette reprend le même motif: *Il faut que j'aïlle avec eux délivrer Rosalinde. Je veux voir sa petite figure de hibou, au sortir de la nuit, qui cligne des yeux dans la lumière. Je vous raconterai.*

La cage dorée de Rosalinde et celle de fer de la Corriveau disparaissent. La célébration de la vie et de la libération est au programme dorénavant. Ardu défi pour un metteur en scène fin et intelligent.

GRAZIA MERLER

MARGINALITÉ ET SOLITUDE

RÉJEAN DUCHARME, *Dévadé*. Gallimard/Lacombe, \$24.95.

ENTRE LA PUBLICATION de son premier roman, *L'Avalée des avalés*, en 1966 et celle en 1976 des *Enfantômes*, Réjean Ducharme s'est taillé une place des plus importantes dans la vie littéraire du Canada, voire de la francophonie. Récipiendaire de divers prix littéraires, l'auteur de *Dévadé* a failli remporter le Goncourt en 1966. Connu pour ses ouvrages romanesques et ses pièces de théâtre remarquables, Ducharme offre sans égal une vision existentielle conséquente dans sa nature, mais variable dans ses apparences. Nostalgie de l'enfance innocente, inventions langagières — dont jeux onomastiques et calembours des plus originaux — personnages marginaux, solitude et refus d'une société institutionnalisée: autant d'aspects qui caractérisent son œuvre. Par ailleurs, Ducharme a également signé de nombreuses

chansons, notamment certaines interprétées par Charlebois, ainsi que deux scénarios de film — *Les Bons débarras* (1979) et *Les Beaux souvenirs* (1981) — tournés par Francis Mankiewicz. L'oeuvre romanesque et dramatique de Ducharme s'est fait couronner en 1990, quelques semaines avant la parution de *Dévadé*, par le prix de littérature Gilles-Corbeil, doté d'une bourse de 100 000\$. Premier lauréat du prix, Ducharme renchérit après un long silence sur le thème de l'évasion, sur celui du non-conformisme qui l'on est venu à associer à tous ses univers romanesques depuis celui habité par la jeune fille neurasthénique et hyperbolique, Bérénice Einberg, dans *L'Avalée des avalés* jusqu'à la vie fantasque menée par Vincent Falardeau dans *Les Enfantômes*, adulte qui ne peut se libérer des souvenirs à la fois tendres et traumatisants de sa mère.

En effet, la galerie de portraits extravagants qu'a créée l'écrivain s'est fait enrichir grâce à la peinture de P. Lafond, protagoniste principal surnommé Bottom dans *Dévadé*. Si celui-ci se dit volontiers "le Mouvant perpétuel, le Fou fuyant, Monsieur le Prince de Personne" (p. 9) ou encore "[d]éficient social crasse, ivogne trépignant" (p. 10), il n'en est pas moins conscient de sa "facilité à verser dans la sentimentalité." (p. 231). L'autoportrait qu'il brosse indique toute l'angoisse ressentie par un individu jugé marginal, mais désirant ardemment se rehausser du commun des hommes :

J'ai mal tourné. A dix-huit ans, je rêvais d'être un poids mort, un fardeau, petit peut-être mais qui y tient, de tous ses dérisoires moyens, sans jamais les perdre, comme il y en a tant, amers et timorés, rongés jusqu'au trognon. Je n'avais pas le choix; j'avais été compté, pesé et jugé bon à rien, aucun jeu de société. Je payais cher ma place qui n'en était pas une, assez cher pour la glorifier, l'occuper comme un trône, ne plus rien devoir à personne, surtout pas des excuses ...

Agé de trente ans et sorti tout récemment de prison, Bottom entame une relation de

symbiose avec "la patronne," fragile dans son fauteuil roulant et pour qui donc il accomplit quelques tâches domestiques entre d'autres. Les rôles se renversent par occasion pourtant: "Mais la patronne m'apporte tellement [sic] mon café, sur un plateau d'acajou tellement posé sur ses pauvres genoux, qu'on jurerait que c'est la grande estropiée qui sert le petit satyre découché, le taré tordu par la trotte." Si la patronne offre à Bottom le Quatuor en sol majeur de Mozart ainsi qu'un souper au champagne, cet "asocial endurci" n'en restera pas moins enclin à se contenter de ses six canettes de bière quotidiennes. Unis dans leur exubérance et leur angoisse respectives, la patronne et Bottom semblent avoir formulé un étrange accord tacite qui leur permet de tout oser ensemble. Consolation puisée chez l'un comme chez l'autre, chacun de ces êtres possède désormais un rôle défini par l'autre, ce qui rend possible l'évasion d'une solitude profonde, mais qui a également comme conséquence une privation de liberté, et ce surtout de la part de Bottom. Confronté à sa nouvelle vie, Bottom avoue à l'égard de la patronne avec une truculence inhabituelle: "La partie de son anatomie que je préfère, c'est son Oldsmobile." La patronne n'est pourtant pas la seule femme à exercer une influence sur Bottom. La vie sentimentale de ce dernier est effectivement perturbée par Juba, "la seule enfant de mon âge qui veut jouer avec moi," qu'il aime mais qui aime un autre, et par Nicole dont l'amant, un poète fou, est renfermé dans une maison d'aliénés. Ballotté sans cesse entre les créatures féminines, Bottom finit par prendre prise, une fois et pour toutes. Ainsi la boucle est-elle bouclée, car c'est nul autre que la patronne qui, à la clôture du texte, seule avec Bottom, lui tend sa main, acte symbolique puisque, ce faisant, elle prend sept pas chancelants, "des pas magiques dont on ne revient pas, les mêmes par le nombre et par la fragilité

que les premiers du petit Bouddha, qui lui ont suffi pour mesurer le monde, le soumettre à sa pensée, son désir, son action."

Le dénouement annonçant une ouverture sentimentale, l'on s'aperçoit que l'ironie farouche dont se sont imprégnés *L'Avalée des avalés* ou encore *L'Hiver de force* a cédé chez Ducharme à une ironie qui surprend, mais qui reconforte avant tout. Les dernières paroles du héros, "Tout est bien qui ne finit pas, va." (p. 257), dévoilent ainsi la continuité d'une oeuvre qui met en vedette des êtres marginaux vivant une solitude en apparence sans issue. Cette fois, par contre, l'unité du couple reste intacte dans sa cristallisation, mais non sans fragilité pour autant. Toute permanence continue donc à fuir le monde ducharmien. Toujours est-il que même dans son instabilité l'oeuvre de Réjean Ducharme ne cesse d'exercer une fascination qui ne manque jamais d'étonner.

KENNETH W. MEADWELL

YOUNG LIVES

BERNICE THURMAN HUNTER, *The Railroader*. Scholastic, \$4.50.

WILLIAM BELL, *Forbidden City: A Novel*. Doubleday, \$12.95.

GORDON KORMAN, *Losing Joe's Place*. Scholastic, \$14.95.

WHILE THERE HAVE always been a few writers for young adults and children in Canada, fiction for this group is flourishing in England and the United States, where it has had decades in which to grow. In Canada young adult and children's fiction has only really begun to take off. But with writers such as Welwyn Katz, Janet Lunn, and Kit Pearson, Canadian fiction in this age-group is already beginning to make its mark.

Bernice Hunter's *The Railroader* is a rather unusual novel for the pre-teen group: it is a historical novel which does

not *feel* like a historical novel. The wonderful glimpses of coal-driven steam engines, old railway men who annually raise and lower the gates at railroad crossings, as well as brief descriptions of life without a washer or fridge are fascinating, but Hunter has avoided overburdening the book with history, thereby alienating the average ten-year-old reader.

Throughout the novel maintains a strong sense of what it is like to be twelve years old. The passion inspired in both Skip and his best friend Tom for their gorgeous but stern teacher Miss Thomas, and their grudging respect as she charms then persuades then forces the best out of them academically, is believable. The radio version of "Hockey Night in Canada" reminds the reader of the pre-television past, while showing how the passions of twelve-year-old boys fifty-odd years ago remain much the same as those of twelve-year-old boys today.

Hunter does not veer away from difficult subjects in this novel. The dismemberment of the child in the railway accident is echoed by Skip's father, who lost a leg in the war. Charlie has a heart attack early in the novel from which he recovers. The incident affects Skip deeply and prepares both Skip and the young reader for the later heart attack that kills Charlie. The novel is uncompromisingly realistic, showing that life is both painful and joyful, and that triumph and defeat are both part of the whole. With themes such as these woven through the excitement, with adventure and a protagonist with whom any child who has cherished a dream could identify, this novel is an important contribution to the rapidly developing field of young adult fiction in Canada today.

Another novel for young adults with an emphasis on death is William Bell's *Forbidden City: A Novel*. This novel is the story of a young man's trip to China with

his journalist father just before the student massacre in Tian An Men Square, in Beijing in June, 1989. Alexander Jackson, separated from his father during the massacre, narrowly escapes with his life and, more importantly to the people who rescue him, with his illegal video footage of the unprovoked attack by the People's Army on the unarmed students. At great risk to themselves, some students help smuggle Alex out of Beijing to the airport, so that he can take their story home for all the world to see.

The novel is on a very intense subject, one that may not be considered by all suitable fare for young adults. But as it is geared for the fifteen-year-old age group and up, that concern is not so important as it may first appear. Furthermore, on the whole, Bell handles his material well. His protagonist, Alexander, is likeable and develops during his brush with death and with the horrors of a massacre. Also important in maintaining the reader's interest in the story are the Chinese students who rescue Alex and then get him to the airport. They are very engaging characters, perhaps because they are committed to their cause while remaining truly human. The risks they take for Alex, and his slowly developing appreciation of their situation, makes them very real. The death of the leader, Xin-hua, as she is helping Alex escape near the end of the novel is the most powerful scene in the novel. Consequently, Alex's personal danger never seems as important as the fact that he might not get the video tapes to the outside world.

Unfortunately, the plot is interrupted frequently with long descriptions of Beijing and of Alex's day-to-day doings. At the beginning of the book, Alex introduces his model army, a passage dense enough to turn most if not all female readers off immediately, and many male readers as well. The greatest hero in the story is not,

in fact, Alexander, but rather the female student leader, Xin-hua. Her courage, strength, endurance and determination are the most inspiring of any in the novel. Her story is a great one, but few young women are likely to stay with the novel long enough to meet Xin-hua, who does not appear until about half-way through.

A much lighter novel, *Losing Joe's Place* by Gordon Korman, won the Canadian Children's Book Centre Award in 1990. It is a fast-paced, rollicking book about sixteen-year-old Jason Cardone and his two friends, Don and the Peach, who are loaned the much-loved apartment of Jason's brother Joe in Toronto for the summer. The story traces their mishaps as they learn to live on their own and to cope with losing their jobs, falling for the same girl and living with Rootbeer, Joe's friend, a mammoth of a man who adds much humour and interest to the story.

There are some unpleasant overtones. The incredibly greedy and nasty landlord, Mr. Plotnick, is obviously Jewish, as is his incredibly greedy although reputedly nicer counterpart one block down, Hamish. Surely there is no place in young adult's novels (or indeed literature of any kind) for this kind of vicious stereotyping. Also stereotyped are the girls in the novel. Jessica, mainly characterized by her long, shapely legs, is a mindless flirt, who plays games with Don and the Peach while all the time provoking Jason. Kiki, the other major female figure, is discussed more than seen, and is too stupid to give Don her correct phone number when he meets her, so that he spends the whole summer trying to reach her at a number where she does not live. The mothers are also stereotyped in their reluctance to let their teenaged babies out of the nest. For a novel written in 1990, *Losing Joe's Place* is reactionary in its portrayal of minority and female characters.

Given the quality of the first two books

in this trio, this critic finds it distressing that it was this frivolous and prejudiced book that won the Children's Book Centre Award.

J. R. WYTENBROEK

ROUGH JUSTICE

MARTIN L. FRIEDLAND, ed. *Rough Justice: Essays on Crime in English Literature*. U. of Toronto Press, pb. \$18.95. 248 pp.

THIS BOOK, "BASED ON presentations given by professors of English literature at the University of Toronto in a law school seminar at the university" (the date of which is not given, although 1985 is implied in the footnotes to one of the essays), and dedicated "to the memory of Northrop Frye," reveals some of its ideological parameters before so much as revealing its table of contents.

I can only do "rough justice" in the space available to a collection of thirteen essays, all knowledgeable and informative, and most quite poised and stylish as well. They dip (in chronological order) into most periods of English literature through the nineteenth century, and conclude with six twentieth-century essays (three American and three Canadian).

The book's topics are not "crime stories," but crime *in* stories, and the range of these stories, (since "crime" can be taken as a fictional universal), is only limited by the knowledge and interests of the critics: not surprisingly boringdeadwhitemalecanonical in the first ten essays, except for Richard Wright (black) and Oscar Wilde (never boring). One should keep in mind, however (although the critics on the whole don't) the interdisciplinary context: what are the law students present at the original seminars presumed to have gained from this exercise, and what might we, as belatedly "general" readers, gain? More than we actually do, perhaps, had any lawyers contributed to the discussion from their perspective. An opportunity,

for dialogue or at least for a "double-voicedness" within the essays themselves, has been missed. And none of the critics seems to consider that "Law and Literature" (the absence of which is at least *mentioned* in the editor's introduction), let alone New Legal Criticism or Critical Legal Studies, might enrich or qualify their arguments or supply shape and tension to the argument of the whole.

The concept of crime is seen in political and social terms in all the essays; this was, presumably, the "brief" for the seminar. "Historical aspects of" (Old Historicism, I take it; historical data and persons, adapted to fictional contexts, are woven into most of these texts), "Societal perceptions of" and authorial attitudes to crime, "the criminal justice system and its role in society" as revealed in literature, are what is promised, and what is, severally, delivered.

"One criminal remains unpunished and apparently unpunishable: 'Society'" (Robson on Dickens); Newgate Prison, in Fielding as in Dickens, is a *mise en abyme* of England and its society (Baird on *Jonathan Wild*); literature is seen as a somewhat ambivalent instrument of social reform (Parker on duelling). What fictions seemingly contribute to social commentary and the history of ideas is a sense of the "roughness" (that is approximateness) of something like "poetic" justice, where the rigid logic of the law must be adapted, in the teeth of moral and human dilemmas, to circumstances, public opinion, local customs (see J. Millgate on Scott).

This relativistic social emphasis continues through to the twentieth century texts, with critical and (by these readings) authorial sympathy for the "criminal" character, who is, on the whole, seen as the victim of the greater crimes of society at large or of naturalistic fatalism (M. Millgate on Faulkner, Hayne on

Dreiser, Blake on Richard Wright); it culminates in the discussions of the relatively contemporary Canadian texts.

Saddlemeyer sees theatres as lawcourts and lawcourts as theatres. She finds striking structural and thematic parallels between the two plays (Ryga's *Indian* of 1962 and Pollock's *Blood Relations* of 1980), establishing them as "internal trials," with the *audience* as co-conspirators. A quick but lucid survey of Canadian and American "Indian" drama, comparing Pollock's *Walsh* and Kopit's *Indians*, contextualizes the main comparison. Pollock's feminist message, of the oppression of the ambiguously criminal Lizzie Borden by social circumstances, resembles the political message of the Indian plays. An elegant, as well as an eloquent essay.

Dennis Duffy on *The Scorched-Wood People* emphasizes the postmodernist elements of Wiebe's narrative (could it be called "historiographic metafiction?"), such as the incongruous juxtapositions of the "ordinary" and the "fantastic." "Wiebe replicat[es] the scriptural project" by hearing the Narrator as a tribal voice, seeing the Métis (in Riel's terms) as New Israelites, and deploying scriptural parallels throughout. An admittedly long seven-page wind-up to the question of Riel's "crime," along with two pages on Riel literature, leaves a wonderfully concentrated two pages to answer the key question of how Wiebe links the visionary Riel with the "criminal" (that is historical) Riel. "The incompatibility of differing cultural discourses" (as in Ryga and Pollock) makes it inevitable that the very concept of "crime" is seen as relative to socio-historical contexts. (Surely the law students had something to say about this?) But the question strikes further, at the readership: how willing are we to accommodate visionary experiences, if they lead to insurrection? It is too easy

for us to simply approve of Riel while condemning those who condemned him. Wiebe's is, Duffy claims, "a self-questioning scripture"; it seems to pose more complex questions than do Pollock and Ryga, comparatively straightforward in their 'political correctness.'

Joseph Škvorecký, fortunately, fits into the appropriate authorial category, while bringing a topic (detective stories) and a perspective (Middle European) that variegates an otherwise somewhat syllabus-like texture. Škvorecký begins with some acerbic comments on the Fate of Detection under Socialism joined to an autobiographical account of how, by personal and historical accident, he became first a reader, then a writer of detective stories. This is delightful. But the quick history of the "classical" detective story (as originated by Poe from the spirit of Poe's musical poetry), and distinguished from the thriller, the crime story, and the mystery story (the umbrella category that includes them all) is rather familiar. Škvorecký prefers, he tells us, the detective story taken straight, without the "literary dallying" of the detective story of manners. "Hypnotized by the fireworks of language," as many of us have been by, say, the novels of Raymond Chandler, we lose sight of the plot and its rational disentanglement. Škvorecký assesses the Canadian detective stories in the 1984 anthology, *Fingerprints* (to which this essay served as introduction) in terms of these criteria, finding only three of them to be genuine detective stories, and even those not "perfect" ones. This is an "occasional" piece, perhaps insufficiently adapted to the larger purposes of *Rough Justice*.

PATRICIA MERIVALE

SOME FICTIONS I'VE BEEN READING with interest include Mike Johnson's *Foreigners* (Penguin, NZ\$19.95), a series of three novellas that develop through the vernacular; Elizabeth Spencer's *The Night Travellers* (Viking,

n.p.), set in Montreal and North Carolina during the Viet Nam War, a narrative that develops through conversation; Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* (McPhee Gribble, n.p.), a fiction that ultimately places its faith in love, as a force stronger than all others, which develops through snippets of revelation; Michael Wilding's *Great Climate* (Faber & Faber, £12.99), anecdotes of sex, paranoia, and uncertainty. They've got me wondering about the strategies of fictional development: what is it that sets an author thinking *in terms of* conversation, revelation, anecdote? Robert Kroetsch would have a cultural answer: it's the telling, not the tale, that tells the message, and the right telling is the one that's most natural to place and person, perhaps gender and time. That's the postcolonial answer, finding logic in method to the degree that it articulates a contemporary political position, resistant through language to the forms of empire and convention. But is it possible then to use the forms of convention — without irony, without some sort of reflexive dislocation — because they seem appropriate to the moment's intent, and *not to espouse a conventional political cause*? I don't know the answer. If the answer is simply *no*, then that seems to me to make literary method a trifle mechanical (Method #12 equals Political Position #12, thank you very much). If it's *yes*, what are the conditions?

Fable provides something of an example. Wilson Harris's *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (Faber & Faber, n.p.) is a novel I refuse to even try to summarize, except to say it's about burden and mystery, play and truth, perception and otherness, that it's the third volume in the trilogy that began with *Carnival*, and that it all depends on experiencing the technique of development. Which involves fable. The first sentence reads: "I was amazed, to say the least, when I saw him in the theatre of Dream." It's a sentence that asks for the language to be listened to. Amazement occurs here — entrapment within maze, that is — when the least language breaks into the silence; language that invites recognition is doubly amazing in that it seems to communicate directly but in "fact" immediately reveals itself as theatre. And more: if it's dream, is it reality? If it's speech, is it communication? If it's fable, is there a conventional moral? If it's a folk form, is it more authentic than the forms learned from written history?

Harris's work characteristically resists answers and the closure imposed by imperial designs. Ben Okri's prize-winning *The Famished Road* (Little, Brown, \$26.95) likewise

draws on cultural traditions outside those conventionally associated with the English Novel. But the "likewise" does not extend to method. Each of Harris's sentences seems crafted to shift the meaning of the understanding engendered by the sentence previous. Okri's narrative of contemporary quest and mythological figure in West Africa is composed by scene, each new experience an addition to what has gone before — both books deal in Transformation — but not crafted, as Harris's work is, to enact a linguistic as well as a narrative process. To my mind, *The Famished Road* opens slowly and goes on too long. Other readers might find all the episodes electrifying.

To turn to Helen Garner and Nadine Gordimer is, for all their stylishness, to seem to revert to familiar conventions. Gordimer's *Jump and Other Stories* (Penguin Viking, \$25.99) is not, I think, a sampling of her best work. The South African situations the stories tell about are interesting, all right — men and women find themselves dislocated by the politics of fear in a society that, by nuance, by the shuffle of implications, leads them to suffer violence or be violent against their better nature. And for the most part the stories work well; but Gordimer can't seem to resist the explanatory last sentence, as though the point weren't clear from the narrative development itself. Or else maybe the neat ending is itself like the conventional fable's moral, a tight restriction on possibility, and hence a formal emblem. Garner's title *Cosmos Cosmolino* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin, n.p.) epitomizes the connections it seeks to explore, between the world at large and the little world of personal preoccupations. Here two short narratives, set in Australia, set up a longer third one; the first two recount the events that dislocate two separate characters, and the third (with a third — "unruly" — character acting as catalyst) reopens the connections between them, allowing them to permit themselves to occupy "rooms" in the world at large without feeling responsible for every one of the world's (or their world's) wrongs. It, too, is a fable of sorts, its literary value bound up in the relevance of revelation to form.

Then there's a mixed set of novels that it's hard to know how to respond to. Maurice Gee's *The Burning Boy* (\$26.95) tries unsuccessfully to turn the title image into a archetype of psychological trauma. Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (Little Brown, \$24.95), by contrast, though not an easy read, is absorbing; here the narrator, Ved Vyes — an old politician surviving from the Raj — tells a

tale of modern politics to his current scribe, and he casts his narrative as a retelling of the *Mahabharata*, India's classic traditional narrative about the cycles of brotherhood, paternity, loving, and revenge. This is an innovative recasting of conventional form; but is it radical or conservative in its critique of politics? (There are at least two answers to this question.) With Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Penguin, \$11.95), the territory is more familiar to a Western reader: an Indian teenager in England discovers sex and fashion, but in striving to be rebellious keeps making a mess of things, *just like* his father, the "Buddha" he is trying to supersede. It's a popular novel. So is Gus Lee's *China Boy* (Dutton, \$19.95), which tells of a Chinese-American boy who becomes street smart after taking YMCA boxing classes, but this book is so caught up in its own adjectives and pop intentions that it loses sight of its character's real dilemmas. Not so with Frank Chin's *Donald Duk* (Coffee House Press, \$9.95); this tale — of a Chinese-American boy who hates his name and wants to be "American" and whose father wants him to be "proud" — is an evocative narrative of contemporary dislocation, worked out in the language of telling. It is cast largely in dialogue, but the range of idioms is instructive: one speech register conveys the childlike aspirations of the boy who wants to be part of the present, another conveys the male warrior Yankee idiom of those who have already been absorbed into an alien value system. These are not, however, the only options, which is the fundamental message of Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife* (Putnam's, \$29.95). "Here is how she told me," says this novel's narration; repeatedly the book declares the necessity of *telling the real story*, the hidden story (the women's story), to the next generation; and the hidden story tells of resistance to being used. This, too, hints of allegorical moral. When cultures meet, they have to grow, not to collide: the book celebrates the future, in hope. Without the telling, the official story would be permitted to stand for real history, and that is what Tan's novel itself resists. The act of telling, however, in turn requires an active listener — or a reader, willing to respond to the strategies of tale.

W.N.

SOUTH PACIFIC

RECENT FICTIONS, or, his occasional South Pacific notebook:

Sue McCauley's *Then Again* (Irwin, \$39.95): intertwining narratives on a sub-

tropical island; wellmade realist prose; are subtropical islands the stuff of wellmade realism? So much is governed by conventional expectations, both in realism and in islands.

Barbara Hanrahan's *Flawless Jade* (U Queensland P/Penguin, A\$24.95): the diary entries of a Chinese woman growing up during Mao's revolution; memory is sweet; of course, it does depend who's doing the remembering, and who has the right to speak for whom while the remembering is ostensibly going on.

Thomas Keneally's *To Asmara* (Warner, n.p.): a novel of Africa, it's called; all about Eritrean rebels, Battlefields, and causes in which Keneally believes, tied up in Odyssey mechanics. (Keneally's *By the Line* [UQP, n.p.] is a revision of *The Fear*, all about RC dogma, working class ethics, and more war.)

Gerald Murnane's *The Plains* (George Braziller, US\$12.95): "Darkness," says the first-person narrator, is ultimately the "only visible sign of whatever I saw beyond myself," and that's of course the point about ambiguous signs; this narrator, recalling the Australian "plains" he once crossed 20 years before, is thwarted by the difference between his desire to film "The Interior" and his impulse to photograph only external realities; as with film, so with self; anxious to be accepted by others, he expunges "unacceptable" events from the narrative of his own life, but he still maintains the "dress" of the Melbourne he thinks he's leaving behind; speech and style "persuaded me I had come far enough," he says at one point, but at another he finds libraries to be unsatisfactory refuges from reality — from "heights and depths," perhaps, in a story about multiple forms of "plain."

Nicholas Hasluck's two novels, *The Hand that Feeds You* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, A\$10.50) and *The Country without Music* (Penguin, A\$19.99): the one takes a man back to the Republic of Australia in the Near Future, and savages his society's resistance to ideas; the other asks what kind of society would have developed had the French settlers in Western Australia stayed to shape a separate state on that island-continent; the ideas are interesting, but the fastpaced narrative (lots of sex, fraud, and power in both — why does the dialogue sound so awkward?) doesn't seem ultimately to be looking for a reflective reader; something goes wrong.

Brian Dibble's *Analogues* (Fremantle Arts Centre P, n.p.): stories and poems about Catholicism and Significant Moments in one's life.

Colin Johnson's two novels, *Doctor Wooredy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (Hyland House, A\$12.95) and *Long Live Sandawarra* (Hyland House, A\$12.95): Johnson (now using his aboriginal name, Mudrooroo Narogin) has written some extraordinary narratives: *Wooredy* eloquently (and quite consciously using its verbal artifice to a political purpose) tells the history of the genocide of the Tasmanians, adapting oral tales to the interpretation of European interlopers, probing the interlopers' taste for violence (letting the parallels between guns and political decrees be tacitly understood), and reclaiming dignity for a palpably misunderstood way of Native life; *Sandawarra* tells in a rough contemporary idiom of the attractions of *joining*: modern youths, alienated from custom and each other, find comfort in self-styled leaders if no real leaders are available, but "inefficient" revolutions can still leave them uninitiated into any valuable "manhood." (About Native culture in Australia, one should also look at Jennifer Isaacs' wonderful collection *Aboriginality* [UQP, A\$39.95], an anthology of contemporary paintings and prints, linocuts and acrylics, by Sally Morgan, Bronwyn Bancroft, and numerous others; and at Kevin Gilbert's *The Blackside* [Hyland House, A\$14.95], a collection of resonant poems of protest and celebration: "It's good to be / the Blackside / for we know that in this land / the fire-hardened tree survives / where others — yew and poplars /... / have never quite adapted / to the heat and fire and smoke.")

John A. Scott's *Blair* (New Directions, n.p.): like many another comic fantasy, this one pillories middleaged academics who expect to find nubile young women in their lives when their wives disappear; sample joke: "How do you know a symposium of English academics has arrived in Australia? Because when they turn off the jets, the whining keeps going." Scott has a book of poems out, too: *Singles* (UQP, A\$9.95); Propertius encounters middleclass mores, but with mordant wit: "The Third Coming" observes: "Nightfall in Bethlehem. / A rough beast thumbing / through the street directory."

Bill Manhire's edition, *Six by Six* (Victoria UP, NZ \$34.95); a superlative anthology of New Zealand's "best" short story writers, six by six: Mansfield, Sargeson, Duggan, Frame, and two contemporaries: Patricia Grace and Owen Marshall.

Gerard Lee's *Troppo Man* (UQP, n.p.): there's an Australian trope at work in the tropics — send a bloke North and see what

happens to him, could be comic: here the Australian (named Matt) finds himself naive in Bali, where he meets with malice and burned-out hippies and finally comes to terms with himself; you have to wonder at synchronicity.

Marion Campbell's *Not Being Miriam* (Fremantle Arts Centre P, n.p.): the negative is important — but if that's the case who "is" Miriam and who is the narrating self if not her? Well, that's the point, isn't it — numerous stories becoming a loose autobiography of multiple selves, the denial of the uniform identity being a cry against male systems of stereotyping and control — hence the designing of identity by "fictions" constitutes an alternative.

Jean Bedford's *A Lease of Summer* (McPhee Gribble, n.p.): a woman joins her husband in New Guinea just before independence, rapidly is involved in sex and the politics of race, and happily "gets out in time"; I suppose one could compare this with Atwood's novel about the Caribbean, but Atwood would win.

Barbara Anderson's *Girls High* (Victoria UP, NZ\$24.95): a striking collection of interconnected stories, both devastating and sympathetic, about girls at school; willing to play with literary form, the book conveys the attitudes of a near-contemporary generation, at an age when they are still seeking some version of themselves, order, difference, and voice, and not always finding it.

Elizabeth Knox's *After Z-Hour* (Victoria UP, NZ\$19.95): several people gather in a remote house in a storm, and we hear their fragmented stories — why then does the novel place its faith in realism and closure? It's as though it's quarreling with its own premises, and perhaps it is.

Rodney Hall's *Kisses of the Enemy* (Collins, \$28.95): I'm a real fan of Hall's earlier novels — *Just Relations* and *Captivity Captive* — so why does this one defeat me? It's another futuristic glimpse of an Australian republic, with the would-be president losing his grip on morality and turning into an easily-corrupted dictator; presumably it's a comment on history and on the way the present, too, is corrupted by its fascination with power, but I can't get past the thematic architecture to be engaged by the style — or is the style standing in the way of something else? Must come back to this at some point.

Matthew Condon's *The Motorcycle Cafe* (U Queensland P, n.p.): what looks like a short story sequence turns out to be a coming-of-age-in-society novel, with a young man discovering

the disparities between his grandfather's (ordinary bloke/mate) public image and the identity revealed by his private journal; "My grandfather didn't really tell lies, he just created another person in himself"; most people live with multiple identities — it's just that sometimes some people with power pretend that, because they "know themselves to be nice people" in one of those identities, they can be blamelessly ruthless in one of the others — but are we talking about tyrants and tycoons here, or about saint and the middleclass?

David Malouf's *Johnno* (UQP, n.p.): this is a corrected reprint of a 1975 book by a writer who's gone from success to success: an early novel — ostensibly a character study of the title figure, by a friend who could never quite come to terms with him: Johnno is "anti-social" by choice and persuasion, it seems, spending his life trying to "free" himself "from Australia," but as much as anything it's a world of paternal order (represented in a father's books: the subject of the frame story) that constitutes the real cage; how Johnno dies, here, is left a little ambiguous, but that may be part of the point; the narrator leaves us in no uncertainty about the ambiguity of Johnno's desire: "even the lies we tell define us," he writes — a conclusion which must give even the most imaginative fiction writer pause.

End of notebook entries.

W.N.

*** RONALD TAKAKI, *Strangers from a Different Shore*. Penguin, \$14.95. In a mix of modes, Takaki tells the gritty stories (the word is deliberate) of Indian, Philippine, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and SE Asian immigrants to the U.S.A. Historical information (on legislative changes governing immigration and citizenship, for example) is woven into interviews, anecdotal memoirs of canefield experiences, and other accounts of labour, race, and the diaspora. "Ethnic profiles" — amounts of land owned, percentages of particular groups in managerial positions and service industries — are supplied. While some reference is made to traditional theatre and the poetry of the first waves of immigrants, more could have been done with contemporary literary practice — there is only one passing reference to Frank Chin, and none to Bharati Mukherjee. The book's implicit message declares that, as one interview claims, "American society is open, able to absorb differences in culture and dress." Such aspirations still lead, however, to a closed definition of Americanism, whose liberality remains to be proved.

W.N.

**** Timothy Egan, *The Good Rain: Across Time and Terrain in the Pacific Northwest* Alfred A. Knopf (Random House in Canada) \$26.00 Cdn. In an essay titled "Friends of the Hide," Egan muses over the sea otter: "They backstroke through cold channels looking for new places to make water slides . . . They sing to their young, which gave rise to the myth of the mermaid; horny sailors, hearing the distant song of a sea otter mother to her pup, imagined a large-breasted amphibian calling them to shore." Then he remembers that by the 1820s the King George men had taken at least 500,000 of the luxuriant pelts. "The females seldom produce more than a single pup. A standard ploy . . . was to snatch the baby, thus luring the mother out, who was then clubbed. The orphan, more often than not, died without the mother's milk or drowned without the benefit of maternal swimming lessons." In fourteen essays Egan, the Seattle correspondent for *The New York Times*, repeats this combination of playful description, colloquial ironies, environmental politics and regional definition. His subjects, orcas, salmon, Asian immigration and the preciousness of estuaries, typically extend to include British Columbia, and one piece, on the Tweed Curtain, focuses on the city of Victoria. Egan scrambles to taste the "stew of shorebirds" and touch the "metallic frenzy of a few chinook salmon" which will define the spirit of place. But these essays become more than routine as they are passed through a mind as passionate for story as Ken Kesey and Tom Robbins, the reckless Northwest writers who provide epigraph and cover blurb for this book.

L.R.

** SING LIM, *West Coast Chinese Boy*. Tundra, \$12.95. This attractive account of a Vancouver childhood consists not so much of stories, but of crucial cultural vignettes, so I am not sure how the book, a paperback reissue of the 1979 original, would hold a 10-year-old's attention. Certainly the language is not inherently interesting (as it is in *Alligator Pie* or "Humpty Dumpty"), but the quiet ironies in Lim's stimple style are both entertaining and informative. His beginning, in the opening paragraph, with the Chinese head tax, indicates the book's didactic intention — an element this adult reader eventually found as engaging as Lim's own naive drawings (he is a former artist with the National Film Board), which accompany the text.

L.R.

ONDAATJE & CHARLTON COMICS' "BILLY THE KID"

THE COMIC BOOK LEGEND is real," assert the acknowledgements in the first edition of Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. The delightful ambiguity of this statement, so in keeping with Ondaatje's work, which is as much an exploration of the mythologizing of Billy as a contribution to it, is muted by the modified acknowledgement found in later editions: "The comic book legend, *Billy the Kid and the Princess*, is Inc. [sic] c. 1969 Charlton Press, Inc., by permission." Ondaatje's removal of the earlier ambiguity, however, introduces a more subtle manipulation of source materials, for the original comic book story in fact appears in two parts under the titles "Toro, the Killer" and "King Billy the Kid," and not as "Billy the Kid and the Princess." Not only does Ondaatje create his book, then, but he creates his sources as well, for Ondaatje's retitling of the story reflects his alterations to it, alterations less evident than his removal of the pictures. Even the placement of the story within *The Collected Works* creates confusion about the nature of source material, for it is juxtaposed with the cover of one of the many pulp-format Billy the Kid novels, *True Life of Billy the Kid*, which at least one commentator assumes is from a comic book (Kertzer 94). Since this book cover provides the only visual image of Billy in the volume, and it appears opposite the first page of text cited from the comic book, Kertzer's assumption is unsurprising. Ondaatje obscures his

source, both in its suggestive juxtaposition and in his misleading acknowledgment of its use. What does he accomplish by doing so?

Charlton Comics published a *Billy the Kid* title for several years, in which the title figure owes little other than his name to the historical Billy, but Ondaatje is faithful, virtually word for word, to the portion of the outrageous story from which "Billy the Kid and the Princess" is taken. He is closely faithful to the words themselves, but by divorcing them from their original context, in which they are accompanied by pictures, and by rearranging the speeches for presentation in a prose rather than comics format, Ondaatje radically alters both the flow and the clarity of the tale. That he cuts off his version halfway through the story only underscores the chasm between the comic book and the version of it appearing in *The Collected Works*.

And, of course, his removal of the pictures is in keeping with his idea of Billy as unfixable; as Alice Van Wart observes, "Ondaatje uses the image of a photograph to express the inadequacy of trying to capture an image of a subject that is constantly moving and changing" (5). As Stephen Scobie states, one of the main themes of *The Collected Works* is "fixing the image of Billy, a character constantly in motion both literally (the finger exercises) and ontologically (as his image shifts between historical fact, legendary accretion, and the creations of Ondaatje's personal imagination" (54). However, the absence of a picture, the emptiness of the frame above the assertion "I send you a picture of Billy" ([5]) contradicts the possibility that any such image can be fixed. Comic books consist of a series of frames, all filled with pictures that tell a story. Ondaatje removes the pictures from the frames, retaining only the words and the frame.

Ondaatje fills the empty frame with

which he begins several times throughout *The Collected Works*, with contemporary photographs and drawings, but only once with an image of Billy, as he appears on the cover of the Wide Awake Library's *True Life of Billy the Kid*. This image is clearly not the photograph promised at the beginning; it does not even offer a Billy consistent with Ondaatje's, for the figure on the cover is right-handed; the title of this novel itself plays up the impossibility of painting a true picture of Billy, for its claim to truth is clearly at odds with Ondaatje's Billy, who is left-handed. This inconsistent image precedes the only instance in *The Collected Works* of words appearing within the frame. In place of an image, Ondaatje offers a picture made up of words, but that picture is itself incomplete, for those words are themselves removed from the pictures with which they were originally associated.

Ondaatje makes very few changes to the text of the comic book. Some punctuation is altered (Ondaatje does not, for example, follow the comic book convention of ending every declarative with an exclamation mark), as are some spellings; "Did they scare yore cayuse" (*Billy The Kid* 3, panel 5) becomes "Did they scare your cayuse" in Ondaatje's version, for example (100). But such changes are small, and Ondaatje is generally closely attentive to the original text: the ellipses, which imply to readers of only Ondaatje's text that something has been removed from the original, are almost all carried over from the comic book.¹ Most other changes clarify the text in the absence of explanatory illustrations, as the few notes, "Thinks" (100; 101), replacing the thought balloons employed in the comic to differentiate between spoken and unspoken words; or the bracketed "(Kiss)" (102), which we see enacted in the comic (9, panel 5); or the specific reference to Billy's rescue of the pictures "this time

from that cougar'" (102), which we also see enacted in the comic, so we need not be told about. Ondaatje deletes the princess's statement, "You may fight but there will be no shooting in the castle" (7, panel 1), from his text — it ought to follow "Now, Billy the Kid knows he's in for a struggle!" (101); his sequence "CRACK! 'Over you go, Toro!' 'Ole! Ole!'" (101 rearranges the original, in which the "Crack" is bracketed by "'Ole! Ole!'" and "'Over you go, Toro!'" respectively (8, panel 5); he deletes the princess's "'How gracious of you, senor'" (9, panel 4) immediately preceding the kiss; and he deletes the following exchange, which follows the princess's statement, "I must not go on being formal with you. . . ." (102; 9, panel 5): "'... what do your friends call you?' 'I'm mostly called Billy the Kid, Billy will do just fine!'" (9, panel 6). Ondaatje also alters "'and won my love!'" (10, panel 4) to "'You have won my love!'" (102).

Of these substantive changes, few can be said to affect radically the meaning of the text; some clarify action no longer comprehensible without the visual component, but do not alter the action in question, while others seem not to alter the storyline. Only one change seems likely to affect interpretation; the deletion of the dialogue following the princess's desire to become less formal with Billy removes the explicit suggestion that she means merely to get on a first-name basis with him and consequently creates a direct segue into the statement, "In the next few days, Billy the Kid was with La Princesa often" (102; 10, panel 1). The implication thus becomes one of a somewhat more adult informality than we might expect of a child's comic book, especially coupled with Ondaatje's finishing with the princess taking Billy in her arms and . . . (102).² However, as we can see, the integrity of the original text is largely maintained.

Nevertheless, Ondaatje's "Legend" radically differs from the comic book story, and not only because it ends halfway through. Despite the close faithfulness to the words of the comic book text, and the occasional insertion to clarify events, the "Legend" requires of readers a substantial effort. First, Ondaatje does not identify speakers, all of whom are clearly denoted in the comic book. With no identifying reference to work with, and very little narrative commentary to go on, the reader must infer who the speakers are. Doing so is not difficult, to be sure, for the dialogue never involves more than three people at once, but whereas in the comic book the association of speaker to speech is immediately apparent by visual association, in Ondaatje's redaction, readers must use their intellects, or their imaginations, to supply the absent speaker. Without the accompanying illustrations the voices float free, lacking referents except insofar as they name themselves; we are free to supply our own images of Billy, a freedom lacking in the comic book.

Furthermore, Ondaatje's redaction rearranges the words according to the conventions of literary rather than pictorial narrative. Speeches which in the comic book are broken up over several panels to complement the visual images are combined by Ondaatje to conform to the way dialogue appears in a written text. For instance, Billy's rescue of the princess from her "runaway" horse covers several panels in the comic book but only a few lines in Ondaatje's version. Billy's first statement, "Gunshots . . . a .45 pistol!" accompanies a picture of Billy sitting up in his saddle, reacting to the noise (2, panel 4). In the next panel, our perspective shifts and we look over Billy's shoulder from behind, seeing what he sees, a distant horse and mounted figure; we share his observation, "Runaway!" (2, panel 5). We remain behind Billy, now

observing his pursuit of the figure, now more clearly visible as Billy approaches, and evidently about to fall (3, panel 1). Billy's two statements in this panel, "It's a girl!" and "She's goin' to take a spill!" are contained in separate word balloons, clearly denoting Billy's separate recognition of these two facts, which are crushed together by Ondaatje. In the next panel, we again shift perspective, this time seeing the princess head on and Billy in the background, hot in pursuit and urging his horse, "Faster, Chico!" (3, panel 2). This perspective gives us the advantage of seeing the princess's face, in which we see no real concern of injury, and allows us to see that she in fact has a firm grip on the horn of her saddle; the danger feared by Billy and emphasized in his exhortation to Chico (in larger, bolder type than usual, to stress the concern) does not really exist. The subsequent panel shows Billy grabbing the princess from her horse, stating "Hang on . . . I got yuh!" as she screams.

In Ondaatje's version, all of Billy's words, with the exception of this final speech are run together into one speech and consequently reduced to a single perspective, lacking the elements of reaction, recognition of the danger, and pursuit provided by the different panels of the comic book story. It also lacks the view of the princess in the saddle in juxtaposition to Billy's pushing of Chico to assure the rescue, which alerts the reader to the princess's duplicity. In the comic book, the princess's evident lack of danger, coupled with her adjuration, "'He comes, be ready Soto'" as the two observe the approaching Billy, reveals that Billy has been set up to rescue the princess, in order to lure him into her affections, while in Ondaatje's version, we might infer as much from the princess' words to Soto, but we lack the visual confirmation of the trickery. Reduced only to words, the action is flattened and condensed,

losing most of the drama and pacing provided by the illustrations (admittedly, the excitement level of the sequence is not high, but in the redaction it is virtually non-existent). The punch, the impact, of the narrative is lacking.

Similarly, the reduction of the fight with Toro to words reduces its impact as well. In Ondaatje's version, the throwing of the knife is related only by the word "CRASH!!!" (101), but in the comic book we see the knife shattering Billy's wine glass, barely missing him, which provides a much more vivid image of the threat (6, panel 3). The illustrations also make clear Billy's disadvantage in the fight, showing him to be much smaller than Toro. Billy's danger is made clear in the comic book when he says, "My head . . . He busted my jaw!" In this panel (7, panel 6), we see Billy lying in the bottom left corner of the panel, while looming in the foreground and descending toward Billy from the top right panel is Toro's boot; the smallness of the panel, with Billy trapped in its corner and the boot looming large, emphasises the threat. The subsequent panel, represented in Ondaatje's version by the word "TOCK!" (101), shows Billy barely rolling out of the way as the boot smashes into the lower left corner (8, panel 1). Consequently, whereas the assertion "He's a stomper . . ." follows clearly from the action in the comic book, it has little impact in Ondaatje's version. The fight becomes no more than an exchange of words in Ondaatje, while in the comic book it is carefully laid out in a sequence of images of Billy trapped in corners of the small panels, small himself behind the looming images of Toro, until the reversal of the final fight panel, in which the smaller panels open up into one the size of the preceding four and Billy strikes back from the floor, himself kicking over the stomper (8, panel 5). In this panel, even the usual narrative flow is disrupted, to emphasize

even further the turn of events: normally, we proceed from left to right through each row of panels on the page, but here we move down, not right, from panel four to panel five, and we follow the line of Billy's body up from the lower left corner into the upper right, where his boots connect with Toro beside panel four. Panel five is shaped like a square with its upper left corner bitten out, wherein panel four nests, and the space that would normally contain all of panel five contains only its upper corner, in which its action is concluding, not beginning.

In adapting only half the original story, Ondaatje further limits its impact. As "Billy the Kid and the Princess" stands, it is clearly incomplete, ending with a conjunction and an ellipsis, indicating, as Manina Jones points out, "the story continues beyond the confines of its present telling" (33). It does indeed, in the direction suggested by the initial narrative cited by Ondaatje but still unresolved at the end of his excerpt: "The girl had chosen William H. Bonney to reign with her" (99). Ondaatje leaves incomplete a story complete in his source to underscore his own thematic concern, the impossibility of finishing Billy.

While the legend of "Billy the Kid and the Princess" is a flat sequence of words, contextless and inconclusive, "Toro, the Killer" and "King Billy the Kid" offer a clearly structured narrative sequence. It is not high art, perhaps, but it uses the devices of its medium to tell a story, to offer a complete picture made up of several smaller pictures in sequence. The comic book's words, removed from that context, offer no such picture. Indeed, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, the sequence of documents of which Billy is composed (see Jones 28), suggests in many ways that no such picture can be offered, not least by removing the pictures from the comic book. Ondaatje makes clear that even his book does not fill the

empty frame: its final image is a picture of the author as Billy, occupying only a small corner of the empty frame ([107]). Only one small segment of the frame, empty at the beginning, has been filled, by Ondaatje. Billy defies even his collected works and remains inscrutable to the last.

NOTES

- ¹ One might desire to make something of Ondaatje's identification of the villain of the piece at first as Toro Cuneo (99) and later as Toro Cueno (102); whether the difference implies the multiplicity of identity we see associated with Billy in *The Collected Works* as a whole, or whether it is a typo, is perhaps debatable, especially since the comic book itself is unsure of its villain, designating him first Toro Cuneo (1) and then Toro Guneo (9, panel 5).
- ² Admittedly, in the comic book we see the exchange over names over the shoulder of a jealous Toro; Billy and the princess appear face to face in silhouette, and are between two tied back curtains, so the visual implication is that they are retreating to privacy and intimacy as well, but Ondaatje's omission makes the sexual overtones much clearer.

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DOMINICK M. GRACE

FLETCHER MARKLE 1921-1991

CANADIANS WILL REMEMBER Fletcher Markle from the 1940s as the writer for the CBC Vancouver radio drama series, *Baker's Dozen*, a writer and actor for the CBC national radio drama series, *Stage* and *Radio Folio*; from the 1960s as the director of the Walt Disney film adaptation of Canadian Sheila Burnford's book, *The Incredible Journey*, and as the writer, producer and host of the CBC television series, *Telescope*; and in the 1970s as the head of CBC television drama, overseeing such projects as *The Whiteoaks of Jalna* and *The Play's the Thing*. For almost forty years, Markle used three media — radio, film, and television — to create and present Canadian stories to Canadians.

During his early days in radio, Markle was known as a versatile and talented "four-in-one" man — writer, actor, director and producer. With his friend and colleague, Andrew Allan, Markle launched the acclaimed experimental radio drama series, *Baker's Dozen*, that introduced a Canadian style of acting and script-writing to the airwaves, one which they together refined in the inaugural shows of the now famous *Stage* series. Like Allan, Markle was fiercely dedicated to "the Word" in radio. But unlike Allan, he was drawn to the American scene, and early on aspired to writing and producing-directing serious radio drama in New York. His success came quickly: first working with Orson Welles and Norman Corwin, Markle graduated to his own radio series, *Studio One* (which won a George Foster Peabody Award for outstanding drama) and *Ford Theatre* (for which he was paid a reported \$1500 a week). In 1947, at age twenty-six, Markle was radio's new *wunderkind*.

After a brief stint directing three Hollywood films, Markle grudgingly turned his

hand to television directing. He was scornful of the new medium, dubbing it "an electronic Pied Piper catering to the great American urge to be easily amused." He retracted his initial condemnation, however, when he found television could accommodate his more serious fare: television versions of *Studio One* (which won a Christopher Award for outstanding drama) and *Ford Theatre*, and two new series, *Front Row Centre* and *Colgate Theatre*.

Back in Toronto in the 1970s, Markle continued promoting original playwriting and adaptations in *The Whiteoaks of Jalna* and *The Play's the Thing*, which commissioned such writers as Morley Callaghan, Robertson Davies, Mordecai Richler, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Hugh Hood, and Huch MacLennan. In the late 1970s, Markle returned to the United States, to radio and television drama, and at the time of his death in California, was writing his memoirs.

Markle was a Canadian who spent his professional life bringing what he loved — good writing — to audiences on both sides of the border. His "four-in-one" talents attracted other artists and writers, as well as fame, fortune, and acclaim. Seminal to the Golden Age of Canadian radio drama and the Golden Age of American television drama, Markle will be remembered for his active and vital contribution to both media.

JILL TOMASSON GOODWIN



READING MORLEY CALLAGHAN'S "SUCH IS MY BELOVED"

REREADING THIS NOVEL impelled me to reread the many many other novels and stories to seek an overview of Morley Callaghan's work now that it is completed (although still there may be new books, collections of stories that so far have appeared only in the leading U.S. magazines of the 1920s and 1930s).

A conviction began to emerge. Gripping as his plots are, realistic as his settings and situations, Callaghan was all out, not so much for storytelling, as for utterance. I don't mean that there is any trace of the propagandist, the exhorter, the apologist, the schematizer, in him. Rather, he invites and probes the very recalcitrance of his people and his situations, he courts the ambiguities, to make sure he is not caught by any extraneous considerations: a process of refining the gold of what he sees. "I was loyal to my search for the sacramental in the lives of people," he told an interviewer, "to find the extraordinary in the ordinary. This used to be considered the great and only aim of art."¹ It has been asked, I too have asked, why a powerful stylist (many passages attest that he is that) lets stand those places that sink, go flat, indicate rather than speak; granted that they are never key passages, but all the same, why? I suspect that he might tell us that a person can grow as many feet as a centipede if he fusses too much, and he will end up never saying it, never really getting there.

Although Morley Callaghan was already qualifying as a lawyer when I was just in public school, the time-gap between us closed over the years; by the 1940s I was generously included, Saturday evenings at Eustace and Mary Lowry Ross's house or in Morley and Loretto's

second-floor duplex on Walmer Road, in an ongoing conversation with their friends about books new and old, ideas, the literatures of other countries, languages. On more than one occasion one of us would debate prose style with Morley. Blunt, simple, immediate, realistic — that style fits some themes, but not others, surely? His reply was stubborn, then. It has remained so. In the 1960s he wrote: "The words should be as transparent as glass, and every time a writer used a brilliant phrase to prove himself witty or clever, he merely took the mind of the reader away from the object and directed it to himself."² And almost thirty years later he was still insisting that such vanities should be beneath a writer. "I wanted language to come easily, you know? I believed in that, I always sit back objectively and detached, and observe . . . the whole effect is in the way you see it, not in the scheming to achieve an effect. . . . If you see it right, then it comes out right."³ This is not a casual method; economy of words involved cutting, going over and over an unsatisfactory passage. Look at his first sentences: "It was not true that Jeannie Warkle had been too easy for Joe Stanin."⁴ "Joseph Carver, the publisher of the *Montreal Sun*, lived on the mountain."⁵ No slipshod craftsman could launch a tale this ably. It took pains to get the "language to come easily" — although I suspect this attention was focused on the key passages, not the transitional bits.

Isn't it astonishing that, though Callaghan was loved and respected as a TV pundit, his Canadian viewers did not go on to devour his books? By 1929 he had become a literary celebrity in the United States. In 1960 Edmund Wilson was calling him "the most unjustly neglected novelist in the English-speaking world."⁶ Why has he "occupied a curious position in the literary history of his own country, where he has been both honoured and put down, and at times almost ignored?"⁷

As my own enthusiasm grew with reading, the fascination of the question grew.

Are the books 'dated' in any significant way? I think not. Some adjustment of perspective is asked of readers. Particulars change from decade to decade: current slang is of course missing although the tone of the 1934 street talk still carries conviction; the Hospital and the Cathedral of this novel still mark their area, but the downtown streets west and south are altogether different now; the priggishness of pre-war Toronto died out in the war years; there was little plane travel then, no television, no subway in Toronto — in 1934 people walked — in this novel shoes get wet in the slush, galoshes matter, winter streets soak through a hole in the sole. All the same, these and other stories published long before Hugh MacLennan's or Margaret Laurence's are immediate still, and surprisingly approachable.

Is Callaghan's stubborn, unique approach to style the reason his work is undervalued? Are people misled by the drive and seeming simplicity of the language to expect another whodunit or a good yarn to while away an idle hour? and baffled and put off when unbearable snarl-ups develop, and are not resolved or leave you wondering whether they have been resolved? Because these simple novels are not at all simple. Who is the lover, who is the beloved, of the title? Why is the central character presented — not in the first sentence — against the background of his most recent sermon "on the inevitable separation between Christianity and the bourgeois world"? This passage does not work as characterization. It does provide the context in which three parties are set on their collision course:

— the main character, Father Dowling: from a background of poverty and love, his family having sacrificed for his education and deeply respecting his vocation;

— Ronnie and Midge, and Lou: also with a background of poverty but rootless early in

their years, vulnerable to manipulation and victimizing in order to survive, defensive; — certain, substantial, prosperous, complacent, prejudiced lay Catholics, a power in the Church but themselves a minority in the city, pressed into propriety by the prejudiced Protestant majority around them.

Take with this subject-matter the iridescent title and the companion epigraph (also from the *Song of Songs*), and Canadian readers of our day need all the directness and sturdiness of language they find, just to hang on. The artifice of economy in storytelling is needed; the laconic voice of a plain-speaking man (for all the objectivity Callaghan insisted on, his prose often makes a woman feel like an eavesdropper) makes of that narrator an extra invisible character. He is a plain man, whereas Callaghan himself was a tremendous reader, widely acquainted with his world. This, I think, is why Callaghan created his own worn-out words. I didn't do a count, but "eager," for example, recurs with deadening frequency, here and in other novels and stories over decades. Such words are his narrator's not the artist's. The transparency with which Callaghan seeks to see and make us see reveals himself behind it, all-out in his determination to perceive undistracted and with honesty, foregoing new ways of stating some things, too "eager," for example, to be bothered.

"Your beliefs will be the light by which you see, but they will not be a substitute for seeing," said Flannery O'Connor. Callaghan's struggle, in the telling, is to make convincing to others remote from his beliefs the light by which he sees; and he does not provide himself, or us, with any comfortable substitutes for seeing.

Despite his plain-man's voice, the artist is evident, for instance in the sentence-rhythms. In the very first sentence of the novel, Father Dowling is introduced this way: "The móst éager yóung priést at the Cathédral, was Fátther Stéphen Dówling."

Over the page we meet Ronnie and Midge: "As he wálked briškly by the hós-pital, he nóted twó gírls stánding nótfár away from a lámp-póst." Again the clustered stresses slow down the reading; and "at the Cathedral" is musically echoed in "by the hospital." The implications are focused, over the next page: "It was not yet clear to him what he ought to have done, but as he hurried to the church rectory he was full of sharp disappointment and more discouraged than he had been at any time since his ordination." The scattering of unstressed syllables here conveys fluster; and what a difference between the flowing "at the Cathedral" and the rough bump of "at the church rectory."

His meeting with the two prostitutes, in his parish, embarrasses, then troubles, then challenges the young priest. Is the ensuing disaster a result of more than manipulative forces and victimization? Is it some one character's "fault"? Is it inevitable? But if it is inevitable, the young priest's absolute conviction that goodness can and must be introduced, indeed intruded, into a bad situation, that change for the better can ease the social pressures with the evils they engender and give back to impoverished lives the scope for new choices — this conviction then remains an unbearable anomaly. The weight of his failure deadens his spirit for a time. But Father Dowling at last reached an awesome place of stillness, a new vision. Is he just a callow idealist, broken by the collision with reality? Is he simply unbalanced? Or is his spiritual insight valid, ultimately hopeful, consistently loving? Is the Bishop, who was put in an arbiter's position, clearer? — "Father Dowling in the beginning may have loved them in a general way and, of course, that was good. . . . What is the matter with me? Do I suffer from the sin of hardness of heart?" he muttered. . . . "If I had it to do over again, I would face the problem

in exactly the same way,' he thought firmly. 'What on earth is bothering me then? ...'

The supreme unpurchasable love defined in the epigraph is set to challenge a select handful of people, in a realistic situation, in a familiar, ordinary, provincial city. That is the way Callaghan "sees" to "get it right." The scope of his candour and faith are conditions of reading his story or, put another way, are his gift to his readers.

Four decades and a dozen books later Callaghan cited this novel as a kind of touchstone of "real writ[ing]."⁸ And at a crisis in his life the hero of a 1960 novel pondered the same theme: "*Innocence is so frail. Can it ever be acknowledged to oneself without becoming a vanity, a pride?*"; and he speculated about others in the early evening streets, "... some ... he was sure, ... would really be alone, knowing the terror of their innocence."⁹ Another early novel ended with many people "too hurt to say much at first, their faith going, feeling the little bit of hope they had held shyly, that men could change and want to be good, fading out of their own lives."¹⁰ This melancholy is just one facet of the stubborn confidence that recurs in story after story, that "... in each man ... [is] a secret domain. Every man or woman [is] sovereign of this domain ... [and] somehow ha[s] to preserve that faint secret unconquerable area of self-respect."¹¹

If such inward concerns be central in all these books, what becomes of Callaghan's assertion that "the greatness of writing is in the reporting — what is in fact observed?" He went on, "Was Flaubert objective? Was he the most highly objective or the most truly personal of all reporters?"¹² What a fascinating question! It suggests such answers as these.

Callaghan absolutely protected his private life. He was an objective reporter depending on observation of others but

never drawing on family or friends for fictional persons. (One sturdy character who had thought of Gil, a barkeep-writer, as his friend "perceived in a flash that Gil wouldn't be offended by anything he said, just interested that he had said it — as a character in his story. Offended, he thought grimly, 'It's time I started keeping Mr. Gilhooley away from me.'"¹³

When he eschews the private, Callaghan sets his characters in an apartness, however vivid, that block a reader from identifying with them. The reader does enter this fictional world. But it is by engaging in the moral struggle portrayed there, a struggle experienced in some form in his own private world as well. Callaghan's commitment is to explore a situation and its effect on a character, to make himself vulnerable to the conflicting values involved, and to choose (in terms of that fictional world) realistically, honestly, often ruefully.

Is his style "unadorned and colloquial. ... even ... commonplace?" Yes, but that too is a value Callaghan chooses even though he is well able to write in other voices. E.g. his Mollie, in *The Man With the Coat*, is totally unlike the direct person who confronts an issue. When she is alone at one point, and in distress, she muses, standing at a window: "*Why is it that nuns look so well under a pear tree in the sunlight?*"¹⁵

"Men have to make room for such places in their thoughts," says Callaghan, "even if they never visit them."¹⁶

NOTES

Quotations from the novel are taken from Morley Callaghan, *Such is My Beloved* (1934; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1957).

¹ "Interview" *Quill and Quire* (July 1983): 17.

² Morley Callaghan, *That Summer in Paris* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963): 21.

³ Ray Ellenwood, "Eternal Style" [Interview with Callaghan], *The Idler* 30 (November 1990): 35, 37.

- ⁴ Morley Callaghan, "The Magic Hat," *Morley Callaghan's Stories* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1959): 339.
- ⁵ Morley Callaghan, *The Loved and the Lost* (1951; Toronto: Macmillan, 1977) 1.
- ⁶ Edmund Wilson, "Morley Callaghan of Toronto," *The New Yorker* 26 November 1960, p. 224.
- ⁷ Robert Weaver & William Toye, eds., *The Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973): 37.
- ⁸ Morley Callaghan, *A Fine and Private Place* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975): 94.
- ⁹ Morley Callaghan, *The Many Colored Coat* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960): 288, 318.
- ¹⁰ Morley Callaghan, *More Joy in Heaven* (1937; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969).
- ¹¹ Morley Callaghan, *A Wild Old Man on the Road* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1969): 16.
- ¹² Callaghan, *A Wild Old Man on the Road*, 62.
- ¹³ Morley Callaghan, *Our Lady of the Snows* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1985): 210.
- ¹⁴ Callaghan, *A Fine and Private Place*, 53.
- ¹⁵ Morley Callaghan, *The Man with the Coat* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1987): 119.
- ¹⁶ Callaghan, *That Summer in Paris*, 88.

MARGARET AVISON

MORLEY CALLAGHAN 1903-1990

WHEN MORLEY CALLAGHAN died in Toronto on August 25, 1990, at the age of eighty-seven, Canadian literature lost one of its most prolific, controversial, and enigmatic writers. We also lost one of this country's most endangered species: the genuinely curious, non-academic, literary intellectual.

Callaghan was a "renaissance" man, or, to use one of his own phrases, "a rare bird." In both his writing and his living, he was an exasperatingly playful Irish skeptical impish ferocious multi-talented dialectical ironic corny sentimental aggressive sensitive individualist, who insisted on the supremacy, the absolute necessity,

of only one human obligation: "to see the world through [your] own eyes" (Weaver, 7). This belief profoundly influenced both his life and *oeuvre*.

Readers of *Canadian Literature* are familiar with Callaghan's enormous literary output. From August 6, 1921 (when, at the age of eighteen, he published his first newspaper article, "A Windy Corner at Yonge-Albert"), until August 1990 (when, at 87, he had almost finished a new 30,000 word novella), Callaghan wrote over twenty novels and novellas, and over a hundred short stories. On this front he was known as Canada's first great internationalist, the writer who "broke open for us the egg-shell of our cultural colonialism" (Ross, 78). In this process Callaghan produced such canonical classics as *Such Is My Beloved* (1934), *More Joy in Heaven* (1937), *The Loved and the Lost* (1951), *That Summer in Paris* (1963), and *A Fine and Private Place* (1975).

Lesser known is the fact that Callaghan was also a prolific literary reviewer: throughout the 1920s and 1930s he introduced Toronto readers to new works by Joyce, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, and Hemingway; during the 1940s and 1950s he produced over a hundred newspaper columns on such diverse topics as sports, politics, fashions, social trends, and cultural issues; and by 1990 Callaghan had been (and in varying degrees still was) a student of law, amateur athlete and theologian, businessman, playwright, national radio and television personality for the CBC, sports columnist, and social commentator. Throughout his various "glorious careers" he remained resolutely Canadian (if not quintessentially Torontonians), a paradoxical activist who agitated on behalf of Canadian writers while simultaneously decrying sentimental nationalism.

Given Callaghan's anti-puritan sympathies, his fiction is filled with "criminal

saints" who reject social and/or moral orthodoxies. The "Paris" of his famous memoir emerges as a carnivalesque site of exuberant transgression (not to mention infamous boxing prowess), turning on its head the uptight moralisms of 1920s Toronto. Callaghan's journalistic work — whether it be a descriptive piece or an interview with a prize-fighter — was also marked by this abrasive refusal to accept a conservative party line. (Interestingly, in the 1950s he was best known for his aggressive talk show, "Fighting Words"!)

But Callaghan didn't simply create subversive characters; he also enacted (or, in the eyes of hostile critics, *tried* to enact) a subversive style, a form of writing which both jettisoned the baroque embroidery of a colonial heritage, and laid the necessary groundwork for later modernist experimentalists. This meant not simply the (r-)evolution of a pared down style bereft of excessive metaphor (his virtual trademark as both novelist and journalist). It also meant the meticulous rhetorical construction of an elusive ambiguity that resists readerly certainty or final narrative closure, an ambiguity of plot, language, and structure which forces individual readers to "see the world through their own eyes." As Callaghan himself remarked in 1984, his writing always strove deliberately for a "haiku effect," because "it's always completed by the reader inside their own mind. That's what I was doing in my stories" [personal interview with author, May 1984].

Though it might seem odd now to think of Morley Callaghan — one of Canada's Grand Old Men of Letters — as a carnivalesque clown, he was in fact just this sort of ever-changing, intellectual/personal/literary harlequin. An acerbic interlocutor of social and moral conventions, and a restless literary innovator, he was, above all, a lover of struggle. Whether it be an emotional, intellectual, physical, literary, domestic, political, or

moral issue, his thought and practice was almost always fiercely dialectical; or as Callaghan himself remarked in 1970, "anarchistic" (Cameron, 29). It seems peculiarly appropriate, then, that Callaghan remains a topic of intense critical polarities: in his case, one writer's *métier* is another reader's poison.

We have been poorer since Morley Callaghan's death in 1990. We have been impoverished culturally, spiritually, and politically at the loss of his vitalism, his writing, his irritability, his grand immodesty, and his uncompromising questioning. Not to mention his incomparable confidence in, and commitment to, his own vision of an anarchic, individual literary practice.

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- Cameron, Donald. "There Are Gurus in the Woodwork," in his *Conversations With Canadian Novelists*, Part 2 (Toronto: MacMillan, 1970): 17-33.
- Ross, Malcolm. "Morley Callaghan," in Brandon Conron, ed. *Morley Callaghan. Critical Views on Canadian Writers* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1975): 78.
- Weaver, Robert. "A Talk With Morley Callaghan," *Tamarack Review* 7 (Spring 1958), 3-29.

GARY BOIRE

NOTES

"Chilling" is the word to use for Ann Davis's account of painter Christiane Pflug's life in *Somewhere Waiting: The Life and Art of Christiane Pflug* (Oxford). Like recent biographies of Sylvia Plath and Elizabeth Smart, this is an account of the destructive relationship between a highly gifted woman and the man in her life. Unlike Ted Hughes and George Barker, Michael Pflug fully cooperated with the biographer, and as a result Davis's assessment of his role is curiously mixed. In the acknowledgements and introduction she praises his "confidence and generosity" in allowing her access to the family papers, and suggests that "a feminist format" would not give proper credit to "the contribution Michael made to Christiane's creativity." In the biography itself, however, despite repeated attempts

to remind the reader of Michael's contribution to his wife's creativity, the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming as Davis evokes instance after instance of Pflug's self-centered and abusive behaviour, and of his wife's desperate effort to balance the demands of her family and art. Davis frequently quotes from letters, going to great lengths to describe them as loving and supportive, when often little of these qualities is perceivable. There are detailed assessments of Pflug's paintings, tending toward the formalist and pretentious and often insufficiently integrated into the narrative (a common malaise with biographies attempting to do justice to both life and art). Perhaps the reproductions (a generous selection both in colour and in black and white) speak best for themselves, conjuring up "an almost frightening air of unreality in the midst of her intransigent and tightly controlled naturalism," as one critic put it. But although this critic was a woman, Elizabeth Kilbourn, she too could not fully suppress condescension when she added: "Far from being a sentimental female picture of domesticity, Miss Pflug's kitchen seems a battleground of alien and alienating forces." Like the reproductions of Pflug's paintings, the photographs chronicling her life first as the daughter born to an emancipated fashion-designer in 1920's Berlin, then as the wife of an ambitious doctor-painter with whom she lived in Paris, Tunis, and Toronto, are very good. Pflug's melancholy beauty is arresting, nowhere more so than in a photograph of an unsmiling Christiane holding her first baby in an empty room in Tunis, a kitten perched on a ladder close by. Davis talks about the Pflug's Tunisian cats: "Wild and unused to human contact, if approached they tried to climb the walls, emitting high-pitched shrieks. To break this behaviour, Michael beat the kittens until they were docile." Christiane Pflug committed suicide in 1972.

The controversy aroused by Diane Wood Middlebrook's biography of Anne Sexton (Allen, \$32.95) has already ensured the book a *succès-de-scandal*. The decision of Sexton's therapist, Martin Orne, to release taped sessions with her to Middlebrook has far-reaching ethical implications, and reading the book, one wonders if such a breach of trust was really necessary to produce an account of Sexton's life. Although documenting in enormous detail Sexton's psychotic conduct through the years, the book fails to give her due as a creator, a shortcoming made particularly painful by Middlebrook's rather feeble efforts to deal with Sexton's poetry. The biographer's own stance toward her subject never becomes fully clear,

and there is a disturbing deference to Dr. Orne's paternalism in allowing him to preface this book. It documents, after all, Robert Lowell's condescension toward his female students (doomed, or so he said, to remain in the category of "minor, definitely minor"), and describes Sexton's sexual abuse by a psychotherapist. There are also details of Sexton's close friendship and working relationship with Maxine Kumin, but these too are subsumed by the endless litany of Sexton's psychological peccadilloes. As often in such books, one turns with relief to the photographs. The cover in particular is brilliantly chosen: Sexton, elegantly dressed as always, animatedly gestures towards someone not included in the picture. Her upper body is an image of ease and charm, but her legs are tightly wound around each other. They seem like a coiled spring, ready to puncture her calm surface.

E.-M. K.

THERE'S SOMETHING OXYMORONIC about stabilizing regionalisms, but that's nevertheless one of the effects of F. G. Cassidy and Joan H. Hall's ongoing *Dictionary of American Regional English* (Belknap/Harvard, \$34.95); the intent, of course, is simply to record usage, pronunciation variants, distribution patterns (maps abound), and botanical and zoological variants in U.S. speech (Southern Black speech examples provide a large source). With volume II (D-H), readers have a chance to check up on such words as *doodly squat*, *fossilbustle*, *goober-grabber*, and *hincty*. In Geoffrey Hughes's *Swearing: A Social History of Foul Language* (Blackwell, \$24.95), those with limited inventiveness can find lists of other peoples' epithets, but more important is the account of lexical and semantic change. Most of the history looks at Britain, with Cockney slang providing a substantial supply of the wordstock; Australian speech, too, is greeted enthusiastically, but readers looking for Canadian distinctiveness in this arena will be disappointed. Canada, says Hughes, being more bourgeois, "maintained comparative mildness in the matter of oaths."

The collected essays in Alan Bell and Janet Holmes's *New Zealand Ways of Speaking English* (Multilingual Matters, £47, pa. £16.95) take another approach again to language, emphasizing phonology (intonation patterns, e.g.) and the relation between the history of sound change and class variables; one essay concerns pidgin English and pidgin Maori, another is called "Politeness Strategies in New Zealand Women's Speech." And Berel Lang's *Writing and the Moral Self* (Routledge, \$53.50, pa.

\$17.50) collects several essays on such topics as Black English, asking not what is and is not *correct* but what is and is not *alive*. From there it is a short step to theorizing about the uses of language both as a colonizing force and as an agency of resistance.

Stephen Greenblatt's *Learning to Curse* (Routledge, \$30), for example, takes its title from an essay on "linguistic colonialism in the 16th century," in which he posits that English writers (i.e. Daniel) assumed that exporting the English language to the rest of the world would be a boon — not a conquest but a gift; by creating a substitute language in other parts of the world, this act required a giving up of existing identities. (The process has not stopped; one of the poems in the Samoan writer Albert Wendt's *Inside Us the Dead* [Longman Paul] reads in part: "Master Future doffs his cap: / his prayer for Mr Past / has an American accent.") Greenblatt simply quotes Caliban: "you taught me how to curse." For the English Empire, the Wild Man represented most of all a threat to *institutions*. But a metaphoric cursing is the stuff of post-colonialism, as Robert Young's account of Bhabha, Spivak, Foucault, Jameson, and Said (in *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Routledge, \$93, pa. \$21.50) makes clear; when "colonial discourse" becomes a subject, this process shifts attention from history as a given to history as a set of contemporary political ramifications.

Canada, say Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan in *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, \$42.50) is a special case in cultural and political history — colonized but not 3rd world; Elaine Showalter, in *Sister's Choice* (Oxford Clarendon, n.p.), a book largely about Margaret Fuller, replies that Canada cannot be truly revolutionary because it's not 3rd world (a characteristically American viewpoint, bound by its own cultural binarism without apparently even knowing it). Both Showalter and the Vaughans use *The Tempest* to argue their case, Showalter writing about Miranda (and drawing on the work of Chantal Zabus, Diana Brydon, and the Vaughans). The Vaughans themselves, in an important book — a performance history and a study of the cultural sociology of reception — examine the historical contexts that have shaped the changing literary and visual representations of Caliban (as monster, subhuman, missing link, and colonial), and they thereby contribute effectively to a continuing debate about power and the forms of authority that language enacts.

W.N.

BOOKS RECEIVED

1) Anthologies

- J. R. LÉVEILLE, *Anthologie de la poésie franco-Manitobaine*. Edns du Blé, \$29.95.
 RICHARD FORD and SHANNON RAVENEL, eds., *Best American Short Stories 1990*. Houghton Mifflin, \$9.95.
 ALBERTO MANGUEL, ed., *Black Water 2*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$16.95.
 SUSAN GINGELL, ed. *The Bridge City Anthology*. Fifth House, \$9.95.
 ELAINE CROCKER and ERIC NORMAN, eds., Michael Nowlan, comp., *Choice Atlantic*. Breakwater Books, n.p.
 UMA PARAMASWARAN, *The Door I Shut Behind Me*. Pali Press, \$12.95.
 GEOFF HANCOCK, *Fire Beneath the Cauldron*. Thistle-down Press, \$18.50.
 WAYNE GRADY, ed., *From the Country*. Firefly Books, n.p.
 VAN IKEN, ed., *Glass Reptile Breakout & Other Australian Speculative Stories*. Western Australia University, Aus. \$14.95.
 JOHN BELL, ed. *Halifax: A Literary Portrait*. Pottersfield, \$14.95.
 BEVERLEY DAURIO, ed. *Hard Times*. Mercury Press, \$12.95.
 NEIL BESNER and DAVID STAINES, eds. *The Short Story in English*. Oxford, \$23.95.
 LUCIEN FRANCOEUR, ed. *Vingt-cinq poètes Québécois 1968-1978*. Hexagone Editions, \$19.95.
 H. ROGER GRANT, ed. *We Took the Train*. Northern Illinois, \$29.50.
 LINDA SVENDSEN, ed. *Words We Call Home: Celebrating Creative Writing at U.B.C.*, UBC Press, \$19.95.
 DAVID DONNELL, *Water Street Days*. McClelland & Stewart, \$9.95.

2) Architecture

- TREVOR BODDY, ed., *The Architecture of Douglas Cardinal*. NeWest, \$29.95.

3) The Arts

- TIMOTHY O. BENSON, *Raoul Hausman and Berlin Dada*. UMI Research, n.p.
 MAX WYMAN, *Dance Canada*. Douglas & McIntyre, \$60.00.
 VINCENT O'SULLIVAN, *Billy*. Victoria University, \$12.95.
 TONY URQUHART and GARY MICHAEL DAULT, *Cells of Ourselves*. Porcupine's Quill, \$19.95.

- T. STUART GILL and VARNEY MONK, *Collits' Inn: A Romantic Australian Operetta*. Currency Press, n.p.
- DORIS SHADBOLT, *Emily Carr*. Douglas & McIntyre, \$17.95.
- SCOTT WATSON, *Jack Shadbolt*. Douglas & McIntyre, \$75.00.
- VINCENT O'SULLIVAN, *Jones & Jones*. Victoria University, \$12.95.
- GEORGE LEITCH, *The Land of the Moa*. Victoria University, n.p.
- J. PAUL GREEN and NANCY F. VOGAN, *Music Education in Canada*. University of Toronto, \$125.00.
- JOHN ROBERTS, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*. McClelland & Stewart, \$24.95.
- JEAN-PIERRE BARRICELLI et al., eds., *Teaching Literature and the Other Arts*. MLA Press, \$18.95.
- TSUKASA KODERA, *Vincent Van Gogh: Christianity Versus Nature*. John Benjamins Press, US\$68.00.
- FELIX LECLERC, *Felix. Le P'tit Bonheur*. Bibliothèque Québécoise, n.p.
- 4) *Criticism*
- HELEN CIXOUS, "Coming to Writing" and Other Essays. Harvard University, \$24.95.
- JOHN McVEAGH, ed., *All Before Them: Volume 1 1660-1780*. Humanities International Press, \$49.95.
- DAVID S. REYNOLDS, *Beneath the American Renaissance*. Harvard University, \$14.95.
- ROBERT LECKER, JACK DAVID and ELLEN QUIGLEY, *Canadian Writers and Their Works*. Fiction Series, Vols. 4, 5 & 7. ECW Press, \$45.00 each.
- HARRIETT HAWKINS, *Classics & Trash*. University of Toronto, \$65.00/\$17.50.
- PIERRE LEON and PAUL PERRON, eds., *Le Conte*. Didier Press, n.p.
- PHILIP BROCKBANK, *The Creativity of Perception*. Blackwell, \$47.95.
- LYNDA ZWINGER, *Daughters, Fathers, and the Novel*. University of Wisconsin Press, \$47.95.
- CHRISTOPHER NORRIS, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. RCH Press, \$13.95.
- TOM MOYLAN, *Demand the Impossible*. Routledge, US\$13.95.
- LOUIS BREGER, *Dostoevsky: The Author as Psychoanalyst*. New York University, \$16.50.
- MARY EAGLETON, ed., *Feminist Literary Criticism*. Longman Press, £18.99.
- MARY ANN DOANE, *Femmes Fatales*. RCH Press, \$19.95.
- RICHARD KOSTELANETZ, ed., *Gertrude Stein: Advanced*. McFarland & Company, US\$37.50.
- JOSEPH FRANK, *The Idea of Spatial Form*. Rutgers University, \$36.00.
- NEIL K. BESNER, *Introducing Alice Munro's "Lives of Girls and Women"*. ECW Press, \$18.95.
- LORRAINE YORK, *Introducing Farley Mowat's "The Dog Who Wouldn't Be"*. ECW Press, \$18.95.
- LINDA LEITH, *Introducing Hugh MacLennan's "Two Solitudes"*. ECW Press, \$18.95.
- GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Introducing Margaret Atwood's "Surfacing"*. ECW Press, \$18.95.
- GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Introducing Mordecai Richler's "The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz"*. ECW Press, \$18.95.
- GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Introducing Sinclair Ross's "As For Me and My House"*. ECW Press, \$18.95.
- LORRAINE YORK, *Introducing Timothy Findley's "The Wars"*. ECW Press, \$18.95.
- DEREK COHEN and DEBORAH HELLER, eds., *Jewish Presences in English Literature*. McGill-Queen's, \$34.95.
- ROBERT H. RAY, *A John Donne Companion*. Garland Press, \$50.00.
- JOHN CAREY, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*. Faber & Faber, \$14.95.
- J. F. KOBLER, *Katherine Mansfield: A Study of the Short Fiction*. G. W. Hall, \$18.95.
- JANE H. PEASE and WILLIAM H. PEASE, *Ladies, Women & Wenches*. North Carolina University, \$16.25.
- STELIO CRO, *The Noble Savage: Allegory of Freedom*. Wilfrid Laurier University, n.p.
- ALLAN MASSIE, *The Novel Today*. Longman, n.p.
- ROBYN V. YOUNG, *Poetry Criticism*. Gale Research Press, \$75.00.
- E. D. BLODGETT and A. G. PURDY, eds., *Pre-faces and Literary Manifestoes*. R.I.C.L. Press, n.p.
- HENRI LEFEBVRE, trans. DONALD NICHOLSON-SMITH, *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, \$19.95.
- PHILIP D. BEIDER, *Re-Writing America*. Georgia University, \$35.00.
- PAUL RICOEUR, *A Ricoeur Reader*. University of Toronto Press, \$24.95.
- JOHN POWW, *The Santa Maria Still Sails*. Delft Press, n.p.
- ROBERT GIDDINGS, KEITH SELBY and CHRIS WENSLEY, *Screening the Novel*. Macmillan, £25.00.
- IHAB HASSAN, *Selves At Risk*. University of Wisconsin, n.p.
- NORBERT ELIAS, *The Symbol Theory*. Sage Press, \$19.95.

- FERNAND DORAIS, *Temoins d'errances en Ontario français*. Le Nordir Editions, \$15.00.
- SHEILA BERGER, *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures*. New York University, n.p.
- NICOLAS TREDELL, *Uncancelled Challenge: The Work of Raymond Williams*. Paupers Press £8.95.
- JIM COLLINS, *Uncommon Cultures*. Routledge, \$35.00/13.95.
- IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, *Unthinking Social Science*. Purdue University, \$47.95.
- GORDON MARSDEN, *Victorian Values*. Longman Press, \$23.95.
- SAM SOLECKI, JOHN METCALF and W. J. KEITH, *Volleys: Critical Directions*. Porcupines Quill, \$9.95.
- BETSY ERKKILA, *Whitman the Political Poet*. Oxford University Press, \$41.95.
- BETSY ERKKILA, *Whitman the Political Poet*. Oxford University Press, \$41.95.
- IRV BROUGHTON, ed., *The Writer's Mind*. University of Arkansas Press, US\$22.00.
- PETER UWE HOHENDAHL, *Building a National Literature: The Case of Germany 1830-1870*.
- TOM MOYLAN, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction & the Utopian Imagination*. Routledge, \$14.95.
- GILLIAN BEER, *Arguing with the Past*. Routledge, \$14.95.

5) Fiction

- JEAN DESY, *Un Dernier cadeau pour Cornelia*. XYZ Editeur, \$14.95.
- BELA SZABADOS, *In Light of Chaos*. Thistle-down, \$14.95 pa.
- JOHN BUELL, *A Lot to Make Up For*. Harper/Collins, \$19.95.
- ALAIN POISSANT, *Vendredi-Friday*. du Roseau Edns., n.p.
- CLAUDE MATHIEU, *La Mort Exquise*. L'instant Même Editions, n.p.
- FRANCINE NOEL, *Myriam Première*. VLB Editeur Editions, n.p.
- C. D. MINNI, ed., *Ricordi: Things Remembered*. Guernica Editions, \$20.00.

6) History

- CLAIRE LAUBIER, ed. *The Condition of Women in France: 1945 to the Present*. Routledge, \$37.50 pa.

7) Life-Writing

- JOYCE BARKHOUSE, *A Name for Himself: A Biography of Thomas Head Raddall*. Natural Heritage Press, \$9.95.

8) Poetry

- ROBERT O'DRISCOLL, *Nato and the Warsaw Pact are One*. Univ. of Toronto, n.p.
- ROMANO PERTICARINI, trans. Carlo Biacobbe, *Via Diaz*. Guernica, \$12.00.
- FAY ZWICKY, *Ask Me*. Queensland University, n.p.
- PHILIP SALON, *Barbecue of the Primitives*. Queensland University, n.p.
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LAST PAGE

TRAVEL BOOKS, like travellers themselves, trail cultural perspectives behind them, like coloured streamers, each one parading a trained response to place, person, action, priority, thing.

It's scarcely possible to escape one's own expectations, and among the most captivating of recent travel writers — Jonathan Raban, say, or Bruce Chatwin — it's the idiosyncrasy of the personal perspective that matters as much (or sometimes more) than its validity. The fictions of observation, that is, take precedence over the observation of fictions. But this distinction sometimes has no effect whatsoever on the course of publishing history — readers sometimes want just to hear their expectations of exoticism retold, their assumptions about the peculiarities of difference reconfirmed — and the oddest of books often competes for shelf space with those that champion a serious cause. For instance, Denis Boyles' *Man Eaters Motel* (Ticknor & Fields, \$19.95), an American's account of travels in Kenya, opens with the sentence "Good neighbourhoods, like bored wives and tuna, go bad if ignored too long" and plunges ahead on a downward curve; "disaster" is the main motif here (disaster treated as the comedy of disorganization and inefficiency), and Kenya surfaces merely as the backdrop for a kind of wit. But even a serious intent cannot always save a book. Witness Peter Matthiessen's very ordinary *African Silences* (Random House, \$27.50), which recounts travels through francophone West Africa (territory that Mary Kingsley visited a hundred years earlier); everywhere judgmental, the author writes with a conservationist agenda, but the laudable cause seems to get in the way of, rather than to serve, both style and detail. By contrast, style and detail are the strengths of Alexander Frater's *Chasing the Monsoon* (Penguin, \$14.95), which tells of a 1986 trip to India; in this case the strengths are not to be the force of specific observations, but those of the nostalgic rediscovery of an earlier self. Place is the medium, person the idiom.

Two recent biographies bear upon this subject: John Sugden's *Sir Francis Drake* (Holt, \$29.95) and Edward Rice's *Captain Sir Richard Burton* (Harper Collins, \$19.95). The "titles" in the two book titles are signs of power, of course, and it is not surprising that both works should be concerned with power relationships — primarily between each subject and other people, though at least implicitly also between Europe and the Empires that Europe sought to possess. Both books emphasize the driving aspirations of their subject: Drake was committed to notions of faith, patriotism, and courage, says Sugden; Burton longed for certainty and repeatedly expressed a faith in genius, says Rice. (Their imperial travels might, of course, be read as compensatory acts in face

of a personal uncertainty.) Sugden's work more clearly establishes the deviousness of the political context in which the explorers moved (observing that Drake's backers were motivated by anti-Spanish biases more than by their public commitment to faith); less narrative in form, Rice's book, however, is a more effective revelation of a compulsive personality.

Beside such works it is instructive to place a series of creative and theoretical works. The comments of critics and anthropologists have for some time been emphasizing the invalidity of imperialism, though (as with travel writing) actually getting out of the "imperial" (read *marginalizing, hierarchical*) frame of mind is less easy than intellectually acknowledging it. Nicholas Thomas's contribution to this debate, in *Entangled Objects* (Harvard, \$32.50; \$14.95), is to categorize ways in which material things have been used traditionally in the South Pacific in ceremonies affecting debts, gifts, and other exchanges, and also to demonstrate ways in which South Pacific and European cultures have each appropriated features of the other, to serve their own customs. But categories can themselves be culturally designed. Thomas R. Berger's *A Long and Terrible Shadow* (Douglas & McIntyre, \$26.95) movingly traces the history of Native/White relations in the Americas (Canada, the U.S., Argentina), using a series of legal questions as the frame through which to view the cultural tensions between notions of value and notions of right; economic exploitation, for example, rapidly turned into (and from the vantage point of the exploiter, *justified*) slavery — a slight shift in category seemed to justify all — but this is a form of legalistic argument which Berger effectively explodes. One might wish for as much historical detail (and a little more attention to previous post-colonial research) from Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvellous Possessions* (U. Chicago P., \$24.95), which uses the travels of Mandeville and Columbus to devise categories of European conceptualization of the "New World," but Greenblatt's nevertheless remains a readable book; it argues that texts were *written in terms of* the "wondrous," but that they use the vocabulary of adventure to *authenticate* the European "right" to possession, redemption, and power. Clare Simmons's *Reversing the Conquest* (Rutgers, \$37.00) is tangentially relevant here, in that it, too, examines the impact of a social mythology on the writing of what came to be accepted as history (Simmons's particular subject is the way Victorian writers coded such words as "Saxon" and "Norman"). Susan Hiller's compilation called *The*

Myth of Primitivism (Routledge, \$68.95, pa. \$23.95), however — a series of essays on art and society — directly addresses the way in which an idea of culture functioned to distribute social power unevenly. To the degree that Renaissance authorities “invented” the idea that culture is a humanizing force in society, runs one argument, they validated (both for themselves and for the many generations who subscribed unquestioningly to their point of view) the “right” of one force in society to exercise power over another. “Culture” (in that it embraced assumptions about economics, education, and class as well as “art”) implicitly meant “property,” leading to unstated and self-justifying equations between ownership, rightful authority, taste, and sometimes even virtue.

Examining these equations has been not only the task of criticism and theory but also the passionate endeavour of numerous creative writers. Two recent publications provide different kinds of example. The reprint of Sam Selvon’s tragicomic 1956 novel *The Lonely Londoners* (TSAR, \$10.95) — its skillful use of dialect being part of its political message — tells of West Indians coping with their loneliness in the “centre of Empire” and of the ways in which they have been led to accept London as their cultural centre, only to discover (“reversing the Conquest,” perhaps?) that their alienation is more symptomatic of the modern world than is the illusion of order which has governed so many peoples’ emotional aspirations. And some lines from a poem called “Dawn Visit,” in Tijan M. Sallah’s *Kora Land* (Three Continents, n.p.), spell out why travellers are so legitimately resisted when they walk uninvited into another’s world: “You came at dawn. / Cocks have not yet crowed. / How can I open the door? / You are a stranger. / And even if I know you, / The night is not meant / for visiting. / . . . / My ancestors loved strangers. / But not one at dawn. / . . . / Not one who, like a scavenger, / Eats the green of night. / / We are daypeople. / . . . / But now you come at dawn / . . . / And you want me to open / The door for you.” What begins as pity for the stranger’s ignorance can rapidly turn into frustration with the stranger’s presumptuousness. That an escalation *can* subsequently *take place* has, unhappily, been common experience. It needn’t, but apparently it’s been hard to put into practice that signs of wonder and declarations of good intent are inadequate substitutes for mutual respect.



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W.N.

contributors

Margaret AVISON, Barry DEMPSTER, Susan GLICKMAN, and Susan IOANNOU live in Toronto and Andrew BROOKS lives in Brampton. Gary BOIRE and Viviana COMENSOLI teach at Wilfrid Laurier, Sandra CAMPBELL at the University of Ottawa, and Evelyn COBLEY at the University of Victoria. Nathalie COOKE is at McGill, Suzanne CROSTA at McMaster, Moira DAY at the University of Saskatchewan, and Teresa HEFFERNAN at the University of Toronto. Lorna CROZIER lives in Saanichton, Jean-Paul GABILLIET in Strasbourg, Dominick GRACE in London, Ontario and Neile GRAHAM in Seattle. Mary Ann GILLIES and Grazia MERLER teach at Simon Fraser University, and John HULCOOP, Eva-Marie KRÖLLER, John LANE, John LEBLANC, Patricia MERIVALE, Sherrill GRACE, and Andre LAMONTAGNE at the University of British Columbia. Jessie GIVNER teaches at Brown University, Martin KUESTER at the University of Augsburg, and Cedric MAY at the University of Birmingham. David WATMOUGH, George WOODCOCK and Susan MacFARLANE live in Vancouver, Jack SHADBOLT in North Burnaby, and Sue Ann JOHNSTON in Langley. Kenneth MEADWELL teaches at the University of Winnipeg, Magessa O’REILLY at Memorial, Dominique PERRON at the University of Calgary, Barbara POWELL at the University of Regina, Beverly RODGERS and Graham SHORROCKS at Memorial. Robert MERRETT teaches at the University of Alberta, Jill TOMASSON-GOODWIN at Waterloo, Tom WAYMAN at Okanagan College, and J. R. WYTENBROEK at Malaspina College. Mary WILLIS lives in London, Greg PAULHUS in Saskatoon, Robyn SARAH and Erin MOURE in Montreal, and Oliver LOVESAY teaches at Okanagan College.



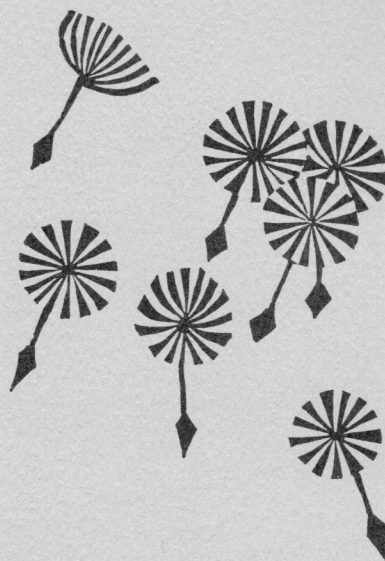
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