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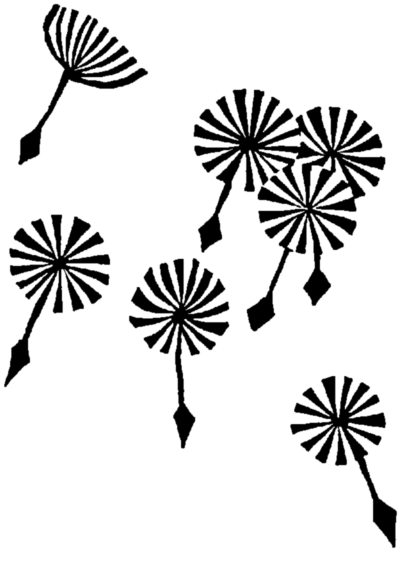

TRANSCREATIONS

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée

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editorial

THE VERY IDEA

SOME RECENT CRITICS have recently been led to declare (with brazen absoluteness) that the term "Canadian literature" is *unacceptable* — presumably to them, though it doesn't seem to stop there — from which it follows (and here one might prepare for the preposterous rather than the logical) that *any* journal using a national adjective in its title *must* be behaving absolutely. National adjectives, from this curiously fixed perspective, *must* be fascist in intent, *must* be authoritarian in desire, *must* require that authors and writings serve a single state design, *must* champion patriarchal unitary values, and *must* give precedence to conventional systems and holders of power and ignore all expressions of alternative possibility. It's hard to find an egalitarian way to dismiss such mustiness; absolute expectations encourage short replies. Speaking at the ADE Summer Seminar in 1990, however, I addressed this issue at greater length. What follows is a slightly edited version of my comments at the time, which seem, in the face of current debates, to bear repeating.

* * *

Behind the invitation that summoned me to take part in this panel there lay, to my ear, three questions: 1. Why did I write a history of Canadian literature? (to which my silent reply was a surly *Why not?*), 2. Is it even possible to consider literature in national terms (to which the answer is *Of course*), 3. Isn't this dangerous? (to which my answer is *Maybe, maybe not*). This last answer, and the assumptions behind the questions themselves, need annotation. For the assertion *Maybe / maybe not* doesn't declare indecision; it simply refuses the absolutism of a single answer to a complex premise — which in itself says something about the writing of histories of literature and about my assessment of the cultural politics of questions about literature and nationhood.

For in the long run, it all depends on who's asking the questions, who's trying to answer them, and what terms such persons use in coding and decoding the exchange in which they're engaged. For example, I teach at the University of B.C. a course that is listed in the *Calendar* as "Commonwealth Literature," and recently at another university I taught a variant version of this course under the rubric "Post-Colonial Literatures." Because asking "What's in a name?" is a broadly social as well as a specifically literary question, and because it involves usable power and the assumption of authority, it should not be too hard to see that both of the course names to which I have referred raise potential difficulties. Trying to find an adequate term to describe the plural group of English-language literatures that have developed since the seventeenth century *outside* the United Kingdom and the United States has, in fact, preoccupied for the last 25 years a number of critics who study these literatures. The term "World Literatures in English" had some vogue for several years; "New English Literatures" can still be heard in some quarters; "Terranglian Literature" — a Texas term — was essentially a non-starter. "Commonwealth," of course, implies to some ears a false and implicitly political (or covertly imperial) unity; "post-colonial," for its part, raises questions about areas of applicability and starting date. If "post" covers everything since European/non-European contact, then when, except conceptually, is "pre"? And does the term, in this use, misleadingly construct "Europe" as the world's *only* colonizing power? It's a context in which the phrase "being left at the post" acquires new resonances.

But the challenges to those terms are also political and just as problematic. If "Commonwealth" is intentionally boundary-marked, how can a course in "Commonwealth literature" (or literatures, in the plural) adequately open to discussions of South African, Fijian, or Pakistani writing during the times when these societies are not strictly speaking in the Commonwealth, which in practice it does? If "Commonwealth" is rejected because it is presumed to articulate a hegemony, yet it refers to societies that are clearly resisting the imposed inheritance of imperialism, does that not mistakenly presume that the "Commonwealth" is a fixed structure, not open to redefinition by those societies who, for all their anti-imperialism, still claim to participate in it? If "Commonwealth" is rejected *by Americans* in these terms, and the area studied then redefined *in American terms* — such as "Black Literature" — does that not suggest a new hegemony in the making, one that is constructed from inside the U.S.A. instead of from without? Clearly the term "Black Literature" *does* carry meaning in the United States, as it does in the Caribbean, Canada, and Australia, but in each of these places the term has a separate meaning, with separate cultural implications. South *Asian* critics and writers, moreover, customarily resist the unitary category "Black" — as in the phrase "Black British Literature" which includes (but does not include) them — as do Maori and other Polynesian cultures. Further, African and Black Australian writers and critics have recurrently drawn attention to the fact that *Black* Americans are also Black *Americans*, not unaffected by the society in which they live, and not *native* to it, making "Négritude" an idea in theory more than in empirical reality. And the term "Third World Literature," which constructs some numerical hierarchies (who decides who's First and Second?), effectively cuts out Canada, Australia, and New Zealand from consideration because they're ostensibly "White," carefully admits black but not white South Africans, and doesn't think to deal with the ethnic and racial plurality that the so-called "settler societies" — as well as India and Fiji — are still in the midst of separately figuring out.

It's the separateness, and the recognition of the range of possibilities, that leads me back to the question of "Canadian" literature. There's a current resistance to this term, too — as to any that appears to declare an expectation of cultural unitariness. But this seems to me as much a construct of interpretation as of expression, and to assume that current political contexts — and current critical fashions — are constant and have always been so. It is, however, scarcely more than three decades ago that the first courses in Canadian literature were being *offered* at the University of British Columbia, and *this* university was one of the pioneers in developing Canadian literature as a "legitimate" area for academic enquiry. To discover that during the 1980s Canadian writing has become a serious area of academic study throughout Europe, Asia, and the South Pacific — as well as in Canada — still comes as a surprise to many academic doubters who questioned the validity of this enterprise thirty years ago and who thought *the very idea* of Canadian literature a contradiction in terms. Others see this international development (in a curious variant of what Australians call a "cultural cringe") as a ratification of their "pioneering" faith; still others interpret it as the rest of the world catching up to reality at last. There's no reason why all these international approaches need be the same. And there's no reason why the reactions to them should be mutually exclusive. The point is that a resistance to writing by Canadians was (and is), broadly speaking, a political act — one born variously of arrogance, ignorance, blindness, a resistant faith in the closed canonical values of tradition or heritage, Euro-centrism, Amero-centrism, declared standards of taste and judgment, assorted boundary lines, and a failure of imagination. An interest *in* Canadian writing is *also* political: but it depends to some degree on a redefinition of cultural priorities, which is what anyone committed to a fixed system of values of course finds debilitating, disconcerting, misconceived, or wrong.

It was both to combat the cultural dismissal (whether explicit or implicit) that was expressed by the widespread failure to consider Canadian writing at all, and to enquire into the value systems that are expressed within Canada (and the validity of connections between literature and society), that Canadian literature courses got going. In other words, there was a mix of reasons for devising the courses and a mix of expectations from them, and it should not be surprising that much criticism in the field sought to enumerate (usually by overgeneralizing) some "distinctive" feature of cultural nationalism. Such generalizations might in retrospect seem naive, but they, too, deserve to be considered in context. In the days when a Canadian author or two might be tacked on to the end of an American Literature class — *if there were any time left at the end of the term* (I'm referring to 1956 or 1957) — the very structure of consideration conveyed the idea that Canadian culture was merely a postscript, an afterthought, an extension. I'm reminded of a primary school textbook that children were required to use in Vancouver some fifteen or twenty years ago. It was an American publication, which editorially at one point placed a footnote mark beside the word "Canada" — the definition at the bottom of the page read "Country north of the U.S.A." My problem was not with the American identification in itself; it was with the normalizing effect of this perspective in Canada. Why should we know ourselves, I asked — or be required to know ourselves — only through other peoples' eyes? Why should we passively accept a version of Tradition that does not attach value to our own several perspectives and patterns of expression? Why should we think it necessary to choose *between* ourselves and others for social models when it's clear that Canada in practice borrows readily from others and permits multiple models? (Why should we try to define ourselves in terms of the neat categorical *Either/Or* when our collective practice seems to favour the more chaotic *Both/And*?) Lines from a poem by the Zimbabwean writer Felix Mnthali describe the politics of unequal cultural contacts, in terms that resonate here as well as in Southern Africa; the poem is called "Neocolonialism":

Above all, define standards
prescribe values
set limits; impose boundaries

and even if you have no satellites
in space
and no weapons of any value
you will rule the world
. . . .
for the game will be played
according to your rules
and therefore the game will be played
only when you can win

(*The Penguin Book of Southern African Verse*,
ed. Stephen Gray; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989: 310)

Unquestionably, the multiple strands of Canadian culture are deeply influenced by the United States — more so (nowadays and for a long time) than by those parts of the world once described metaphorically as "parent" countries. To try to read "Canada" without acknowledging this influence would be to distort both history and current experience drastically. But how to interpret the result? And what to accept as an influence? Or is "free will" in this context not even a relevant term? Some Canadians know how to use the recognition that their familiarity with the United States gives them in order to recreate American symbols for Americans — it was a Canadian who wrote *Rambo* for Hollywood. But Hollywood, for its part, has also constructed several imaginatively effective snowbound versions of Canada, and these typify, even as they perpetuate, some of the paradigms of relational hierarchy, and the myths of purity and boredom, that have led to the Afterthought Syndrome in canonical design.

The academic study of Canadian writing, that is, began in Canada for reasons involving a desire for an expanded version of received definitions of canonical greatness (Eurocentric, androcentric, Judaeo-Christian), and a resistance to the neighbourly cultural politics of American expansionism. It began in other places largely for more disparate reasons involving the politics of cultural comparison — post-colonialism, regionalism, feminism, bilingualism, multiculturalism. These differences have led to variant readings of literary texts — but there's no reason why a Canadian reader's interest in a Canadian text should be identical with that of a reader whose interest is contextualized elsewhere. Nor will all Canadians agree about their literature or their culture. Nor is a comparative desire intrinsically more valid than a national one, or vice-versa. Neither Nationality nor Foreignness will guarantee *authenticity* or *objectivity* in composition and criticism, even if one could readily conceive workable definitions for these words. But in this regard, what is a "Canadian text"? It's probably on this question, more than any other in the field, that critics perennially stumble, recognizing problems involving definition, national*ism*, historical change, class power, and the textual containment of a unitary "identity."

The main problem is one involving interpretation. The adjective "Canadian" may not be as neutral as many critics have in the past liked to believe; but nor is it necessarily as monolithic as many current critics now claim. The all-encompassing monolith is, in other words, as much a critical construct as a uniform National Identity ever was, and it's just as misleading. National adjectives, simply because they are currently being read as the articulation of a presumptive *set* of usually middleclass, fixed, authoritarian, systematic, unitary, hierarchical, and androcentric values, do not give up their function as descriptive indicators of social source. Nor does the replacement of national adjectives with forms of a new Internationalism erase the fact of nationality or ultimately silence the expressions of cultural differences that variously derive from particular social experience. What does have to be recognized is: 1. that a national adjective does not in and of itself describe a literary virtue; 2. that nationality and nationalism are not identical, and that both change over time, in the process altering critical definitions and expectations of cultural distinctiveness; 3. that an exclusive equation between cultural validity and a set of particular cultural features that are taken to be distinguishing signs of nationality is an exercise in critical (as well as political) totalitarianism; and 4. that any requirement that a work of literature adhere to a set of social directives, and serve the causes espoused by one particular system, in order to be accorded nationality or value or both nationality and value, is in the long term probably futile, and in the short term, however seemingly efficacious, intellectually absurd.

Such recognitions undoubtedly contribute to the current critical uneasiness about the teaching of "national literatures." If national*ism* is a fascist construct, runs one form of the argument, then teaching literature in the context of nationalism must be a covertly if not openly fascistic exercise. No distinction is made in this syllogistic construction of the problem, however, between the context of nationalism and the context of nationhood; and no distinction is further made between the essentially nineteenth-century unitary definitions of *nation* that were invoked in the name of European imperial expansion (definitions which would include the paradigms embraced during World Wars I and II) — George Stewart, Jr., reviewing Charles Mair's *Dreamland* in January 1869, for example, rhetorically intoned: "It is time we had a literature of our own. . . . Without a national literature what is a nation?" (*Stewart's Literary Quarterly Magazine*) — and the complex exchange of ideas involving shifting conceptions of *nation* that is still being articulated in the latter years of the twentieth century. What's being worked out as "post-national," in this context, is less "international," however, than it is "post-imperial," a distinction which has repercussions in the remodelling and reconceptualizing of notions of colony and canon.

In 1983, at the triennial international conference on "Commonwealth Literature," held in Guelph, I chaired a panel that was trying to suggest some alternatives to national modelling not just as a basis for instruction but also as a conclusion to which criticism might lead. Panel members considered the theoretical paradigms offered by feminism, discourse analysis, regionalism, deconstruction, race studies, and Marxism, for example, none of these necessarily in isolation. The *reactions* to the panel were culturally absorbing. Some listeners objected to *-isms* in principle, as though they were not speaking from within one already; others applauded; still others condemned any comparative departure from the tried, established, and presumably true. But a greater disparity derived from differences of national perspective. The panel itself was multiethnic, two-gendered, international. But endorsement of the panel's suggestions came primarily from British, American, and settler-society listeners; critics from the "newer nations" (those from Malaysia and Fiji, for example) questioned what they heard as the authoritarianism — the replacement imperialism — of yet another system from outside their own territory, looming at them as the New Answer before they'd yet had time to think about the world from a (national) perspective they might call their own.

A poem by the Singapore-born poet Shirley Lim is apropos. It's called "Cross-Cultural Exchange (Singapore 1986)" — Singapore 1986 being the site of the next triennial Commonwealth conference after Guelph — and it reads in part this way:

> The pink-and-glossy man wants the little chap
> to bring back the water glasses. He settles
> on the platform and calls for questions. The plain jane
> from the Ministry of Culture wants to know
> how to be modern without becoming Ike and Tina
> Turner. Her chinese convent voice is constantly
> apologizing on the edge of rudeness.
> We don't have a national culture, she complains,
> nervously eying the Aussies and Kiwis
> and the jolly-brown woman from Papua New Guinea.
> We have value-added industries, central
> provident fund, cheap taxis, housing
> development board, glass hotel and,
> of course, the people's action party.
> But we don't have a national culture. . . .
> The pink-and-glossy man sits up smacking his lips.
> It's just the kind of question he relishes.
> You must remember, he begins, in the beginning
> was the word. You people speak English
> very well, it shows how civilized you are
> and that you are ready for a national culture. . . .

There follows a Second Reason and a Third:

> . . . we in New Zealand have seen it all:
> landfall, mountains, lakes, hotsprings, native trouble,
> sheep, and angry god. You can learn from us.
> As we can learn from you. Next question?
> (*Modern Secrets*; Aarhus: Dangaroo, 1989: 94-95)

The barbed ironies tear in a variety of directions here, but most particularly they expose the closest imperialism of assuming that single answers are uniformly acceptable (whether they come from within or without), of acquiring other peoples' nationalism as a "neutral" language of Internationalism, and of pretending that two-way exchanges between numbered first, second, third, and fourth world societies even approach, in political reality, a gesture of equality.

In principle, that is, Shirley Lim's poem objects to appropriation — even to the sorts of appropriation that sometimes mask as the expansion of the canon to include writers and works previously deemed peripheral. For in some cases to "centralize" a marginal perspective will implicitly deny it its power. If, for example, its "marginal" intent is to overthrow the systems of hierarchy implicit in a given canon, can it any longer do so once it becomes "acceptable" within that system? If it has not wholly replaced that system? But once it conceives of that system as a "whole," and in binary oppositional terms, is it perhaps not also demonstrating the degree to which it is complicit in the very language, the system of dominant power, that it says it seeks to replace? The difficult relation between authority and alternatives remains at issue.

The conundrum I am dealing with here involves a series of apparent contradictions or circularities:

> To assert Difference is to deny Empire.
> To deny Empire is to recognize Empire.
> To recognize Empire is to admit the power of Empire.
> To admit the power of Empire is to transfer to Empire
> the capacity to determine Difference.
> To reclaim Difference, or the speech natural to the
> margin, it is necessary to dispute the Empire's
> claim upon the effective language of discrimination.
> Hence to assert Difference is to deny Empire.
> And seemingly so on.

Recasting these terms reinterprets the process: that is, to assert pluralism is to deny homogeneity, or the uniformity that rests in a fixed authority. This doesn't deny the presence of authority, though it allows that authority itself may be plural. Indeed, the declaration of plurality can also be an exercise of power, a measure to dissipate the potential power of the perceived margins. For meaning is not fixed, nor can interpretation be thoroughly useful if it's always automatic. Which returns me to Canada and Canadian literature.

How so? In ways that involve the process of conceptualizing the subject — in the classroom, for example, or in a history of literature: and as an irrelevance, an appendage, a territory of difference or similarity, an entirety, a national necessity, a field of alternatives, a process itself (still in flux), a cultural network. These are, obviously, competing approaches or expectations. When Canadian literature was being taught in Canada as a postscript to British or American literature, it was read in a context of nation-building, with literature interpreted as an expression of cultural "greatness." The equation between the idea of greatness (as conceived in culture and often articulated as morality) and the fact of political recognition (the opportunity to exercise power) was less openly declared, if probably unquestioned as the operating criterion in critical discriminations. When a second, third, and fourth definition of nationhood replaced the first, judgments of literary worth and designs of pedagogical organization also changed. A model involving a fixed set of cultural attributes gave way to a model involving the linear progress of historical development, which in turn gave way to models of Canada involving a mosaic of classless opportunities, a cultural role as international honest broker, the tensions of regional inequalities, biculturalism, gender and race-related disparities, economic territoriality, independence, dependence, cultural multiplicity, and the shifting fields of speech in time and place. In other words, in practice, the very idea of Canada is recurrently being reinvented — just as other national and cultural ideas are. Such recent books as Richard White's *Inventing Australia* and Graeme Turner's *National Fictions* exemplify how social assumptions about nationhood and the impact of cultural models can be analyzed and queried, with implications for reading. To read "Canada," it is necessary, I think, to pay attention to the shifting contexts and expectations to which I have been referring. To read the writing that has emerged from Canada, it is *possible* and usually very *productive* to pay attention to the ways in which social contexts have had an impact on verbal design. But it isn't, inevitably, *necessary.* Verbal designs can attract numerous responses, to which problem-centred (rather than nation-centred) courses in literature pay specific but varying forms of attention.

But one last question to ask in this connection is this: Who does the designing — of the course, the model, the metaphor, the premise, the centre, the problem? Inevitably this will affect the outcome; and for any given text, it's possible to design a way of reading that embodies various conflicting or overlapping categories. For example, *a* particular *Canadian* text might also be read as late Romantic, nineteenth-century, colonial, sentimental, gender-marked, class-biased, Presbyterian, narrative, popular, and marginalized. Each of these adjectival categories constructs a "problem" which a course in literature *could* address. "Canadian" texts — by which I mean those written by writers inside Canada's territorial limits and those written by Canadians abroad — can function instructively in a course designed (across national boundaries perhaps) to address any one of them. Is it worth reading them? Of course. Is there already a canon of received texts? Yes. And is that canon being questioned? Also yes: in part by histories of literature.

Not to consider the possibility of including a Canadian text in such enterprises as an international anthology or a cross-cultural comparative study might well be a deliberate decision, determined by intention, space, and time. Contrarily, it might simply declare the ignorance of a designer who had not thought to ask if there were any text in Canada appropriate to the occasion. To insist by way of reaction that a Canadian text *must* appear in all such anthologies would be arrogant. Another face of arrogance, however, is for those in control of the canon — whoever they are and whatever the canon — to presume that their boundaries are adequate for everyone, and that that canon is already closed. For anyone to tell *me* that I *cannot* construct a course in Canadian literature, that I *cannot* study the literature written in my own country — with or without reference to its social, verbal, and intercultural contexts — because *their theory does not justify it* would, for example, be an absurd exercise of power. Clucking one's tongue by way of reply — and saying "The very idea!" — acts out a quiet defiance. It also indirectly declares that the language of perceived margins has the longstanding capacity to circumscribe — if not immediately to displace — the language of presumed centres of authority. The *ability* to recognize the plurality of cultures, voices, attitudes in literature seems to me an advantage, not a limitation, for a critic and teacher. The *willingness* to embrace what is implied by pluralism, which may be a rarer attribute in educational institutions, would, moreover, facilitate the discussions of models of various kinds (whether national, ethical, multicultural, or poststructural) as intellectual alternatives rather than as threats to the fabric of an entrenched and accepted version of what is believed to constitute civilization.

W.N.

MARLATT'S STEVESTON

Scott McFarlane

i gather
            and picture you.
You and the river,
always the river and its lapping,
napping rhythm, nightmare nap,
            and the places of the place,
            caught still and still caught,
                                                    hot
without breeze, without ripple,
and you, casting yourselves at once from the river
onto familiar shores and snagged into
the sea (see) that is me, and i cast.
            and the need for a cool glass of water.
sweltering summer of '73
granted
Canada Council's   Canada.

Marlatt and Marlatt off to Steveston,
          travelling those lines that never end
but do,
          Munro in wonderland,
setting her camera,
the angler and the bait,
joined by the tension of

             the riddle.
                                 (and the ocean).

"Imagine: a town" you said.
Imagine a town imagining you.
Imagine you, and you canning
    to the silver rhythm of fish
slapping in a boat (the river slopping against the hull)

frantic

    to include (often in brackets) what is usually
forgotten: "For their time, their stories, their interest
and kindness, our thanks go to: Henry Kokubo, Koko Johnson,
Inez and Charlie Huovinen, Unosuke Sakamoto, Spud Matsushita,
Buck Suzuki, Rintaro Hayashe, Maya Koizumi, Andy Anderson and
his staff at the Richmond Art Center,"
and Daphne Marlatt,

for living in
            the cannery, "don't get theoretical now,
the cannery."

The poet,
    Electrifier of life, the executioner,
    the connecter of things,
        "well I *live* here."

                And i live *here.*
              Steveston is
he her here e
And the counselled hands
      that slit the silver bellies,
      that caress the boat and master,
      and smell of an oily river,
      that sign the paychecks,
      that fix the nets and twist the cottonwood,
have been touched into memory,
                their fingerprints impressed
with their impressing.
e, enemy alien in parts.
a japanese population
not dispersed but surgically relocated
to specific places in Canada.

"*This* land
    is *your* land"
hummed by a King's ghostly Council.

i can no longer gather
and return to the tribe.
i gaze
   slap slapping scales on the dock.
   dry, straight mouthed gills
   sing silver silence
   to the smell that lingers.
my swallows,
      counselled by air,
      bird-like,
peck tinny rhythms
for gaps in a can of worms.

the japanese,
and the turning of centuries
met on the docks by Anglican missionaries
and racism.
interned still,
and told how to be.

Marlatt not Kogawa
to Steveston.
and not a Steveston poet.

“‘It was a good experience.’” “‘How can you say that?’”
“‘Look at my daughter, she’s a pharmacist!’” and a doctor,
and a dentist and a university professor, and a chemist . . .
but not a poet.
not a Canadian.
and told how to be.

   “wherever fish come from, circling back in
to their source” you said,
and you have,
   gasping
in the polluted river,
   holding on
to a cracking concrete dock
for dear life.
and you are right:
   circling back
to BMW, private schools, golf club,
and the ever-present camera
recording where *citizens* live.

japanese Canadians,
still shot in beautiful British Columbia.

Marlatt
the canner, writing her divided self
and notioned nation
while mysterious creatures
pushed by nets
to the spaceless paceless places of the sea,
are floating
alone
(picture ancient mariners without guests)
sunburnt and dying of thirst,
struggling

in muddy waters

without ripple,
to tell their story
to the salty sea.

* * *

ZEN SNOW

Brian Burke

the air so cold
fall stalks fracture like colt bones
brittle as an arctic heart
&leaves scuttle across vacant lots

to furl on the frozen ground
the individual flakes rearranging filaments
destroying old molds
like koans melting on your tongue

"I'LL BE MY OWN MASTER"

Domestic Conflicts and Discursive Resistance in "Maurermeister Ihles Haus" and "Our Daily Bread"

Irene Gammell

"BASICALLY, Master Mason Ihle despised everything that was female" (99), is the phrase F. P. Grove used to describe the German patriarch in *Maurermeister Ihles Haus* (1906), and if Richard Ihle is Grove's most blatantly misogynistic character, he is also "the prototype of Grove's fathers" (Blodgett 134). Focusing on the marginalized female characters in Grove's fiction, E. D. Blodgett has argued that Grove's patriarchs — Abe Spalding, Niels Lindstedt, Ralph Patterson, and John Elliot — are immobilized and somewhat static in their epic greatness and that it is the women in Grove's German and Canadian fiction who are capable of change and who also challenge the frozen systems of order set up by the men: "where the males always seem to be who they are — unchanging, hopelessly teleological — it is the females who must act" (126). In Grove's fiction, female action entails discursive struggle and resistance, thus illustrating Michel Foucault's point that discourse is inseparably intertwined with relationships of power (*History* 101).

With the narrative point of view focused on Susie Ihle — the rebelling daughter in late nineteenth-century imperial Germany, *Maurermeister* is concerned with "the emancipation of women or at least with their struggle against male tyranny" (Riley/Spettigue 7). Likewise, Grove's Canadian prairie novel *Our Daily Bread* (1928) traces the young generation's rebellion against the father, pioneer-farmer John Elliot, whereby the daughter's questioning of the patriarchal authority is encoded more often in silence than in speech. While in both novels, the sons and daughters ultimately escape the patriarch's tyranny by leaving his house, the novels' thematic emphasis on generational and domestic conflicts is interwoven with a feminist subtext, namely, the women's search for new discourses that can effect significant change within the family's network of relations. Grove's women oppose and poke holes into what Mikhail Bakhtin has called "the word of the father," which most of them encounter with "its authority already fused to it" (342).

While both novels emphasize that the daughter must dethrone the word of the father in order to resist its assimilation, they also point to the limits of discursive resistance. Questioning not only patriarchal but also matriarchal power structures, *Maurermeister* and *Our Daily Bread* address the question of female complicity that perpetuates the subjugation of women in both the German and the Canadian households. Thus in both novels, the women's struggle to subvert the "symbolic order" of the patriarch's house does not occur in a linear fashion but is full of reversals, illustrating Michel Foucault's point on the polyvalence of discourse: "We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (*History* 101). Drawing attention to the shiftiness and flexibility of discourse, the German and the Canadian novel alike emphasize that the daughter's struggle against patriarchy is often a strategic game that involves a cautious manoeuvring between slippery discourses. Such manoeuvres allow her to defy the father's word, but only rarely, if ever, does the daughter manage to change the patriarchal rule of the house.

The juxtaposition of the Canadian and the German novels seems especially appropriate since Grove's interest in engendered discursive rebellion is deeply rooted in his European past — in the time before his spectacular "suicide" in Germany and his "rebirth" as a Canadian writer. Both the intellectual climate and the inspiration of his "wife" Elsa (Ploetz) Endell had a strong impact on the young novelist Felix Paul Greve, and inevitably left their traces in his fiction. In her autobiography written in the mid-1920s Elsa — today better known as the Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven — looks back on her early life and accuses Greve of having appropriated her "life" and "persons out of [her] life" (34) in his early fiction while at the same time dismissing her own writing with contempt.[1] As Paul Hjartarson's examination of Elsa's autobiography suggests, Grove's *Fanny Essler* (1905) traces Elsa's life from her late teens to her early thirties, while *Maurermeister* fictionalizes Elsa's girlhood and teenage years (276).[2] Elsa's father was a master mason whom she describes in her autobiography as "alternately violent-tempered and tearfully sentimental" (Hjartarson 276), a description that closely matches Susie's father. Also, in her personal writing in the mid-twenties, Elsa alludes to her problematic relationship with her father and her struggle against her father's language,[3] a conflict that is conceptualized in similar terms in Grove's fiction.

While Elsa's experience appears to have provided the raw material for *Maurermeister*, Grove's shaping of his material was also influenced by the turn-of-the-century philosophical interest in language crisis (*Sprachkrise*) associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, whose work Grove knew well.[4] In the *Gay Science* — a book "of the greatest importance," according to Grove (*Myself* 166)

— Nietzsche has a section entitled "Of the sound of the German language" (160-62) in which he criticizes the militarization of the German language, a German that has turned into "Offiziersdeutsch": "welches wütende Autoritätsgefühl, welche höhnische Kälte klingt aus diesem Gebrüll heraus" (104), Nietzsche writes, "what raging sense of authority, what scornful coldness speak out of this roaring" (161). Nietzsche's critique applies to *Maurermeister* in that "*wüt*endes Autoritätsgefühl" is precisely what characterizes the language of the family tyrant, master mason Richard Ihle, whose character is attached to the word "Wut" (rage, wrath, ire) like an epithet (e.g. 45-46; 48-49 in translation). Ihle speaks a form of *Offiziersdeutsch*, the very discourse that Nietzsche rejects as distasteful ("geschmackswidrig"). Not only is Ihle's language stripped of all music — it is pure command. Such an authoritarian language inevitably stirs up disgust ("Widerwillen"), at the same time that it provokes resistance ("Widerstand"),[5] not only in the language philosopher Nietzsche who makes it the target of a vicious satire, but also in Grove who ridicules Ihle's inflexible discourse of authority through Ihle's wife and his daughters who oppose it, at the same time that they are victimized by it.

In *Maurermeister*, it is above all Susie Ihle who is linked to resistance and subversiveness. In the first paragraph, the reader sees her as an eleven-year-old leaping over ropes and chains in her little Baltic home town at the sea coast, ready to set into motion whatever is static: "The hazy stillness on the water . . . demanded almost to be shattered" (13).[6] As Susie and her friend stalk two bourgeois lovers and call them names, it is significantly by manipulating language that the two girls disrupt the conventions and the order of the little Baltic sea town: Susie takes delight in word plays and punning, in parodically imitating the school headmaster's Saxon dialect (*Master Mason* 37), and, above all, in offending bourgeois respectability with sexual equivocation.[7] Even in the first chapter, Susie enjoys creating her own linguistic carnival in which she becomes linked to subversive laughter ("Lachen"), and giggling ("Kichern") (14-15; in the German text 11-12).

Susie's exuberant play with signifiers — her pleasure with words, puns, and name-calling — is, to apply Julia Kristeva's terminology, a "maniacal eroticization of speech," as if she were "gulping it down, sucking on it" ("Microcosm" 42). According to Kristeva, such a "non-communicative, exhibitionistic" sense of speech and play with signifiers is typical for a "borderlander," a person who lacks a sense of home and a sense of boundaries ("Microcosm" 42). Living in her father's house but destined to leave it for somebody else's house, Susie is indeed such a threshold person who finds herself "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law," as Lynda Boose describes the precarious position of the daughter figure in a patriarchal family (67). But just as the daughter's liminal status endows her with "the special power of the weak" (Boose 67), so Susie's favourite linguistic strategy of subversion is the principle of negativity, even lying: "All we have to do is keep saying no" (18), she tells her girlfriend, when their pranks become uncovered. When accused of calling names, "Susie collected herself quickly: "'That's a dirty lie,' she said, loudly and indignantly" (19). Here, the manipulation of language is a strategy that is directed against another woman, as it is often used as a weapon against her girlfriends, at the same time that it serves as a strategy to deal with a tyrannical patriarchal power at home.

An expert manipulator of signifiers outside the house, Susie is, however, often silenced when she enters the literal house and rebels openly against her father: "'If you don't shut your trap this instant,' Mr. Ihle flew at her with menace in his voice, 'I'll give you what for'" (102). According to Foucault, "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions" (*History* 101), but, since the same discourse can be both a strategy of power and a strategy of resistance, silence can also encode an oppositional strategy. The women in Ihle's house often fight back by surrounding Ihle with silence. Occasionally leaving the house to escape the patriarch's wrath, they isolate Ihle within the house (e.g. 50), forcing him to search for companionship elsewhere.

"Father-daughter stories are full of literal houses, castles, or gardens in which fathers . . . lock up their daughters," writes Boose (33), and most of *Maurermeister* is set in the house that gives the work its title. Yet for Susie, the house is more than a simple dungeon. Showing the house, the yard, and her father's shop to her friend Hedwig Ribau, eleven-year-old Susie Ihle ends up sitting in the new family carriage, in intimate closeness with her friend: "Hier fühlte man sich geheimnisvoll in Sicherheit. Es war ein Haus im Hause" (66), "They felt secretive and secure. It was a house within a house" (68). On the surface, these sentences evoke the archetypal function of the image of the house; the house serves as a shelter, a notion that John Elliot in *Our Daily Bread* reaffirms when he invites his daughters who are troubled in their marriages back to the security of their parental home.

But this atmosphere of security is instantly subverted. The German phrase "geheimnisvoll in Sicherheit" is more telling than the English translation, in that "ge*heim*nisvoll" not only contains the word "heim" (= home) but as a whole word also means the opposite of home: it denotes secretiveness, at the same time that it is related to "un*heim*lich," the uncanny. "Geheimnisvoll" as a premodifier for "Sicherheit" is an odd collocation in German verging on the oxymoronic, as it appears deliberately to undermine the sense of "Sicherheit" in the rest of the house. The phrase suggests the presence of a potential intruder and disturber of peace who is not somebody outside the house, but somebody *in* the larger house itself — the father figure.

The novel describes several scenes where the father intrudes suddenly and violently into his daughter's space, where he makes entrances that are like assaults on her body. Just as Elliot's daughter Gladys confesses as an adult woman, "'I am afraid of him [her father]' . . . 'Just as mother was'" (285),[8] so the scene in which Susie is "geheimnisvoll in Sicherheit" is preceded by a chapter that describes Master Ihle's violent entrance into the house that forces Susie and her sister to hide in the wardrobe to escape the father's wrath. Although to the reader Ihle appears very much like the comic stock figure of the ridiculously wrathful tyrant (Blodgett 134), for his wife and the children, the threat is real enough: "What should I do?," Mrs. Ihle asks, "If I say anything he just hits me" (49).

It is the adverb "unheimlich" (uncanny) that the narrator uses when the father enters the house to indicate that, then, the "heimisch" quality becomes negated. Given this textual play on the absence of "Heim" and the novel's title with its emphasis on the house, the novel underscores the separation between "Haus" and "Heim," a distinction that Martin Heidegger emphasizes some decades later, when he asks rhetorically: "do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that *dwelling* occurs in them?" (324). For Heidegger, "dwelling" ("wohnen") means to live in peace, to be at home, a sense that Susie only experiences in the house "within the house," where she discovers her own home, that is her body and her language in the intimacy with her girlfriend whose language Susie admires and mimics.[9]

Susie's voice of *Widerstand*, of resistance and protest, is also developed in dialogue with her mother, at the same time that her critical discourse is paradoxically *not* directed against the father, whose tyrannies she deeply resents, but against her mother, whom Susie blames for being impotent, for not being able to protect herself or her children: "[Y]ou are just as frightened of him as we are" (49), she tells her mother accusingly. Unlike Mrs. Elliot, who is set up as a strong matriarch in *Our Daily Bread*, Mrs. Ihle retreats into a sentimental language of romanticism and goes to her children for protection, occasionally sleeping in her daughter's room to avoid being sexually assaulted by her intoxicated husband. (Grove explores this motif of rape in marriage in more explicit detail in his Canadian work *Settlers of the Marsh*). While Susie rebels openly against her mother, she oscillates discursively between silence and eulogy in relation to her father, a psychological phenomenon that feminists — Luce Irigaray, Jane Gallop, and Christine Froula — have theorized as the daughter's (or the father's) seduction. To quote Irigaray: "the only redemption of her value as a girl would be to seduce the father, to draw from him the mark if not the admission of some interest" (quoted in Gallop *Seduction* 70).

In the first part of the three-part novel, Grove provides a socio-psychological explanation for this phenomenon. The school — even a school for "höhere Töchter" with exclusively female teachers — lays the emotional seed for the daughter's identification not with a mother but with a patriarchal father figure by giving birth to children's patriotism and arousing "the children's first 'great feelings'" (90). This explains the traumatic emotional reaction to the *Kaiser's* death in the fourteen-year-old Susie in 1888:

> This event, the death of the old Emperor, was the first, and it remained the only experience of Susie's entire youth that caused her real and protracted grief. Even when later her mother was suddenly taken from them and died, she did not suffer so immediately and so selflessly as now in the case of this death, which in no way affected her directly. (88-89)

In Susie's young life, the old Kaiser, in contrast to her father, is the stereotyped image of a kindly old man with a white beard who loves flowers above all. This image of the Kaiser, complementing that of her wrathful, erratic, younger, self-made father works together to constitute the image of the ideal father in her mind, an image that conjures up strength and power and that partly displaces the mother as a figure of positive identification.

And yet, trying to please the father, the adult Susie at the same time struggles to separate from the father, to leave the father's house and to escape the story he has created about her. After her mother's death and Ihle's remarriage, the eighteen-year-old Susie "felt less than ever before that her father's house was her house" (221), a situation that leads to the eventual confrontation between father and daughter. As Lynda Boose puts it: "The daughter's struggle with her father is one of separation, not displacement. Its psychological dynamics thus locate the conflict inside [the] inner family space" (33). The intrusion of a male rival and the creation of "male-female-male syntax" (32) produce the dynamics in the father/daughter text and initiate the daughter's departure from her father's house. In contrast, separation is not the crucial feature in father/son texts: "In the archetypal father-son structure, the son's departure is authorized inside a circular pattern that predicts both his inevitable return and the concurrent threat of displacement/usurpation that he will pose" (32). The son eventually returns to take the father's place.

"OUR DAILY BREAD" (1928) begins at such a point of separation; it starts where *Maurermeister* ends, namely, with the children's marriage and departure. As in *Maurermeister*, the generational conflicts in *Our Daily Bread* intersect with the language issue, but are contextualized in different terms. On the surface, the generational conflict opposes Elliot's austere, saving, luxury despising life to his children's love of pleasure, luxury and the desire for quick money. Discussing his novel *Two Generations* (1939) in *In Search of Myself* (1946), Grove writes that his task had been to portray "the transition, in Ontario, from pioneer conditions to an urbanized rural life which brought about a conflict between fathers and sons" (440), an interpretation that has influenced many readers of *Our Daily Bread.* Margaret Stobie, for example, describes John Elliot as "an anachronism in the commercial world": "Grove seems to be saying that the family belongs to the agricultural phase of human existence, [and] that it cannot survive in the commercial world" (107).[10]

Thus, the geographical movement of the children who leave the house to find better living conditions elsewhere is interpreted by Elliot (and most readers) as their choosing different paths in their lives and their refusal to follow the old (agricultural) tradition. *Our Daily Bread* is in fact preceded by the biblical epigraph: "And his sons walked not in his way" (iii, 1 Samuel, 8:3). But what about the daughters? Elliot (and most critics) have chosen to ignore the fact that as in *Maurermeister* the rebelling daughter is constantly in danger of being seduced (or co-opted) by the patriarchal power structure she rebels against, so Elliot's children are drawn into, and in many ways repeat, Elliot's fatal ways, even by attempting to create new and different lives for themselves. Almost every single son and daughter fails economically *not* because they refuse to follow Elliot's dream but because they share his obsession of claiming some territory of their own, of establishing their own "houses" of power and proclaiming themselves masters.[11] As Elliot makes a financial success of his land but lets it eat up his soul and destroy his emotional life, so his children opt for the pleasures of life, but become slaves to the land through the burden of debt it imposes.

The patriarchal influence goes even further, since the children adopt the "father's" language. Throughout the novel, Elliot is described as having a very deterministic perspective that has little to do with the tragic inevitability that some readers see as the key to the novel (e.g. Pacey 52). At the beginning of the novel, Elliot feels that he is being "rushed along an unknown path" (9), and, in another scene, after letting his violent anger take over against his son Arthur, Elliot realizes that "he had acted under a compulsion stronger than his will" (188). Repeatedly, the protagonist absolves himself from responsibility by resorting to a deterministic language, a discourse that is repeated by his children.[12]

Grove critiques the patriarch's deterministic pessimism and emotional crustiness by presenting him as a *senex*-figure typical of the comic rather than the tragic genre (Blodgett 123) and by evoking his premature senility as a metaphor for spiritual death — a death-in-life stasis. With his white hair and beard, Elliot's old age comes to allegorize a state of mental petrification: "What is the use of talking?" (235), Elliot asks wearily and decides no longer to "correct" his children because they are "beyond correction" (134). And to a certain extent they are, not because they have gone their own ways but because they have started to adopt their father's petrified discourse: "What's the use?" is a sentence that is repeated verbatim by his sons John (241) and Norman (368) and by his son-in-law Pete (337) who, like Elliot, longs for death.

Reflecting on his children's characters earlier in the novel, Elliot anticipates the generational conflict as inevitable; each child has traits of its father and its mother at the same time that they also have "a third thing" (12) — their individuality — which strikes Elliot as "mysterious" and "incomprehensible." Almost like a Hawthorne villain, Elliot hopes to read and manipulate this mysterious force to make it serve the teleology of his life — his territorial dream of claiming as many pieces of land from the wilderness as possible.[13] The children's only strategy of resistance is to hide their individualities in their relationship with the father with the result that, like Richard Ihle's daughters, most of Elliot's children remain strangers, even to the point of becoming pure abstractions. When Elliot's youngest son Arthur dies in the War in 1918, this death "affected his father strongly. Not that he mourned greatly; he had hardly known the boy; but the first of his children had died!" (241-42).

ON THE SURFACE, the mothers in *Our Daily Bread* and *Maurermeister* appear almost diametrically opposed to each other in their status and power: Mrs. Ihle submits to her husband's whims like an intimidated child, while Mrs. Elliot is set up as the archetypal, powerful matriarch, with much of the narrative suggesting that she is the one who quietly dominates in the Elliot household. The novel starts out with a vignette on the matriarch's elaborate preparations to go to town: "Mrs. Elliot sat enthroned while Cathleen combed her hair, Isabel buttoned her shoes, and Henrietta laid out her dark-grey silks" (15). Meanwhile, John Elliot, who admires his wife's "quiet majesty" (264), adopts the guise of the queen's humble servant and gets the carriage ready. John Elliot and his eldest son John recognize that she, not Elliot, is the one with the power to hold the family together, and as if to prove them right, the family indeed disintegrates shortly after Martha's death.

Yet this novel does not celebrate the power of matriarchy but critically draws attention to the fact that Martha Elliot's power is not in ultimate contradiction with its apparent opposite — patriarchy. Martha's matriarchal powers complement Elliot's patriarchal domination in the family as they are appropriated by (and ultimately serve) John Elliot's territorial dream. Any idealization of matriarchy is undercut from the beginning of the novel, when the narrator speaks of the "worried harshness of her words" (21) toward her children, suggesting that the problems of everyday life erupt into what Elliot would like to perceive as an idyllic mother-child relationship. Also, as Martha is ready to help her daughters in need, so she herself can only walk by leaning heavily on her daughters' arms;

the symbiotic mother-baby relationship is extended, albeit in a reversed form, into adult life. For her adult children, Martha never becomes Martha the individual but always remains the archetypal Mother, an indicator that the relationships have stopped growing and become petrified.

It is Martha, moreover, who repeatedly disrupts the discourse of determinism that is so characteristic of Elliot and his children, as she does, for example, when her daughter Cathleen announces the visit of Woodrow Ormond, who later becomes Cathleen's husband. In Cathleen's, as well as the narrator's discourse, this union with Woodrow comes about without Cathleen's active volition: "Without taking thought of what might be implied in her words, she had issued half an invitation to him" (15). Confronting Cathleen with the fact that she has to take responsibility for her own desires — a responsibility of which Cathleen would like to absolve herself, Mrs. Elliot asks: "[W]hy does that man come?" and "Do you like him?" (21). The conversations between mother and daughter, however, is interrupted and never continued, suggesting that the mother's discourse is not effective in disrupting the cloud of determinism that Cathleen has wrapped around herself like the rest of the (less educated) Elliot children. In her marriage Cathleen becomes an appendage of her successful husband; she gives up teaching for empty social functions and claims that she leads this life because of her husband, so that even the most educated of the Elliot children absolves herself of responsibility for her life's course.

Despite the differences between the two women, Martha Elliot and Bertha Ihle develop very similar resisting strategies toward the end of their lives: both women become what the German text describes as "wunderlich" (95), peculiar or odd, terms that encode the women's disruption of "normalcy."[14] In both cases the women react against the patriarchal structures of their households by deliberately excluding their husbands and children from their lives. Slamming doors and making loud scenes with her husband, Mrs. Ihle openly rebels against her husband's oppression by appropriating his own tyrannical strategies, while Mrs. Elliot — Bartleby-like — quietly refuses any further intimacies and contacts with her husband. By pretending to be "normal," Bertha Ihle tricks her husband into going to Bad Ems for six weeks to cure his sore throat, and then indulges in a carnivalesque buying spree while the bills for all "extravagances" welcome Mr. Ihle several days after his return home. He can do nothing but pay them. Similarly, Martha Elliot's disruptive behaviour culminates in her spectacular dancing adventure. Partially recovered from cancer surgery, she drives to a town-dance and insists on dancing with every male present, while her family at home in vain searches for the mother. "For once in my life I have had a good time!" (131), she triumphantly tells her shocked husband upon her return home.

Nevertheless, just as any "carnivalesque" freedom is temporary, so a simple disruption of normalcy does not bring about genuine change. Grove's texts illustrate Michel Foucault's point that a simple reversal of the power relation does not lead to ultimate liberation but often perpetuates the structure of a power relation that can easily be reversed again: the nature of the power play itself does not change.[15] After what is interpreted as an aborted suicide attempt by her family and by her doctor, Mrs. Ihle is taken to a mental institution, where she dies, leaving her daughters very vulnerable in the same patriarchal family structure.

Equally incapable of communicating her resistance in an effective language, Mrs. Elliot leaves a very problematic legacy to her children; her rebelling words are related many years later through Gladys, the only witness of her mother's last days of life.

> Oh, she [Martha] cried, I don't even know any longer whether there's a God or not. If there is, I don't care. Come here, listen. I want to whisper to you. You may think I've had so many children because I was fond of them. No! They just came. Because I lived an evil life with your father. Look at me! — And she suddenly bared her body: a terrible sight! (133)

On the surface, this expression of an almost existential despair and her bitter self-condemnation as "the harlot of Babylon" (133) appear to be a result of sexual repressions that inevitably links sex with guilt, an interpretation adopted by most readers. However, the confession of sin followed by an almost Dantean sense of retributive punishment — Martha's awareness of her destruction by abdominal cancer — are rooted in a much deeper psychological and moral feeling of guilt than her sexual language can express.

Martha's sexualized discourse is the closest she comes to expressing a mother's feeling of guilt for having borne ten children not for her own (or for the children's) sake but solely as products of Elliot's territorial dream. She realizes that through the trap of her sexuality, she has become a complicitous agent of Elliot's territorial dream and thus has sinned against her children before they were even born. In the end, she admits to herself (and to her oldest daughter Gladys) that she is close to her first-born only, but that all the other children remained "strangers" in her life (88). Earlier in the novel, Martha Elliot is shocked, when her daughter Mary refuses to have any more children telling Martha that there are "ways and means" to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Unable to express some solidarity with her daughter, Martha is equally incapable of articulating her newly found wisdom and her condemnation of Elliot's dream in an effective, resisting language; she rebels against Elliot by refusing to have him near her in the last months of her life, but is incapable of telling him what she accuses him of.

Unlike Bertha Ihle, who is quietly sent off to an asylum and thus effectively silenced, Martha deliberately chooses silence as her strategy: having no effective language to communicate her newly found awareness, Martha refuses to speak to most of her children. The brief legacies she communicates before her death are ambiguous and, oscillating between two extremely different discourses, they achieve the opposite of what they set out to do. Martha can only communicate her guilt to Gladys in incoherent fragments, and, as a result, Gladys escapes in horror from her mother's confession by becoming even more firmly submerged in the conformity of her rotten marriage with Frank (134). Then falling back to the coherence of her "old" language with two of her other children, Martha perpetuates the patriarchal pattern that has dominated her life even in her legacy to her children. Hoping to warn John and Isabel not to lock themselves into the prison houses of doomed marriages, she tells her oldest son that his future wife Lillian is no "farmer's wife" (108), as she tells Isabel that her chosen partner lacks the proper "descent" (107). Her evocation of marriage in terms of a "good household," or patriarchal *oikos*,[16] is not only ineffective as a true warning, but makes her an involuntary accomplice of patriarchy. It ironically causes John and Isabel, once married, to stick it out in their rotten marriages in order forever to prove to their mother that they have made the right decision.

This motif of the mother's complicity in the perpetuation of patriarchy is also problematized in *Maurermeister*, where Mrs. Ihle tells her daughters the story of their grandmother: "The old woman, though; she made your grandfather's life such hell that once, when he was drunk, he tried to beat the old woman to death with an axe" (44). Not only has Bertha Ihle swallowed her husband's version of his mother as "a devil incarnate" (47), but Mrs. Ihle's story of her husband's origins presents the wife as the scapegoat who is responsible not only for the troubles in the marriage but also for her husband's violence. A victim of her husband's assaults, Bertha Ihle discloses in her discourse that she has deeply internalized her victimizer's rationalization, namely, that it is the woman who is responsible when she is assaulted by her husband.

In both novels the daughters rebel against the mother's complicity as they rebel against patriarchy itself, yet the mother's complicity already anticipates the containment of opposition in the next generation. Just as Susie Ihle deliberately refuses to follow her sister's example of feminine conformity by becoming a "German housewife," so most of Martha Elliot's daughters attempt to resist the notion of a patriarchal marriage. The androgynous Henrietta negotiates a contract so that she will at least keep her financial independence in her marriage, but her language of patriarchal resistance inevitably slips into the discourse of the market place: Pete can only have her "provided [he] can pay the price" (62). Once married, their relationship turns into a continual power struggle in which Henrietta eventually asserts herself as "master of the house." Conversely, Cathleen speaks the language of "a new ideal of manhood" (45), only to subject her own discourse to this new master's discourse once she agrees to marry him. And Isabel, like her namesake Isabel Archer, adopts a discourse of romantic love, selflessly giving her "virgin love" to redeem her husband-to-be whom everyone else despises (41), only to find out that there is no redemption in marriage.

Margaret presents the most challenging alternative. Refusing to get married so as not to be subjugated by any man, she speaks in a deliberately patriarchal language "I'll be my own master" (110), she counters her brother-in-law, when he suggests that a woman's destiny is inevitably marriage and motherhood. Refusing to be tied in any master/slave relationship, she subverts the very idea of mastery by speaking a parodic discourse of "mastery." By appropriating a masculine language to resist the patriarchal notion of a woman's destiny, Margaret manages to walk a very fine line between parodic imitation of, and co-optation by, the patriarchal language.

In a sense, this is the strategy Susie attempts to use in her struggle for independence, and yet, Susie's language oscillates between Henrietta's master discourse and Margaret's parodic imitation of it. Toward the end of *Maurermeister*, Susie's rebellion against her father becomes more and more open and defiant, at the same time that her own private language of resistance also becomes more "masculine," drawing very strongly on terms that the French feminist critic Hélène Cixous has identified as belonging to the masculine "economy of the proper"[17]: "Sie [Susie] wollte ein eigenes Haus haben: niemanden über sich: ihr eigener Herr sein: wer sie beherrschen wollte, der musste ihr imponieren" (243).[18] The language used in this quotation is the discourse of mastery, of ruling and commanding respect, of appropriation and property, in brief, a discourse that lacks the parodic twist that Margaret's language has. Here, we may ask with Hélène Cixous:

> If the position of mastery culturally / comes back to men, what will become of / (our) femininity when we find ourselves / in this position? /
> When we use a master discourse? ("Exchange" 136)

As Susie adopts the language of patriarchy without any apparent distance to the language she speaks, she is in danger of replicating patriarchy, of accepting and internalizing the master/slave power structure of her parental home. She is tempted to marry Consul Blume because his title would give her the powerful status of "Frau Konsul," and the only reason that keeps her from making the ultimate decision is that Consul Blume ("flower") lacks the one thing that would make him a perfect husband (in her eyes): he lacks masculine aggression, or in other words, he refuses to be (like) her father.

The fact that Susie decides to marry the Consul in the end suggests for most readers the end of resistance and the acceptance of a very unsatisfying reality principle. But the novel also allows a more optimistic (and a more resisting) reading, a reading that emphasizes Susie's growth. On her very last confrontation with her father, Susie (re)discovers the traces of a new feminine voice of resistance, a language that is rooted in her childhood experience. Just as Julia Kristeva stresses the importance of negativity and disruption in relation to the masculine "symbolic order" as the most effective strategy of feminine resistance in a patriarchal order

("Woman" 137), so many of Susie's sentences in her last fight with her father are negations, a language that resists and exposes her father's hollow truths by simply negating his assertions. Asked to obey her new stepmother, Susie quietly responds by saying: "That's not my mother" (240), adding, "My Mama's dead" (241). Here, the new voice and strength of verbal resistance are rooted in her mother's memory, and it is this new voice that prompts Ihle's violent and physical attack, his "iron grip around her throat" (241), as if he wants to cut off her new, empowered voice. The fact that his grip around her throat signifies a "release" (242) to Susie suggests that for the first time in her life she has consciously distanced herself from her father.[19]

Granted, the novel does not ultimately resolve the father/daughter conflict and thus turns into "frustrated comedy" (Blodgett 137, 147), but it is equally important to note that the ending is deliberately vague and open-ended: "'I've got something important to tell him'" (242), is Susie's commission to the Consul, when she summons him to a neutral meeting place. "Something important" is the typical borderline discourse in which the "message" is deliberately relegated into the gaps of the text, into the "not-to-be-read." On the surface, Susie's elusive discourse suggests her acceptance of a union with the Consul, but on a deeper level the important message may be seen in her changed attitude to this man, after she has shaken off her falsely romantic notions of the strong, masculine man modelled on her father. Susie had rejected Blume earlier because she looked at him through her father's eyes: "What would Papa think of me. He'd laugh me to scorn with the little Consul" (186).

I do not mean to read the ending as a romantic resolution and even less to suggest that it leads to an ultimate female liberation; Susie's need to *attach* herself to a man is highly problematic, especially since she has barely *detached* herself from her parental home. But Susie has gained a new perspective on her father, and there is hope that she has come to see the Consul's lack of aggression in a different light, after she stops looking at him through her father's censoring eyes. Also, given Susie's linguistic flexibility and her resisting courage, she has the potential to rewrite the meaning of her name and title (should she really become Frau Konsul).

"My sympathies were always with the women. Yet I was no sentimentalist; in my books I gave the facts and let them speak for themselves," Grove writes in *In Search of Myself* (224). And yet, *Maurermeister* and *Our Daily Bread* illustrate that such "facts" may encode a masculine bias: Grove presents us with women who are discursively subversive and playful and who continually undermine and disrupt masculine self-seriousness, but Grove also limits these women's subversive powers. Martha Elliot, for example, is doomed to die once she tries to break out of discursive normalcy; realizing that she cannot communicate her legacy to her children, she dies in despair. He daughter Margaret, the most independent woman in the novel, really lives on the border of the novel; her independence is relegated into the gaps of Grove's text, suggesting that Grove is either not willing, or not capable of writing her parodic mimicking of the patriarchal language. And Susie Ihle's story ends abruptly, once she has found a very precarious voice to confront the father, so that the seeds of her discursive resistance are never allowed to bloom in the novel.

Thus the exploration of women's discursive resistance in *Maurermeister* and *Our Daily Bread* affirms Grove's deep interest in, and sympathy with, the plight of female characters in a patriarchal household, but the novels also point to his limitations as a male author trying to write the feminine voice of resistance. And, perhaps more importantly, these novels — despite their gender subtexts — force us to recognize the author's own ambivalent nostalgia for patriarchal power structures.

NOTES

[1] Elsa's "Autobiography" is amongst the Djuna Barnes papers at University of Maryland.

[2] Like *Maurermeister*, Elsa's autobiography describes "her mother's mental illness and death, her father's decision to remarry, her hatred of her stepmother and her own decision, at age eighteen, to leave home" (Hjartarson 275-76).

[3] Shortly before her death in 1927, Elsa suggested in her personal writing that her conflict with her father (and her father's language) was never resolved: "I left my father's house, protection, money, now I am in his house back again, trodden on, jeered at . . . it is my father's clutch!" ("Letters" 20). Equating the German language with "the father's" discourse, she even felt "nauseated at German sound" and longed to express herself in English — the language in which she wrote her autobiography ("Letters" 20).

[4] See, for example, Grove's homage to Nietzsche in his collection of poems, *Wanderungen* (51-53), or his tribute to Nietzsche in *In Search of Myself* (166-67). "Grove did not create Nietzschean characters, but his protagonists frequently engage in philosophical questions about their existence which resemble Nietzschean inquiries" (13), writes Axel Knönagel in his study of Nietzschean philosophy in Grove's writing. Knönagel, though, does not even touch on the issue of *Sprachkrise*, in which Nietzsche's philosophy and Grove's fiction deeply intersect.

[5] German *wider* = against, contrary to, in opposition to.

[6] Unless otherwise indicated, the English quotations are from Paul Gubbins' translation of the work. The page references for quotations in German refer to the original German work.

[7] Hidden behind shrubbery Susie and her friend Betty shout to the lovers: "Ihr sollt euch vermäääählen" (12), "You ought to get ma-a-a-r-ried" (16), and later, getting carried away by their prank, they give their earlier sentence a sexual twist: "Ihr sollt euch vermehren!!" (13), "Ought to reproduce" (17). Unfortunately the joke is somewhat lost in the English translation, as the words "vermählen" and "vermehren" rhyme in German but not in translation. Susie and Betty also play on Karl Schade's name, calling him "Kahl" (= bald) Schade (11).

[8] In *Our Daily Bread*, Grove gives the motif of the tyrannical, wrathful father an interesting twist, since it is only very late in the novel that Elliot's wrath surfaces. In the beginning of the novel, he is introduced to the reader as "a thinker, [who] had lived a life of introspection, dreams, and ideas" (5). It is in the middle of the novel that we witness the first explosive, hateful attack on his son Arthur who refuses to become a farmer (176).

[9] Yet there are also loaded silences in the dialogue between the two girls, especially when Susie cautiously discloses her father's violence and tyranny to her friend (68). Hedwig, identified as the commandant's daughter in the novel, abruptly shifts the conversation in a different direction, so that the daughter's story of her father's violence is muted even in the relationship between girl-friends.

[10] Similarly, in the words of Douglas Spettigue, *Our Daily Bread* is "the most concentrated of the novels of the decline from the agrarian mode" (132). Comparing *Our Daily Bread* with Quebec writer Ringuet's agricultural novel *Trente Arpents* (1938), Ronald Sutherland maintains that both novels introduce "the beginning of the dissolution of the old order" (6), a dissolution that is symbolized by the fact that "[n]ot one of their many children adopts the values of the father" (9).

[11] Elliot complains that his children don't follow his tradition but the fact remains that five of his children and their husbands and wives turn to farming to make a living (Gladys, Henrietta, Isabel, John, and Norman).

[12] Thinking about her sister Gladys's life, Elliot's daughter Henrietta follows the following train of thought: "Life was leading [Gladys] along a path which she had not chosen except for the fact that she had once on a time chosen a man, Frank Bramley, the druggist" (48-49).

[13] In his growing senility, Elliot, seeding the soil, has a very telling vision: "It seemed to him that, as he had had ten children, ten such seeders as his were being drawn over the prairie, so that, through his children, he had multiplied the land reclaimed from the wilderness by ten" (245). The patriarchal dream of replicating and multiplying himself is thus deeply rooted in the even more powerful territorial dream, the dream of claiming a piece of land as his own.

[14] John Elliot summarizes his reaction to his wife's changed behaviour by formulating only one word, "which came from his lips with the peculiar quality of a bursting bubble. 'Odd!' he said, 'Odd!'" (117).

[15] See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 92-96 and "The Ethic of Care for the Self" 11-12.

[16] In *The Use of Pleasure*, Michel Foucault analyzes the Greek patriarchal notion of the household (*oikos*) in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and stresses the dissymmetry of the relationship between husband and wife (156). For the male, marriage implied "being the head of a family, having authority, exercising a power whose locus of application was in the 'home'" (151). Although the wife is a key figure in the management of the *oikos* (154), it is the husband who governs and guides the wife, as she becomes the "*synergos* he needs for the reasonable practice of economy" (155).

[17] Influenced by Jacques Derrida, Cixous distinguishes between the feminine economy of the gift and the masculine economy of the proper ("Medusa" 259).

[18] I am quoting here in the original German because the English translation transforms Susie's obviously "masculine" discourse in German into feminine terms in English. In the following quotation I italicize the most problematic words: "She wanted to have her own *home* ["Haus" evokes a property = house]; nobody over her: be her

own *mistress* [German "Herr" is masculine and is linked to the verb "herrschen" = to rule over]. Whoever wanted *to give her orders* ["beherrschen" not only has the "herr" in it but literally translated means "to rule over"] must *impress* her ["impress" corresponds to the German "beeindrucken" which Grove deliberately does not use in the German text; "imponieren" linked to Latin "impono" is a much stronger term and has even a touch of intimidation to it]" (238).

[19] The language describing her father's attack is deliberately rapist: "But at that moment her father's great mass came lunging toward her. He seized her by the hair and flung her to the ground. Susie saw him standing over her, his face blood-shot and swollen" (241).

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NATURAL DREAM LEXICON

John Marshall

She's called out of the dark
she's proud she's no longer afraid of

surprised to see she's made herself
so small.
She was on a picnic with her mother

something like men
but all hairy too like beasts
captured us and we're put in their cage
and we are frightened but we get a chance to escape
and we do escape but we've been in the cage
for three weeks and we are very hungry
and we decide to eat berries but we can't remember
and we eat the wrong berries and we get sick
and we're too sick to run away anymore
and they find us and put us back in the cage
what is scary is
they want to eat us
and there's nothing we can do
but they can't eat us because they see how sick we are
so they let us go

so we go straight back home

Strange to forget
how homesick it is to feel and think
of what it is she see's to say.
He won't fool you into believing

anything he can do can help,
nor choose among the little lies of assent
and find his excuse in them.

A little girl visiting Dad
lets him leave the light on awhile.
From the zoo posters they try
lion rhinoceros tiger
it makes them feel better to see
they are not afraid of what they say.
They talk some of those other creatures

also on the wall
which no one alive has ever seen.
She is satisfied

they will not hide
from what they have said.

He will look in on her later

and later in her life.

MARGARET LAURENCE'S SOMALI TRANSLATIONS

Donez Xiques

I long for you, as one
Whose dhow in summer winds
Is blown adrift and lost,
Longs for land, and finds —
Again the compass tells —
A grey and empty sea.

THIS SIX-LINE POEM is one of Margaret Laurence's translations of Somali love lyrics, included in *A Tree for Poverty*, her first book.[1] This remarkable work excellently translates and paraphrases several Somali tales and poems which the young writer collected and edited while she and her husband, Jack, a civil engineer, were living in the British Somaliland Protectorate. Written when she was in her twenties, this important but little-known book was originally published in Africa in 1954. Today it is still considered a landmark by scholars of Somali life and literature. The distinguished linguist B. W. Andrzejewski provides a valuable summary of Laurence's contribution:

> Her book publicized Somali poetry and showed through the excellence of her translations that it was not just anonymous folklore poetry but was a form of high art. She also gave the Somalis who could read English a sense of pride, in that the beauty of their poetry found outside recognition and was presented to the world at large.
>
> (B. W. Andrzejewski, letter to Donez Xiques, 18 March 1989)

One of the first reviews of *A Tree for Poverty* appeared in *War Somali Sidihi*, a fortnightly news-sheet which was produced in the Information Department in Hargeisa. It states: "[Margaret Laurence] has written an introduction full of understanding and sympathy, and in her translation of the poems has shown 'a vision beyond her fellows' in capturing the imagery and imagination of the originals" (23 October 1954). Several months later *A Tree for Poverty* was reviewed by V. H. W. Dowson, an Englishman with an excellent command[2] of the Somali language. He praised Laurence saying: "[She] is to be heartily congratulated not only for being the first to undertake the publication of so large a collection of translations from the Somali, but also for the felicity of her verse.... [She] has caught well the spirit of the original songs" (*The Somaliland Journal*, 1.1 [December 1954]: 52).[3] Encomia such as these rarely circulated outside Africa; and, with the exception of comments by the scholar Clara Thomas, Margaret Laurence's first book has never been the subject of much critical scrutiny.[4]

I wish to look more closely at this work, believing that such scrutiny will help evaluate the corpus of Laurence's work and help understand her development as a writer. An examination of *A Tree for Poverty*, its composition and achievement, reveals a good deal about Laurence as a young writer, her work habits and her concerns. It also raises questions: Why did Laurence devote so much time and energy to writing a book for which it would be difficult to find a publisher? How does this work fit in with her plans of becoming a writer? And why was it reprinted in 1970, sixteen years after the first edition, when Laurence was at the height of her literary career and well-known for her Manawaka novels? Whatever the answers, one thing is clear — Laurence took considerable care in writing *A Tree for Poverty* and she had a keen appreciation of Somali life and culture.[5]

ONE MUST UNDERSTAND that when Laurence undertook these translations in 1951-1952, there were overwhelming difficulties. Somali was an exclusively oral language. It had no orthography. In fact, no written Somali texts were available until the 1970s, more than twenty years after Laurence's book.

Before examining the book itself, however, some background may be useful. When this young woman from the Manitoba prairies set sail from Europe in December 1950 for the Horn of Africa, she did not expect to find literary companions there.[6] She was astonished, consequently, when some weeks after her arrival in the Somaliland Protectorate she came to realize that she was living, as she remarked, in a very "nation of poets."

In Somalia, Margaret Laurence found herself surrounded by a rich, complex, and ancient oral tradition in both poetry and prose, yet was barred from it by cultural and linguistic barriers. Undaunted and intrigued, Laurence nevertheless found a way to enter that world and to experience some of Somalia's rich literary tradition; and she grew to love and respect the Somali people and their country. In their turn, "Somalis speak of her with admiration and affection and regard her as one of their great friends" (BWA, letter to DX, 18 March 1989).[7]

Although Laurence, while living in the Protectorate, undertook the study of Somali, she certainly was not fluent in it. As one of her contemporaries explained, "Somali is a difficult language for Europeans to tackle and it was especially so in those days when there was no official version of its orthography and even educated Somalis when writing to one another were accustomed to using English or Arabic (or in Italian Somaliland, Italian; or, in French Somaliland, French)" (C. J. Martin, letter to DX, 22 April 1989). Laurence obtained from a young Polish scholar, B. W. Andrzejewski, who had recently arrived in the country to pursue linguistic research, and his Somali assistant, Musa Haji Ismail Galaal, literal translations of Somali poetry. And she used these to fashion her own English versions of the poems.[8] Laurence explains in the introduction that she eschewed literalness in order to "remain true to the thought and imagery of the original" (4).

The process of working on these translations is described in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*. Laurence refers to a "three-way process" in describing the method in which she, Musa Galaal, and Andrzejewski worked on the poems. Although Galaal was fluent in English, he would discuss subtler connotations of the words with Andrzejewski in Somali. Then Andrzejewski and Laurence would discuss the lines in English. Laurence explains: "I took notes on the literal meanings, the implications of words, the references to Somali traditions or customs. I would then be able to work on this material later, and attempt to put it into some form approximating a poem, while preserving as much as possible of the meaning and spirit of the original" (*PCB*, 100).

Additional details from Andrzejewski about Laurence's efforts as translator further clarify the process: "Musa was keen on improving his English and made rapid progress. Soon he was able to collaborate with Peggy without my assistance. What is more, Peggy learnt more and more about Somali culture and acquired the skill of collaborating with him. She then worked with him, without me. I never checked with her in detail the final versions of the poems translated in that way" (BWA, letter to DX, 24 November 1991).

Although today Margaret Laurence is remembered for her fiction, she also wrote poetry. In fact, when she was an undergraduate a number of her poems were published in the college literary magazine, and at graduation she received an award for poetry.[9] In her adult years she also wrote poems for friends and family members. Some of these she selected for inclusion in *Dance on the Earth*, her memoirs, which were published posthumously in 1989.

A TREE FOR POVERTY is one hundred and forty-six pages in length and contains three sections: a critical introduction of some thirty pages by Laurence herself, followed by separate sections containing translations of Somali poems and tales accompanied by extensive notes about Somali vocabulary and customs. Laurence comments on approximately ten different types of Somali poetry and presents translations of thirty poems. She also includes paraphrases of thirty-six tales, which are either Somali or Arabic in origin.

In the introductory section Laurence explains that because Somali literature has not been committed to writing, she has undertaken these translations to ensure that the material not be lost and to encourage Somalis themselves to collect and transcribe more of their own literature (3-4).[10] In addition to offering this rationale for the book, Laurence provides an overview of the land, the people, and the culture of Somalia.

Here the reader finds evidence of Laurence's great respect for the Somali people. She describes the country as "a nation of poets" with highly developed literary tastes (p. 1, unnumbered). She praises their achievements and comments on the place of literature in Somali life.

> In a country as barren as this, where the population is almost entirely nomadic and where the actual process of survival demands so much effort and tenacity from each tribesman, it seems remarkable that there should be such a large body of unwritten literature, containing such a high degree of dramatic sense, vivid imagination and wit. (30)

Laurence points out that, although the lives of the average Somali camel-herders are drab and harsh, in their poetry one finds "sensitivity, intelligence, earthy humour, and a delight in lovely clothes and lovely women" (2). Somali poetry and folk-tales are "always available," and are as free to the impoverished nomad as they are to the Sultan. Thus Somali literature, in its way, provides "a tree for poverty to shelter under" (2).[11]

After Somalia adopted a system of orthography in the early 1970s, studies of the literature increased markedly. In the 1950s, however, Laurence may not have fully understood that not only were poets important, but they occupied an *essential* and *unique* role in Somali society. Andrzejewski recently summarized the situation as follows:

> [In Somalia poetry is the main art] providing entertainment and aesthetic pleasure, it is the vehicle of reflective thought and it is a storehouse of the communal memory of past events . . . poetry occupies an elevated position only surpassed by the supreme claims of Divine worship and the powerfully strong bonds of kinship. The prestige which the poets enjoy and the influence which they exert over their public would inspire the envy of their confrères in Western Europe and North America, whose work reaches only a fraction of their compatriots. In Somalia, poetry reaches the masses, and though much of it is high art, it is by no means an elitist pursuit. What is more, poets are commentators on current affairs and use their influence in situations of conflict, whether as an effective offensive weapon or as a means of bringing reconciliation and peace. (Andrzejewski, "Poetry and Camels," 157).

On several occasions Laurence stated that living in Africa for seven years had a profound and positive impact on her.[12] In writing these translations, however, she does not focus on herself. In *A Tree for Poverty* the voice of the introduction is that of both reporter and scholar. Laurence remains in the background and makes no direct statements about her life or personal experiences. The focus remains, appropriately, on Somali literature. A notable shift in Laurence's style does occur, however, when she actually describes that literature and in the notes which she wrote to accompany the translations. The tone then is much more animated than in the earlier pages of the introduction.

A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT FORMS of poetry are used in Somalia, each with its own style, metre, and rhythm, its own particular function. Because Somali poetry is a highly developed and complex art, poetical forms and rules of composition tend to be formal. In addition, as Said Samatar points out, "The language of Somali verse shows a strong prejudice towards beauty. Vividness, clarity and precision of thought are prized but they are regulated by rigid rules of alliteration" (60). A skilled poet, therefore, is one who can express his thoughts and feelings with originality and freshness of phrases, within the prescribed framework of the type of poem he has chosen to compose.

The second section of *A Tree for Poverty* contains Laurence's translations of Somali poetry. In some cases, she found it necessary to add words or phrases in order to make clear a concept contained within a single Somali word for which English has no exact equivalent. But Laurence also reiterates: "in no sense [have I] embroidered the original text or developed the thought of any poem" (4).

She distinguishes among poems that are recited, chanted, or sung to a tune and presents translations of two types of Somali poetry: the *belwo*, which is a short, lyrical popular song, usually a love song; and the *gabei*, a long, narrative poem.[13] Because the *gabei* is considered to be one of the most complicated and subtle types of Somali poetry, a man who is talented and accomplished in this form is very highly regarded.[14]

When one examines Laurence's translations of these poems, it becomes obvious that she worked diligently on her texts so that an English reader could experience some sense of the beauty of the Somali original.[15] The following examples illustrate her success in conveying two essential features of the *belwo*: the single image and a strong alliterative pattern.[16]

1. The curving of your breasts
Like apples sweet and small,
Tolmoon, I will know again
When night turns dusk to dark.

(Laurence, TP, 34)

In the next *belwo*, the weaving of thought and image — the dhow adrift on the sea — is further heightened by the sustained alliteration of "l" and by the presence of long, open vowels.

2. I long for you, as one
Whose dhow in summer winds
Is blown adrift and lost,
Longs for land, and finds —
Again the compass tells —
A grey and empty sea.
(Laurence, TP, 31)

For English readers to appreciate the formidable literary task which Laurence as translator set for herself, a comparison of her versions with translations published more than a decade later by the distinguished scholars B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis is interesting. Undoubtedly, their command of the language, their understanding of Somali rhythmic patterns and knowledge of the scholarship of the previous decade are impressive. However, when Laurence's 1954 version is compared with theirs, I believe English readers will find that Laurence has succeeded in producing translations which are themselves poems. Thus, for the non-specialist *A Tree for Poverty* offers a very helpful means of access to and appreciation of an unfamiliar country and culture.

3.a. When you die you will enter the earth
Let not the preacher then turn you from your love-song.
(Andrzejewski and Lewis, 146)[17]

3.b. Since, when you die, delight
By earth's silence will be stilled,
Then let not now the priest
Drive you from your song.
(Laurence, TP, 31)

In Laurence's version (3.b.), the careful alliteration of "d" and "s" is woven into the poem along with the antithetical notions of song and silence, creating a powerful impact on the reader. In the next *belwo* (4), Laurence combines attention to rhythmic effect with an interwoven pattern of assonance and alliteration to produce a translation which is more effective as a poem in English than Andrzejewski and Lewis's version.

4.a. (It is because of) your fine mouth,
Its scent and sight,
That I postpone my journey, oh Flower!
(Andrzejewski and Lewis, 43)

4.b. Your bright mouth and its loveliness,
Your fragrance, the look of you —
Ubah, flower-named, for these
My journey is forgotten.
(Laurence, TP, 33)

AMONG HER THIRTY TRANSLATIONS of Somali poems Laurence also includes examples of the *gabei*. In contrast to the *belwo*, the *gabei* generally is a long, serious poem which has complex rules governing its content, vocabulary and style. The chant of the *gabei*, moreover, has a simple melody with great variations in the length of the notes: "The tempo of the chant is slow and majestic, seldom changing throughout the poem. All emotional appeal depends on the expressive power of the words, and the reciter does not especially modulate his voice or accentuate any words or lines, thus giving the impression of superb restraint and stylization (*Somali Poetry*, 47-48). The *gabei* is a form generally undertaken by the more accomplished senior poets, some of whom have been famous statesmen and warriors.

In assessing Laurence's work as a translator, it is important to examine her efforts with this difficult form.[18] *A Tree for Poverty* includes a few *gabei* translations, among them "Qaraami," a love *gabei* by the poet Elmii Bonderii.[19] It is somewhat difficult to assess Laurence's work with this form since, for the most part, only brief extracts from *gabei* are included in *A Tree for Poverty*. "To a Faithless Friend," for example, comprises only 9 lines there. However, her manuscript translation of the complete *gabei* (in the archives at York University) runs to over 130 lines. I also have discovered that the entire *gabei* was published in *The Somaliland Journal* (1956).[20] The typescript for this *gabei* accompanied by Laurence's notes, the Somali text, and the literal translation which had been given to her by Andrzejewski and Galaal are in the Laurence archives at York University.[21] These items offer a unique opportunity to observe Laurence the translator at work.[22] Moreover, since Andrzejewski and Lewis's rendition of this *gabei* is also included in *Somali Poetry*, a comparison of the two versions of "To a Faithless Friend" enables us to appreciate Laurence's work.[23] Her ability to convey the dramatic moment is everywhere apparent in her translation.

Because of the length of the gabei poems, a few examples must serve to illustrate this point. "To a Faithless Friend" deals with a situation in which a man finds himself deserted by a friend. Feeling bereft and angry, he appeals to his kinsmen. In reading Laurence's translation, I find echoes both of "Beowulf" and the biblical canticle of Deborah in *Judges*, ch. 5:[24]

Version A

(I sing of) the man on whose behalf I shouted for help until my
    lungs were dry,
For whom I ran with shoulders bent until I was completely
    without breath,
And for whom I anxiously raised the rallying cry "Habar
    Habuusheed" until people mistook me for a nightjar,

> And on account of whom my skin itched from my rapid passage
>   through the "jillab" grass,
> And as I made my way through the night I fell and tore
>   myself on "hagar" bushes.
> Like the Ethiopians in attack, a mass of warriors,
> Numerous as you know, I assembled for him . . .
> (Andrzejewski and Lewis, "Ingratitude,"
> *Somali Poetry,* 120)[25]

Version B

> Ye Tribesmen gathered here, my song is of sorrow,
> And of that man, the faithless, for whose sake
> My lungs were parched with a desperate call to war —
> "Awake and arm, oh Habar Habuush men!
> The spear of vengeance is thrust at your kinsmen's heart!"
> So strongly pulsed my cry that warriors, waking,
> Took it for the doom-knowing "huur," the fearful bird
> Whose eyes alone may see the Angel of Death
> Walking the earth in dark and terrible splendour.
>
> If memory lives in you, recall the time.
> Through the hostile night I journeyed for his sake —
> The "jillab's" bitter branches lashed my skin
> And stabbing thorns of "hagar" tore my flesh.
> (Laurence, "To A Faithless Friend," 138)

Laurence's choice of "Ye Tribesmen" as the opening phrase immediately establishes the context. The sibilant "s" moves through lines 1 and 2, linking the sound of the words with the sense of sorrow. Then, in line 4, the strongly accented opening words "awake and arm" combine with the alliteration in each hemistich to effectively convey the speaker's sense of urgency. The adjective "hostile" (11) extends the warlike feeling of the previous lines and the "l" runs from "lives" to hostile" to "jillib" and the vivid phrases which follow; while at the same time, the repetition of "s" (12-13) both echoes the poem's opening lines and moves forward into a new and more frightening context with the words "stabbing," "lashed" and "tore."

These translations show Laurence's appreciation of complex poetic techniques and an ability to employ her own considerable skill in producing a book of lasting value and significance.

THE FINAL SECTION OF *A Tree for Poverty* deals with Somali prose and includes thirty-six tales which are either Somali or Arabic in origin. Margaret Laurence distinguishes between those which she has translated and others which she has paraphrased.[26] In discussing Laurence's efforts in this genre,

B. W. Andrzejewski clarifies several points. He states: "I never checked any of her prose narratives in detail and they are not translations but rather 'tales retold' where the principal fidelity applies only to themes but not to the actual wording" (BWA, letter to DX, 24 November 1991).

Although the translated stories generally are brief, their subject matter is quite diverse. Among them, for example, are beast fables — "How the Meat was Divided"; moral tales — "Right and Wrong"; tales with fantastic elements — "The Strange and Terrible Camel"; stories which explain a proverb — "High or Low"; and humorous tales, often dealing with the cleverness of a character or the reversal of a situation — "The Man Who Had Four Wives" and "The Townsmen."

The paraphrased Arabic stories, by contrast, are quite different in content, style, and source from the translated ones. Laurence obtained paraphrased stories not from written sources but from oral ones. That is, they were conveyed to her, partly in Somali, but mainly in English, by Ahmed Nasir and Hersi Jama, who acted out the tales in a spirited fashion, with gestures and facial expressions. Their renditions gave Laurence a sense of the way in which the Somali people for centuries have orally delivered their stories.[27] Laurence states that her English versions are faithful as regards plot, but cautions the reader that their literary style should not be taken as pure Somali. She believes, however, that her paraphrases convey "a good deal of the tone and spirit of the original" (17).

This very point is also made by Andrzejewski: "What is astonishing is that in spite of the language barrier she developed such empathy with the Somalis that even though her translations are sometimes not very close to the original she conveyed their spirit and atmosphere with a high degree of accuracy" (BWA, letter to DX, 18 March 1989). *A Tree for Poverty* includes nine paraphrased tales which are Arabic in origin. They are longer than the translated stories and many have subplots, high suspense and a good deal of character development. "Ahmed the Woodseller" opens this section.[28]

Referring to Ahmed, Laurence writes: "Perhaps he appears in the stories of any race of people who live uncertain poverty-stricken lives. Ahmed is the 'little man' ... he is both funny and sad" (18). The theme of paradox, which in subsequent years frequently appears in Laurence's own fiction, occupies a central position in this tale.[29] Laurence, pointing to the paradoxical personality of Ahmed Hatab states: "[He] is completely selfish, and yet is capable of generosity and affection.... He is good and bad, lovable and despicable. In fact, he sums up a good many of the contrasts which make the eastern mind difficult for Europeans to understand. It will be seen that just such a series of contrasts runs throughout the Somali folktales given here" (19).

Laurence also included this folktale (in a somewhat altered version) in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, where it subsequently caught the attention of the librettist Ian Serraillier from whom it received another artistic translation. Serraillier obtained Laurence's permission to use the tale and then collaborated with the English composer Gordon Crosse to produce a cantata for schools which was broadcast on BBC-TV twice weekly during the summer term 1965 (Ian Serraillier, letter to DX, 20 February 1990).

In the Somali tale, Ahmed is an intriguing character, an anti-hero. Squat and ugly with a shrunken and twisted body (59), Ahmed Hatab is physically repulsive. Although plagued by poverty and hunger, Ahmed does have his day-dreams. And by selling firewood he manages to eke out a living. His wife, however, is a shrew who nags him endlessly. At last, Ahmed decides to commit suicide. The story then cleverly unfolds around his decision. Laurence's narrative skill, apparent in many of her paraphrases of Somali and Arabic tales, is evident in the following passage from "Ahmed the Woodseller":

> And with these words, the executioner, who was a stout strong man, brought the scimitar down on the scrawny neck of Ahmed Hatab. But then a wonderful thing happened. The blade of the scimitar, tempered steel as it was, shattered into a thousand pieces, and the neck of Ahmed Hatab remained unscathed. (65)

In this story and the three which follow it, the reader also is introduced to Nebii Hhudur, a holy man, whom Laurence describes in the following note for English readers:

> [He] must wander over the earth, travelling as the wind travels, disappearing and appearing at will, sometimes being carried inside the "dust-devils," those columns of wind and sand so common in desert countries. He must never marry or settle down. The Somalis believe that Nebii Hhudur often comes to a place in the guise of a beggar. Hhudur prays for those who are kind to him, and they become wealthy. But those who are unkind to him are ruined. No one can tell where Hhudur may be or who he is. (71)

The stories connected with Nebii Hhudur, "the good prophet who travels the world disguised as a beggar" (61) are about sharing with and caring for the less fortunate.

The remaining Arabic stories in this section of *A Tree for Poverty* focus on the adventures of Abana Wys. His life and values are the antithesis of those of Nebii Hhuder. Hhuder is a holy man: humble, poor, a prophet; whereas Abana Wys is a lusty, shrewd court jester. Through his antics and stories he must amuse the Sultan and thereby earn his own meagre livelihood. This sharpwitted man, who also appears in Sir Richard Burton's work, is frequently at great personal risk because although he is clever, Abana Wys is always at the mercy of the Sultan, the powerful Caliph of Baghdad.

The final section of *A Tree for Poverty* contains seventeen paraphrased Somali tales. The richness of that literature is obvious in these stories which vary in length and subject matter. Several deal with religious ancestors and/or explain tribal heritage. These tales move swiftly with dialogue advancing the action and surprising conclusions in which there are role reversals (the clever outwit the bold), impossible challenges are overcome, and shrewd plans resolve insoluble dilemmas.

ALTHOUGH MARGARET LAURENCE could not have produced these translations and paraphrases of Somali literature without the assistance of B. W. Andrzejewski and Musa Galaal, as well as other Somalis whom she mentions in her acknowledgements, it remains true that in *A Tree for Poverty* Laurence's own work as translator is impressive. Here she hones her skill in narrative: in translating the tales into English, Laurence had to retain elements of suspense, create quick and varied action, and sustain the interest of "European" readers.

From a writer's point of view, the tales are rich in human interest. And many of them also reveal intriguing paradoxes — a point which Laurence herself often comments on in the introduction to *A Tree for Poverty.* Reading the tales, one is aware of her success in briefly rendering a memorable character. Like an artist who does a number of quick sketches or studies for a portrait, she penned paraphrases of these Somali tales which give westerners a genuine sense of the richness of an ancient mid-eastern culture and literature.

Her English versions of the Somali poems also reward close examination. They consistently reveal her careful attention not only to details of vocabulary, alliteration, and rhythm but also to the poem as a whole. Because Laurence was keenly interested in language, working on the Somali translations must have been both challenging and rewarding. Her success recalls Robert Frost's remark: "a poem, like a piece of ice on a hot stove, must ride on its own melting."[30]

Because her husband's work took him into the Haud (a plateau region of some 25,000 square miles, south of Hargeisa), Margaret Laurence accompanied him and had the opportunity, unusual for a woman, of living for an extended period of time among Somalis, devout Muslims, whose daily life was full of tales and songs. Though she was aware of how little she really knew of Somalia and of "how impossible it was to blow in from the sea and size up a land's centuries in a few months" (*PCB*, 225), the experience in the Haud deepened her understanding of the Somali way of life.[31]

In her notes to the poems and tales, as well as in her introduction to the book, Laurence endeavors to convey to English readers certain untranslatable features of Somali life and culture. These efforts she later referred to as "a labour of love" (*PCB*, 225).

The labour which Laurence undertook so that Somali oral literature "not be lost" surely enhanced her own literary skills. She had come to the Horn of Africa after working for some months as a journalist following graduation from college. Her subsequent contact with the richly imaginative tales of the Somalis and with their poems of lyric beauty (*belwo*) and historic significance (*gabei*) must have quickened her own imaginative journeys into fiction; we know that soon after *A Tree for Poverty* she was hard at work on both short stories and a novel. If, however, we had nothing more, nothing further from Margaret Laurence than the translations and commentary in *A Tree for Poverty,* we still would have a remarkable book. It is an intriguing first publication, one which will yield yet more insights into the mature writer.

NOTES

[1] Margaret Laurence, *A Tree for Poverty: Somali Poetry and Prose*, 2nd edition. All subsequent quotations are from this work unless otherwise noted. The 1970 edition was the result of a collaboration between Margaret Laurence and William B. Ready, University Librarian and Professor of Bibliography at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. It was Ready who made all the arrangements for publication of *A Tree for Poverty* in an edition of 2000 copies by the Irish University Press, Dublin. See the William B. Ready papers at Mills Memorial Library, McMaster University. The 1970 edition contains a new preface by Laurence, but in other respects is a photolithographic facsimile of the first edition. (Both Trent University and McMaster University libraries have a copy of the rare first edition of *A Tree for Poverty.*) The original typescript copy of *A Tree for Poverty* was presented to the Somaliland Society by the Chief Secretary to the Government; see *The Somaliland Journal*, 1.1 (1954): 62. I am grateful to the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and to the Research Foundation of the City University of New York for grants which enabled me to pursue much of the research for this article.

[2] C. J. Martin, personal interview, Bournemouth, 3 May 1990.

[3] This was an occasional publication of the Somaliland Society, which was formed at a meeting in the Oriental Hotel, Hargeisa, on September 5, 1954.

[4] Clara Thomas makes some cogent remarks about "possible connections" between Laurence's own fiction and these early translations: "Particularly interesting . . . are [Laurence's] introductory passages on the element of the grotesque in Somali characterization and on the strong sense of the dramatic which she found carried from the people themselves into their literature." *Margaret Laurence*, 22.

[5] In our post-colonial era, it is important to recall that not all European travellers (Richard Burton, for example), saw the Somalis so positively.

[6] *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963), Laurence's only travel book, published a decade after she had left Somalia, is an absorbing account of her experiences and impressions there. Under its American title *New Wind in a Dry Land,* it was issued by Alfred A. Knopf simultaneously with *The Stone Angel* and *The Tomorrow-Tamer* on June 15, 1964. Knopf's decision to issue three books by one writer on the same day was most unusual at the time and called more widespread attention in the United States to Margaret Laurence's work.

[7] Their esteem for Laurence is also reflected in the fact that she was among a handful of Britishers who were invited back to Mogadishu as guests of the Somali government in July 1966 for the sixth anniversary celebration of independence.

[8] Professor Andrzejewski notes that the only literary translations which preceded *A Tree for Poverty* were those given in *A Grammar of the Somali Language with*

Examples of Prose and Verse by J. W. C. Kirk, Cambridge University Press, 1905. Kirk's translations were meant to illustrate points of grammar. He did not fully realize that when Somali oral poems are memorized there is "an unwritten copyright law according to which the name of the poet has to be stated before the recital." It is to Laurence's credit that she correctly observes this Somali literary custom. (BWA, letter to DX, 11 April 1989).

[9] *Dance on the Earth*, 96.

[10] These translations did not constitute Laurence's sole literary activity in Somalia. I have discovered in the archives at Princeton University correspondence between Margaret Laurence and Whit Burnett, editor of *Story* magazine, which clearly establish that Laurence had completed her first published African short story "Uncertain Flowering" at least as early as November 1951 [although it was not published until 1953] and that she is working on a novel set in Somaliland. See Xiques, "New Light on Margaret Laurence's First Short Story."

[11] This phrase is taken from a Somali *gabei.*

[12] See Thomas, *Margaret Laurence*, ch. 1-2, and Morley, 21.

[13] I retain Laurence's spelling of these words. After the introduction of orthography to Somalia in 1972, they appear as follows: *heello* and *gabay* (Andrzejewski, "Somali Literature," 337-38).

[14] According to information in the *Area Handbook for Somalia*, the composition and recitation of poetry is a national pastime. In Somalia, training in the art of expression begins early when young children are taught riddles and tongue twisters to improve their verbal skills. Somali poets compose and polish their poems in private until they are felt to be beyond criticism and ready for oral presentation, 131.

[15] According to Said Samatar, "Even the most elaborate poets and reciters are unable to clearly express the complex rules of Somali verse," as quoted by Mohamed Rirache in "Somali Poetry: The Case of the Miniature Genres," 16.

[16] "The rules of alliteration are very rigid in the sense that only identical initial consonants are regarded as alliterative (*higaadsan*) with one another and no substitution by similar sounds is admissible," *Somali Poetry* 42. Further details about the alliterative requirements of all Somali poetry are discussed in great detail in this book.

[17] B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry.* All poetry translations by Andrzejewski and Lewis are from this volume unless otherwise noted.

[18] The intent of this paper is not to critique the work of Andrzejewski, but to examine Laurence's efforts in rendering Somali tales and poems into English. In all fairness to Andrzejewski, who has made outstanding and unique contributions to an understanding of the literature and culture of Somalia, has written numerous articles and books on this subject, I want to make clear that at the time when Laurence first met him and his British wife in Sheik, the young Polish scholar probably was not familiar with features of Anglo-Saxon poetry which Laurence no doubt studied as an undergraduate: for example, "Beowulf" and perhaps "The Battle of Maldon."

[19] He appears again in *Heart of a Stranger* in the chapter "The Epic Love of Elmii Bonderii," which Laurence describes as "a retelling of the many tales about this poet I heard when I was working on translations of Somali poems and folk-tales" (*HS* 77).

[20] "To A Faithless Friend, a gabei by Salaan Arrabey, translated by Margaret Laurence." *The Somaliland Journal*, 1.3 (December 1956): 138-41.

[21] The rough literal translation of a shorter *gabei* by 'Abdillaahi Muuse, "Reproof from an Elder," as well as Laurence's notes and her translation of this poem, are

also in the archives at York University. Another translation of this *gabei* may be found in Andrzejewski and Lewis, 102-03.

[22] It is puzzling that a handwritten note by Margaret Laurence in the archives at York University states that these *gabei* translations "were never published." It seems unlikely that she was unaware of the publication of "To a Faithless Friend" since she is listed among the members of the Somaliland Society (*Somaliland Journal,* 1. 1 [December 1954]: 65) and presumably received a copy of their journal. Furthermore, a clipping of Dowson's review of *A Tree for Poverty* from *The Somaliland Journal* is also with these translations at York.

[23] By looking at the rough literal translation which Laurence worked from, one may see more clearly how she proceeded with her efforts at translation and paraphrase. Here a few examples must suffice: versions B.1 and C.1 were given to her; versions B.2 and C.2 are her published translations of the poem.

B.1. For him I gathered a host of men, numerous, as you
remember, thronging like an Ethiopian horde in attack;
(Rough typed translation given to Laurence by
Andrzejewski and Musa Galaal)

B.2. Dare ye forget the multitude of men
I summoned to his rescue on that night?
Mighty of sinew and spirit, our warriors thronged
Like an Ethiopian horde to the attack.
(Laurence, "To a Faithless Friend," 138)

C.1. [No one can do anything alone, without help and I am now
without anyone by my side, though you, my cousin, should
have come to my aid]. Sailing ships do not sail in the
windless season, just before the "karan" rains.
(Rough typed translation given to Laurence by
Addrzejewski and Musa Galaal)

C.2. Before the "karan" rains, when the wind is still,
The wide-sailed dhows do not put out to sea
A heavy log cannot be set ablaze
Without the assisting fire of tinder straw:
And no man lives who will not one day need
His brother's help to lighten his distress.
(Laurence, "To a Faithless Friend," 139)

[24] Laurence remarked to Donald Cameron: "I am particularly attached to the King James version of the Bible, because it *is* the poetry of it that really hits me." Interview with Donald Cameron, 112.

[25] "Ingratitude" and "To A Faithless Friend" are different titles for the same Somali poem.

[26] The translated stories were obtained from Musa Galaal and B. W. Andrzejewski. Laurence then put the stories "into English which would convey as much as possible of the dramatic effect of the original" (*A Tree for Poverty,* 16).

[27] See *A Tree for Poverty* (17) and *The Prophet's Camel Bell,* ch. 9.

[28] This tale appears in the section on Somali literature in *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963).

[29] "When I began to write," Laurence said in an interview with Donald Cameron (103), "I realized quite quickly that what really grabbed me the most, what I really would like to do the most in a novel, was to, as far as possible, present the living individual on the printed page, in all his paradox and all his craziness."

[30] Robert Frost. "The Figure a Poem Makes" in *Selected Poems of Robert Frost,* 1-4.

[31] Laurence's appreciation of Somali culture and religion, so entirely different from what she had known growing up in Manitoba, was in sharp contrast to the negative attitudes toward Somalis and a strong sense of superiority which were common among many of the English in the protectorate. See *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, chapter 14 as well as pp. 16, 25, 88.

In *A Tree for Poverty* she provides a context for and an explanation of Somali customs and values. However, it is important to note as well that Laurence not only had English speakers in mind, but also educated Somalis since her remarks in some cases are germane only to them, eg., distinctions among various tribes, camels etc. In *A Tree for Poverty* Laurence frequently discusses various features of the Somali language. This concern with words, with making meaning, comes round full circle from *A Tree for Poverty* (1954) to Laurence's last novel *The Diviners* (1974) in which Morag's preoccupation with language is central to the book.

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WINDOW DISPLAY

J. D. Carpenter

Bloodroot
Mandrake

Manna
Tansy

Cyani
Plantain

Pennyroyal
Peppermint

Coltsfoot
Corn Silk

Cramp Bark
Cranesbill

Haircap
Bogbean

Broom Tops
Rose Hips

Slippery Elm
Serpentaria

Sarsaparilla
Eucalyptus

Lily of the Valley
Pellitory of the Wall

Witch Hazel
Red Saunders

Blue Malva
Black Malva

Black Cohosh
Black Horehound

Green Osier
Gold Thread

Balm of Gilead
Holy Thistle

Hyssop
Bittersweet

Speedwell
Saw Palmetto

Tag Alder
Tamarack

Thorough Wort
Rupture Wort

Motherwort
Mistletoe

Lovage
Life Everlasting

—*Thuna Herbalist, Toronto*

FAN

Henry Israeli

The fan turns slowly in the iris of
your eye. Wind whistles from your hair. I pull

an egg from behind your ear. I love
the spontaneity about you. The fan

turns slowly in your mouth. You speak in circles
and breathe in squares. I brush the snails from

your eyelashes. Impatience is your virtue.
Your world is full of many colors.

You love to paint. You paint radishes. You
paint radishes philosophizing

with parrots. Is it true you are paid to sleep?
The fan turns slowly in your hand. Your hand

turns slowly in my hand. We walk that extra
mile, then return. I pull twigs from out of

your spine. I sing you to death, then sing
you back. Which side will you face tonight?

I'll face the other. The fan turns slowly
in the iris of your eye. We keep moving.

RE-INTRODUCING CANADIAN "ART OF THE THEATRE"

Herman Voaden's 1930 Manifesto

Sherrill E. Grace

INTRODUCTIONS ARE IMPORTANT. An editor's introduction to a volume of edited or collected texts situates that collection, valorizes the individual texts, explains why and how the collected items matter and may even claim to be defining a tradition or establishing a canon.[1] Twenty years ago, W. H. New began his "Introduction" to *Dramatists in Canada: Selected Essays* (1972) by noting "the past failure of Canadian writers to react dramatically to their world," and he went on to say that, "until comparatively recently something has gone wrong, and the drama that has reached the stage has frequently died there, without even reaching the tenuous immortality of print."[2]

In 1972 all this was very true. Moreover, as the opening paragraph of an important introductory statement to the first (as far as I am aware) collection of critical essays on Canadian drama, these remarks should not be taken lightly. New recognized that a majority of voices prior to 1972 had announced the futility or quixotic nature of any attempt to create a Canadian drama. Chief amongst the early naysayers was Merrill Denison whose 1928 diatribe called "Nationalism and Drama," reprinted in *Dramatists in Canada*, went so far as to mock even the desire for such a drama. The main voice raised against Denison in the twenties — that of Herman Voaden — was not rediscovered until the early 1980s, ten years too late for New's anthology. But in his "Introduction," New not only recapitulated and contextualized past calls for or dismissals of an indigenous dramatic literature and a Canadian theatre, he also anticipated a new, creative moment for Canadian Drama, one that would pick up where Voaden left off.

New's most optimistic point was that failure was a thing of the past because, in the 1970s, things had changed. His view, however, did not gain general acceptance for another decade. In 1977 Brian Parker published a major critical assessment called "Is There a Canadian Drama?" with sound analysis of plays by Tremblay, Ryga, and Cook. But even here, and as late as 1977, Parker found it necessary to introduce the entire enterprise of Canadian drama with a question.[3]

The first clear evidence of a new critical conviction about the status of Canadian drama appeared in 1980 with the publication of *Canada's Lost Plays* in three volumes edited by Anton Wagner. The publication of four major anthologies in the year 1984-85 confirmed this confident position: these were Richard Plant's *Modern Canadian Drama* (Penguin, 1984), Richard Perkyns' *Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre, 1934 to 1984* (Irwin, 1984), Jerry Wasserman's *Modern Canadian Plays* (Talon, 1985) and Anton Wagner's *Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions* (Simon & Pierre, 1985). As time passes, 1984-85 may acquire the reputation of a watershed moment for future historians of the drama in Canada because three of these anthologies are major canon-making collections of plays published by major presses and the fourth is a collection of essays and reviews covering the period from the mid-forties to the present.[4] All four take their subject for granted, treat it with respect, and provide innumerable valuable insights into the richness of Canadian theatre history and dramatic literature.

It is not my purpose, however, to discuss these four anthologies or to examine the introductory statements made by the editors, each of whom is clearly articulating his concept of a Canadian canon.[5] I mention them at the outset only to suggest the historical context for my specific subject, Herman Voaden and, further, to establish an important critical perspective for Voaden's early efforts at creating a Canadian "art of the theatre."

When Voaden published his *Six Canadian Plays* in 1930 with the introductory manifesto on which I want to focus, he was not writing in a vacuum. His clarion call was not altogether unprecedented, nor did it go entirely unheeded, and the obstacles to, challenges of, and conditions for a Canadian theatre which he addressed, still exist. Certainly, for the critic using *Dramatists in Canada* (with Denison's essay) as their introduction to the subject, Voaden's remarks will provide an interesting comparison. They also further explain why Wagner and Perkyns give an important place to Voaden in their collections.

In brief, what Voaden perceived by the mid-1920s was that, although Canada lacked the venues, scripts and skilled theatre teams required for a Canadian theatre, the time was ripe for the inauguration of a new, vibrant theatre movement that would breed and nourish a national drama. With great precision and energy, he identified all those prerequisites so familiar to Canadian literary historians today: the value of a spirit of Canadian cultural nationalism, the excitement of the international modernist challenge, and the practical economic and physical exigencies of the stage. Moreover, he did so without qualification or demurral. Writing in *The Canadian Forum* for December 1929, he proclaimed what was already his carefully thought-out position in ringing tones:

> Never before has the theatre held such power, richness, and opportunity. [. . .] With communities all over Canada creating native and proper [sic] culture, with the dramatic activities of these communities skilfully guided by provincial and national

> organizations, with the soil prepared for the writing and production of new drama, a Canadian Renaissance in art and literature is assured.[6]

And he was right. Why, then, has it taken so long — over fifty years — to materialise? Or has it actually been much less than fifty years? Estimates vary, as a quick comparison of Plant, Perkyns and Wasserman shows. And what, after all, happened to Herman Voaden or to that *avant-garde* theatre that, above all other forms, he espoused? I will return to these questions in my conclusion, but first I want to shift from the present to the past in order to see what was happening on Canadian stages prior to Voaden and, hence, what the context was for his impetus and vision.

IN 1923 MERRILL DENISON published four of his realistic treatments of ordinary Canadian life in a volume called *The Unheroic North*, but this "mugwump Canadian" is difficult to place as a "Canadian" dramatist. Despite his contribution to our dramatic literature — in *The Unheroic North* (whose *Brothers in Arms* and *March Hay* have been frequently anthologized), *The Prize Winner* (1928) and his 1931 volume of history plays for radio, *Henry Hudson and Other Plays* — he poured scorn on the very notion of a national drama. Unfortunately, his provocative 1928 essay, "Nationalism and Drama," originally written for Bertram Brooker's *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928/29* and included in *Dramatists in Canada* forty-four years later, has been taken as representative of the state of drama in the twenties and thirties.[7]

Denison began by likening the notion of a Canadian drama to "the art of dinghy sailing among the bedoins" and went on to denounce the "dream of a native theatre [as] a product of [. . .] introspective patriotism." It was a "mirage," an "illusion," a "pious hope," and one, moreover, that Canadians would be better off without. As far as Denison was concerned — and here is where the ideological ramifications of the subject begin to emerge — Canada lacked an identity and a cultural centre without which a drama could not exist. Furthermore, any dramatist worth "his" salt would leave for London or New York, preferably the latter (as Mitchell did in 1921 and Denison would do in 1931) at the first chance. (Both men had strong early ties with the United States that continued over the years and were bound to colour their responses to any form of Canadian nationalism.) "Life in Cleveland and Toronto," Denison insisted, "is identical," and, therefore, a native theatre would be as artificial and pointless as a "native orange industry."

Denison, however, was not the only player in the Canadian theatre of the twenties. Hart House, which Vincent Massey opened in 1919, first under Roy Mitchell's guiding hand, later under Carroll Aikins, mounted many varied seasons of play performances that included a regular number of Canadian plays. In 1926, Massey published eleven of these plays in a two volume edition called *Canadian Plays from Hart House.*[8] In his brief "Introduction," he was optimistic. Although the number of plays by Canadians which had received production (Massey's criterion for inclusion) comprised a "slender company," he saw much hope for the future success of Canadian drama in the nourishment of local amateur theatres. In Massey's opinion, Canadian theatres and stages were "under alien influences" because they "accept [...] what Broadway sends" (p. v); therefore, the "little theatres" were extremely important because they would first provide alternative venues and then, through the encouragement of actual production, they would, according to Massey, "give birth to a drama really Canadian in spirit and, therefore, worthy of Canada" (vii).

Both the plays in Denison's volumes and those in Massey's *Canadian Plays from Hart House* provide very standard fare: sentimental domestic subjects, historical romances, local colour 'realism' with touches of comedy, mystery and farce. There are no budding Ibsens, Strindbergs, Kaisers, Maeterlincks, Shaws or Pirandellos among the lot. But playwriting in Canada and thinking about the theatre during the 1920s was by no means as uninspired and formulaic as these plays alone suggest. Three men were working actively to create both a theatre and a drama that would embrace the twentieth century and provide a sophisticated, *avant-garde vision* of the total theatrical enterprise. They were Carroll Aikins, Roy Mitchell, and Herman Voaden.

Aikins is of special interest to British Columbians because, from 1920-23, he ran the "Home Theatre" in Naramata on Lake Okanagan using the most advanced principles of Adolph Appia and Edward Gordan Craig.[9] In addition to his pioneering work with Hart House, Roy Mitchell published two important pieces during the twenties which had a direct influence upon the younger Voaden. Besides Denison's little diatribe, Brooker's *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928/29* contained two other essays on the theatre: one was Carroll Aikins' "The Amateur Theatre in Canada"; the other was Mitchell's "Motion and the Actor." What Mitchell was concerned with was not a national Canadian drama, but an art of the theatre that would "change the relations of our actors, the form of our plays, perhaps even the shape of our playhouses" (p. 194). The ideas in this essay formed the basis of his 1929 book, *Creative Theatre,* in which he developed his concept of a spiritual, ritualistic theatre art drawing upon the best of eastern and western traditions and exploiting the new expressionist techniques of colour, light, and inner force.

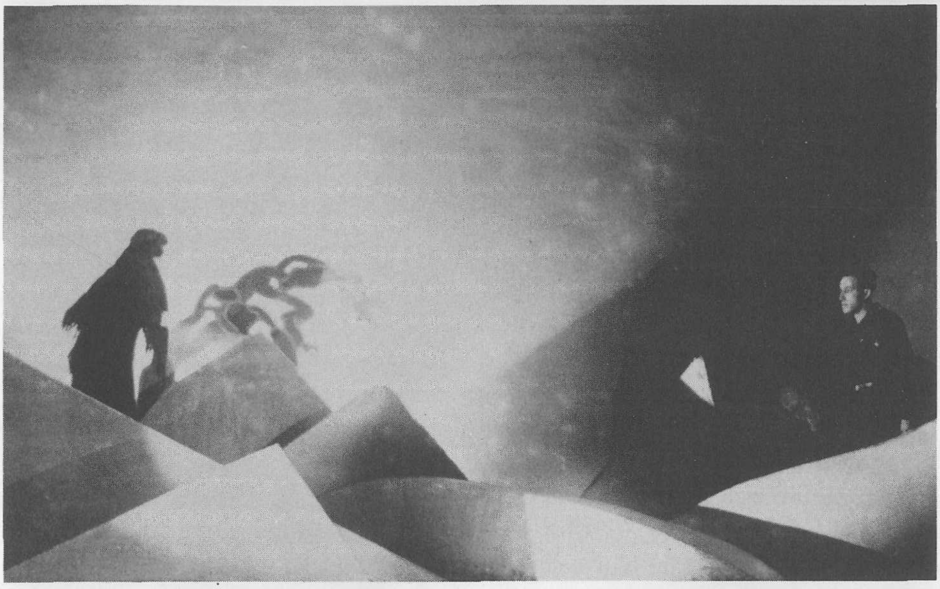
The stage was set and the battle lines clearly drawn when Voaden entered upon the scene. On the one hand, there were the nay-sayers like Denison with their specifically anti-nationalist, thus anti-Canadian-drama position. On the other, there were strong individuals who saw nationalism and the cause of Canadian drama as inextricably related. On the one hand, there were the established, commercial stages with their entrenched preference for all things foreign and financially viable. On the other, there was the burgeoning of amateur theatre in Canada that would lead to the establishment of the Dominion Drama Festival in 1933. The cause of the amateur theatre was picked up by *The Canadian Forum* as early as 1928, and in the November issue that year, Carroll Aikins published an eight page report on the progress of these theatres across the country.[10]

With hindsight, it is possible to argue, first, that these theatres provided the alternate stages essential to the nurturing of Canadian playwrights and, second, that they encouraged Herman Voaden to establish his own theatre workshop in 1934.[11] Two further ingredients required for a theatre renaissance were also on hand: one was the published existence of a number of conventional plays dealing with Canadian subjects; the other was a mounting international excitement and debate over modernism and the revolt against realism (the *bête noir* of modernism) that had already taken European writers, artists and theorists by storm and had moved across the Atlantic to the United States and Canada.[12] In his 1930 "Introduction" to *Six Canadian Plays*, Voaden brought all these ideological and aesthetic positions to bear upon the question of a Canadian drama. The volume with its "Introduction," which is at once expository and complementary, is an extraordinary document, one that has much to tell us about the rhetoric, responsibilities and role of the editor.

In a reminiscence at the end of the seventies, Herman Voaden recounted in detail the event that led to *Six Canadian Plays*.[13] He quoted from a letter, dated 22 February 1930, that he had received from Bertram Brooker in which Brooker regretted the views expressed by Denison in his invited essay for *The Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928-29*, and he went on to comment that: "Down the years the Denison statement has been the text-book, the bible, for those who have ridiculed the cause of a native drama" (TS, 65). But as Voaden explained it, Denison's "unheroic north" spurred him on to espouse "the cause of the *heroic* north" (TS, 68), and, hence, to conceive *Six Canadian Plays*.

During 1929-30, Voaden held a contest at the Central High School of Commerce in Toronto, where he was Head of the English Department, for original plays requiring "an exterior northern setting." Contestants were encouraged to follow the mood and/or subject matter of contemporary painting. From the forty-nine scripts submitted, three were selected for workshop production and these, together with three more, were chosen by Voaden to comprise *Six Canadian Plays*.[14] The book itself, now long out of print, is a collector's item, not least for its inclusion of seven exquisite line drawings by Lowrie Warrener (see illustrations 3 and 4), black and white photographs of Lismer's "A September Gale, Georgian Bay" (1921), Lawren Harris' "Above Lake Superior" (c 1922), J. E. H. MacDonald's "The Solemn Land" (1921), Tom Thomson's "The West Wind" (1917), and photographs of the sets for two productions (see illustration 2).[15] In

These illustrations, numbers 2, 3 and 4 from *Six Canadian Plays*, demonstrate clearly the sources of inspiration for Voaden's volume and his stage sets. They also show the close association of Voaden and Warrener. Numbers 1 and 2 are photographs of the sets for *Winds of Life* and *Lake Doré*; they were designed by Lowrie Warrener and executed by E. H. Thomas, with original photography by Allan Sangster. Numbers 3 and 4 are examples of the drawings for *Six Canadian Plays* by Lowrie Warrener: at top is his drawing for *Winds of Life* with its strong resemblance to Thomson's "The West Wind"; the bottom drawing appears with *The Bone Spoon.*



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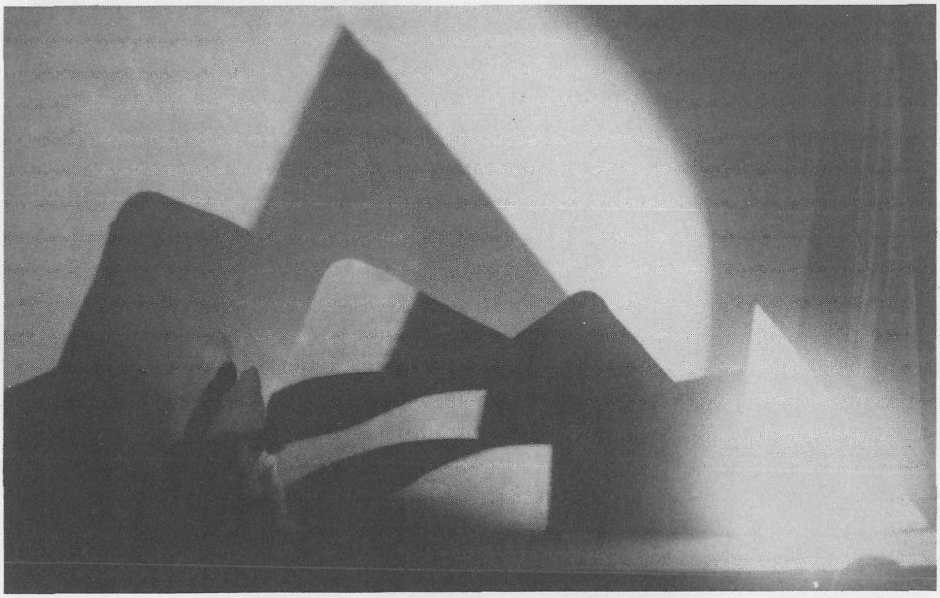

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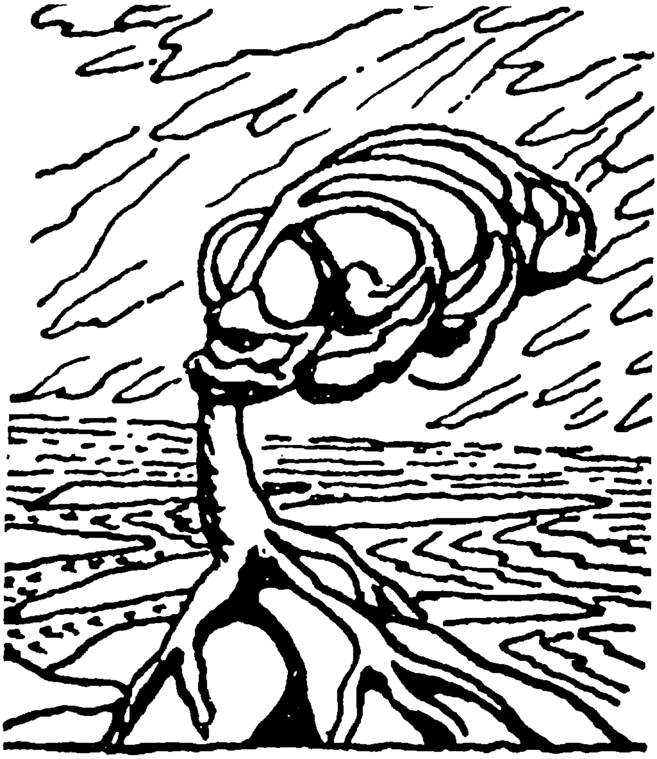

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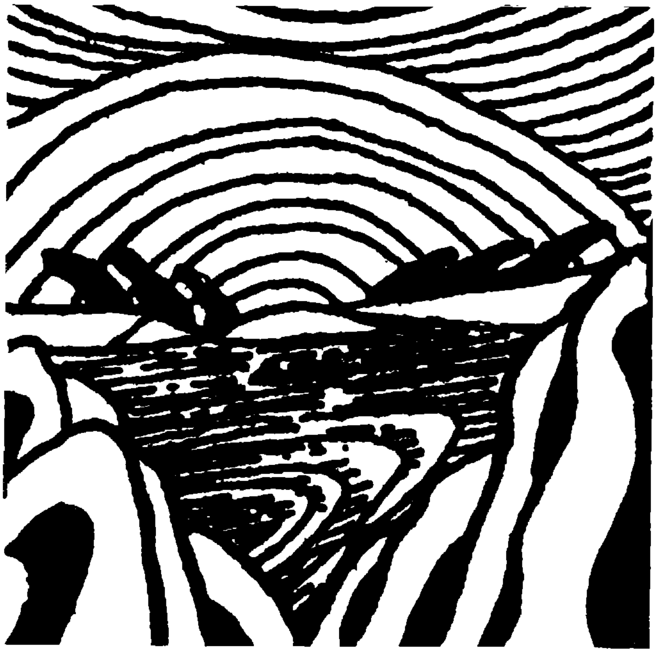

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addition to his ten page introductory manifesto, Voaden also included two highly inspiring quotations from Brooker's own introductory essay to the 1928-29 *Yearbook* called "When We Awake!" some production notes with a glossary, and a brief "Preface" explaining the origin for and the goals of the book:

> If [Voaden writes], in reaching schools, study groups, little theatres, and the general reader, it arouses the interest of our audience in "the Canadian mood," and if it encourages playwrights and other artists to give themselves more whole-heartedly to the expression of our own land and people, it will have accomplished its major purpose. (vii)

Voaden, however, had several goals in mind beyond this primary and general one. As the "Introduction" makes clear, *Six Canadian Plays* was both text and model, political statement and aesthetic vision. The book as a whole, then, makes *manifest* — it is both argument *and* practical manifestation. After an opening flourish in which he acknowledges the sources of his own inspiration in Emerson, Whitman, Brooker, and the Irish Literary Renaissance (Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge), and above all in the canvasses of the Group of Seven painters and the vision of their first champion, F. B. Housser (who published *A Canadian Art Movement* in 1926), he explains that Canadians are on the threshold of a great artistic discovery:

> The sense of imminent adventure is upon us. We should have no fear.... Our idealism is ... fresh and untrammelled. It is an idealism of our own, owing something to the spirit of our wide-reaching land. The North makes the greatest contribution to this spirit; to use Lawren Harris' terms, it has a "spiritual clarity." ... Great things may be done if we have faith in ourselves and in our dynamic and creative power. (xx)

The second half of the "Introduction" is devoted to explaining what can be done in the area of Canadian drama. Voaden identifies three distinct types of play that should contribute to a full dramatic expression in this country — realistic, romantic and "art of the theatre." The first two he discusses briefly. Realistic plays can be set anywhere in the country, will draw upon "elemental passions," and will follow the lines explored by Hauptmann, the Manchester School, the Abbey Theatre and the native folk drama of the American, Paul Green; Merrill Denison's work is Voaden's example of this kind of play. Romantic plays offer Canadians a unique scope, according to Voaden, because there is a largely unexplored romance subject matter of discovery and exploration awaiting the playwright's treatment. Moreover, Indian subjects and the frontier provide rich possibilities; in this connection, Voaden cites the work of Marius Barbeau and Bret Harte. But clearly what most interests Voaden is an "art of the theatre," and it is on this type of drama that he pins his greatest hope.

What he is advocating is a type of play, perhaps modelled on the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk,* and certainly applying all the new advances of theatre men like

Appia and Craig, in which the *experimental* dramatist can create new forms for new expression. Because the theatre has always acknowledged its ancient roots in ritual and worship, it has also been capable of attaining new formal means to match its restless spirit. Voaden's love and respect for the theatre, as well as his extensive practical and theoretical knowledge of it, serve him well here as he proceeds, step by step, to proclaim his challenge to the contemporary hegemony of realism in Canada. Quoting Eugene O'Neill's rejection of "the banality of surfaces," he notes the variety of approaches available to the contemporary *avant-garde* playwright — "Symbolism, formalism, stylization, constructivism and expressionism" (xxii) — all of which share an anti-mimetic spiritual purpose.

Some of Voaden's own personal favourites are O'Neill and the German expressionists, notably Ernst Toller, whose *Masse Mensch* he praises at length, but he stops short of insisting that any *one* dramatic form or model is sufficient for the new Canadian "art of the theatre." Instead, he concludes his elegantly structured, clear and persuasive statement with an appeal for a *national* drama in many different forms that will be good, and universal, by virtue of its Canadian authenticity:

> We want realistic and romantic drama in Canada, glowing with the power and appeal of living dialogue and intense human action. But we should be aware of wider artistic opportunities. The challenge to our dramatists is to seek an ever varying expression of our life [and] to join hands with our painters, sculptors, dancers and musicians to create new combinations of the arts, lifting them all to inspired levels of beauty and significance in which they may be universal, being the reflection of the vision and beauty of a new people in a new land. (xxiii-iv)

Implicit here is the idea that the best route to universality is to dig deeply into the local, personal and immediate, and not to ape the foreign or so-called international fashion. Also implicit here, and throughout the "Introduction," is Voaden's belief in a northern mystique with its roots in the political boosterism of the Canada First movement, the growth of the nature park mentality, the neo-platonic elements of Theosophy (Voaden admired both Harris and Brooker), and the widely popular aesthetic theories of Wilhelm Worringer and Wassily Kandinsky.[16] Today it is this northern quality that links Voaden most emphatically to his period (to the Group, the pages of *The Canadian Forum*, and the experiments of F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith, and W. W. E. Ross, for example) and to ours. Indeed, the continuing articulation of a northern myth has interested many Canadian writers and critics in the second half of this century, from Hugh MacLennan, Ralph Gustafson, and Al Purdy to Margaret Atwood, Robert Kroetch, and Rudy Wiebe.

About the six plays included in the collection, a few points should be made. Although no dramatic genius lies obscured in its pages, it is nonetheless true that each of the plays demonstrates greater innovation than anything previously published in the *Hart House* volumes or by Denison. Each of these one-acters explores or stretches staging possibilities, and each represents a different approach to the business of playwrighting. Four are basically realistic (*The Mother Lode*, *Lake Doré*, *God-forsaken*, and *Winds of Life*), but in different ways, spanning distinct subject areas (mining exploration, domestic tribulation, and personal tragedy), while *The Bone Spoon* is a historical romance with a contemporary (today we might say historiographic) twist, and *Manitou Portage* "lends itself," in Voaden's words, "to expressionistic production" (50). Each play is accompanied by a short introduction identifying its author and drawing the reader's attention to its production qualities, and four of the plays are linked to a specific Group canvas. For example, in a paragraph beneath the plate of Tom Thomson's painting, Voaden explains that *The Winds of Life* "was suggested by 'The West Wind'," and that Thomson's death in 1917 has "made him an almost mythical figure" (120). He, thereby, valorizes the play and his own enterprise by association and by aesthetic contextualization.

Taken as a whole, with Warrener's drawings, the plates, plays, and Voaden's "Introduction," the volume represents a ground-breaking work. That it was recognized as such at the time was no accident. In his *Globe* column for 6 December 1930, drama critic Lawrence Mason described it as "Canada's first volume of genuinely Canadian plays" and as a "first step ... toward the creation of an authentically Canadian drama and theatrical art."[17] He praised the plays themselves for being passionately new and Canadian instead of derivative of European fashions, but he reserved highest praise for the editor whom he quoted at length, and whose book he called "epoch-making."

WHAT EPOCHS, MILE-STONES, or other breakthroughs were, in fact, made by Voaden with *Six Canadian Plays*? Judging from received opinion, a Canadian drama did not exist until, at the earliest, 1950 in John Coulter's *Riel* or even later with the 1967 successes of George Ryga (*The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*) and John Herbert (*Fortune and Men's Eyes*, written in 1963, with a first professional production in New York in 1967). Certainly, Herman Voaden has, until fairly recently, been forgotten as a playwright and theatre visionary.[18] In looking back, critics and literary historians have privileged Merrill Denison's views as definitive and perceived his predictions as inevitable and self-fulfilling. Why this should be so is hard to understand, but it is perhaps a lingering sign of Canada's pernicious "colonial cringe." Undervaluing what they have in the present, Canadians are too quick to discard the possibility that they had something in the past, unless it came from elsewhere. To be fair, it is also true that a vital native *theatre* is a late acquisition in new countries which must first build the economic, industrial and urban centres to support the co-operative efforts of an active theatre art, and this task was neither easy nor a high priority in post-Depression, pre-World War Two Canada.

However, the present scenario is far from bleak, and Voaden's efforts are no longer forgotten. His 1936 play, *Murder Pattern,* received a fine amateur revival in Toronto in March 1987, and Richard Perkyns includes Voaden's 1934 play *Hill-Land* in his anthology. Moreover, Perkyns makes a strong case for beginning his "comprehensive anthology" with this play. In short, Perkyns is arguing for a tradition of "outstanding" plays that "reflect the total Canadian ethos," a tradition that begins with Voaden and proceeds through James Reaney who, he claims, fulfils the "imaginative theatre that Voaden had been advocating, (ix).

For anyone reading, writing, or teaching Canadian drama today, it is important to know that sixty years ago a Canadian playwright well versed in modernist aesthetics had the courage and the vision to call for an "art of the theatre" that would celebrate Canadian life in forms as varied as the realism of David French or Sharon Pollock, the improvisatory agit-prop of Theatre Passe Muraille, the historical plays of Carol Bolt or Rick Salutin, the expressionism and fantasy of George Ryga, George Walker, Judith Thompson, or the powerful native theatre of Tomson Highway and the experimental *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Robert Lepage.

Despite his sophistication and idealism, Voaden stayed in Canada which may, in a perverse way, explain why his collection of plays and "Introduction" took so long to be rediscovered while the negative cynicism of the expatriate Denison has been remembered. But it is Voaden's manifesto that has stood the test of time, and it is his "Introduction" that provides the historical link with New's 1972 volume and with the anthologies of the 1980s.

NOTES

[1] This study was first presented as a paper, with slides, at the University of Alberta's 1987 conference on "The History of the Literary Institution in Canada: Prefaces and Literary Manifestos." It has undergone revision since then, although I have tried to preserve something of its original polemical and historiographic intention. I would like to thank Barbara Godard whose expert discussion of the manifesto as practice and *topos* helped me to appreciate the nature and function of Voaden's text. As she pointed out in her paper, the manifesto has always had a strong link with an *avant-garde,* both as explication and as empowering act of validation, all of which is true of Voaden's 1930 project. To Herman Voaden (1903-1991) we all owe thanks.

[2] *Dramatists in Canada: Selected Essays* (Vancouver: UBC Press 1972): 1. Most of these essays first appeared in the journal *Canadian Literature*; four, including Merrill Denison's "Nationalism and Drama," were added to provide greater inclusiveness and, in Denison's case, "to allow for the expression of earlier significant views" (vii). Denison's essay was reprinted again in *Canadian Theatre Review* 8 (1975): 74-78.

[3] "Is There a Canadian Drama?" *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture,* ed. David Staines (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1977):

152-87. Significantly, Parker begins by explaining his title as modelled on Douglas Bush's 1929 title, "Is There a Canadian Literature?" and he goes on to assert that in the 1920s the "very situation of Canada was inimical to drama" (153). For Parker, a quality drama of international stature emerged in Canada with Reaney, Tremblay, and Ryga.

[4] Each of the anthologies includes extensive bibliography of primary and secondary materials. Amongst these items, the following might be mentioned here: the journals *Canadian Drama*, *Theatre History in Canada*, and *Canadian Theatre Review*, begun between 1974 and 1980; *The Brock Bibliography of Published Canadian Plays in English, 1766-1978* (Toronto: Playwrights' Press, 1980); and a variety of published interviews and conversations.

[5] Perkyns takes the most thorough historical approach to his subject, and Diane Bessai and Don Kerr have started to map the landscape of plays by Canadian women in *Plays by Women* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1987).

[6] "A National Drama League," *The Canadian Forum* 9.99 (December, 1928): 105-06.

[7] *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928-29*, ed. with an introduction by Bertram Brooker (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929).

[8] *Canadian Plays from Hart House*, 2 vols., ed. Vincent Massey (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926). Massey had already published on "The Prospects of a Canadian Drama," *Queen's Quarterly* 30 (October 1922): 200. I would like to thank my colleague, Jerry Wasserman, for information on these and other early discussions of our drama. See also Anton Wagner's *Canada's Lost Plays* III (Toronto: Canadian Theatre Review Publications, 1980).

[9] See James Hoffman, "Carroll Aikins and the Home Theatre," *Theatre History in Canada* 7.1 (1986): 50-70.

[10] *The Canadian Forum* began sporadic publishing of theatre articles in a 1922 issue (2.24), but a regular column, called "The Stage," written by Fred Jacob, did not begin until 1925. In this column, Jacob wrote on drama in general, noting especially the process of O'Neill during these years. Special attention to Canada did not start until the end of the decade. One of the earliest pieces on the issue of Canadian playwrighting is Fred Jacob's "Waiting for a Dramatist" in *The Canadian Magazine* 43.2 (June 1914): 142-46.

[11] Voaden was one of the founders and the first Director of the Sarnia Drama League in 1927-28, and he attended George Pierce Baker's Workshop at Yale in 1930-31. But with an M.A. thesis on O'Neill behind him by 1926, as well as performances in plays by O'Neill, Maeterlinck, and Kaiser from 1926-27, he was extremely well prepared for this task in the 1930s.

[12] Canadian artists such as Lawren Harris, Charles Comfort, and Bertram Brooker were well versed in modern art, aesthetics, and literature. One might note, in this connection, Harris's acquaintance with the ideas of Kandinsky and the poetry of Eliot, or Brooker's knowledge of contemporary theatre and visual abstraction, or Charles Comfort's defense of modern art in "The Painter and his Model" reprinted in *Documents in Canadian Art* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1987).

[13] This unpublished typescript is called "Symphonic Expressionism: A Canadian adventure in the direction of a more musical and expressive theatre" (1975). I would like to thank Herman Voaden for permission to quote from it.

[14] *Six Canadian Plays* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1930); all references are to this edition.

[15] Lowrie Warrener, painter, sculptor and teacher, was a close friend of Voaden's. They travelled across Canada in 1929 (while Voaden was working on the idea for *Six Canadian Plays*) and co-authored the hitherto unperformed expressionist *tour de force Symphony*. For discussion of Warrener see John Flood, "Lowrie Warrener," *Northward Journal: A Quarterly of Northern Arts* 25 (1982): 11-28, with illustrations; and Anton Wagner, "A Country of the Soul: Herman Voaden, Lowrie Warrener and the writing of *Symphony*," *Canadian Drama* 9.2 (1983): 205-25. *Symphony* has been published in *Canada's Lost Plays*, vol. 3.

[16] For extensive discussion of these converging ideas, see Douglas Cole, "Artists, Patrons and Public: An Inquiry into the Success of the Group of Seven," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 13.2 (1978): 69-78; Michelle Lacombe, "Theosophy and the Canadian Idealist Tradition: A Preliminary Exploration," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17.2 (1982): 100-18; Victoria Evans, "Bertram Brooker's Theory of Art as Evinced in his 'The Seven Arts' Columns and Early Abstractions," *The Journal of Canadian Art History* 9.1 (1986): 28-44; Ann Davis, "An Apprehended Vision," Ph.D. York University 1973; and Sherrill Grace, "'Figures in a Ground': Bertram Brooker and the Craft of Fiction," *Provincial Essays* 7 (1989): 63-76.

[17] Lawrence Mason, "Genuine Canadian Drama," *The Globe and Mail* 6 December 1930: 21.

[18] It is largely due to the work of Anton Wagner, who included *Wilderness* and *Murder Pattern* in *Canada's Lost Plays*, vol. 3, together with useful introductions and notes, that Voaden's work is now receiving attention. I have discussed his work in *Regression and Apocalypse: Studies in North American Literary Expressionism* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1989): 117-37. The Voaden papers are held in the York University Archives, and a successful revival of *Murder Pattern*, directed by Heinar Pillar, played at the George Brown Theatre in Toronto in March 1987. For permission to quote from Voaden's works, and to reprint the plates, I am indebted to Herman Voaden.

HUTS

Elizabeth Harper

for Earle Birney 1979

I could begin, "You
probably
don't remember that old hut
— you've been to Spain
and found a spider; I
know about your life — "

but I would run the risk of being coy:
that permanently temporary peeling paint
of a derelict with lilacs at the door
— that time —
is still so bright and lost to me
that I must think you also leaf
through rainsilk days when you
and Chaucer strode across Point Grey,
punched the clouds, and blew the rain
right out the limping army surplus
door we straggled through
three times a week.

I have essays
proving
these congruities,
these happy strides
two poets took across a
squeaking west coast what-the-hell floor.
I probably have
the Prioresse's napkin
somewhere
from that April . . .

Now is the month
under my permanently makeshift roof
when reading here and there your name
— we know about your life —
I long to make a pilgrimage to honour you
and — I'll be honest — burden you
because . . .
you were a teacher . . .
hooly martir
with immaculate intent . . . .
But never mind. You blew (you blow)
a boisterous bliss about our heavy huts,
and soothly, you
have holpen us.

PIN SETTER: POINT GREY

Elizabeth Harper

(Newly arrived — an immigrant really — in her first big city, and needing money until her piano class took shape, my mother answered an ad for a pin setter, thinking it a sewing position.)

Amending the length of sleeves,
she set pins well enough I
guess   but clumsily —
her headstrong fingers
tripping over them, heart
trembling at the illicit chance
to mold again the little mannekin.

She could set
gay crepe-papered tables
in the baked-bean basement
of a church. She wasn't
keen though — couldn't
seem to catch and toss back
kitchen camaraderie,

preferred to be
about her Father's business,
drawing the women from their
apron skins, out of their
happy jostling
into an Upper Room to
drop embarrassed eyes
before her Bridegroom
(bearded and bewildering but
— so it seemed to them —
innocuous in his melancholy).

Mostly, though, you found her
    stationed   bent
inside the raucous bowling alley
of each dreaded day:
pin setter in a furious cycle of
collaboration during which
she propped up
white-robed dreams

against which
as she reckoned
no crude bowler
would dare hurl.
Frame after frame
she'd set us up.
We were
to shame
the flighty, game-
addicted world.

GEORGIA & HOWE

Elizabeth Harper

Dear B: Did you know
that you became a Citizen of Canada
in what is now a Gallery?
It celebrates you today
with fruit and flowers hanging on
the west wall of the second floor.
The pretty things were painted
by the Dutch — honest people if
a trifle humourless.
                    Never mind.
In celebration of "becoming"
they made their pictures
    shine
    singshine
    cry colour
    dye it
    pour it into
    peaches and
    roses
    until it could
    — don't touch! —
    spill over to
    the floor . . . !

And so folk become citizens, or whatever,
and celebrate with apricots and irises.
But if, like the Dutch, they're smart,
they will include . . . my God,
come here and look! A little
salamander in the food . . .
Why, there are salamanders
everywhere! And flies, bees,
beetles . . . Look! The wet
exquisite grapes of Jan van Huysum (1682-1749)
take five perfect
life-size ants
into eternity.
I have a friend can tell me
what these visitations mean *exactly*.
Meanwhile, study this healthy worm
humping a green moat. Admire
the artful judge who gave old truth
its funny, undramatic due,
gave it its papers,
let it vote.

FIREWORKS OVER THE OTTAWA RIVER

Mark Cochrane

Rockets blossom, filaments of stamen
Till anthers droop their heads in embers.
Paper husks, brown, flutter on to the crowd

Moments later, the scorched petals of Roman
Weaponry, tangled in tendrils of smoke.
Like bombers' propaganda, each fragment

Shucks a message, a flash-pod of deceit
That trickles into the river's darkness:
These seeds that sparkle, a shower of souls.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S "IN THE SKIN OF A LION" AND THE ORAL NARRATIVE

Gordon Gamlin

MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *In the Skin of a Lion* revises Toronto's civic history. While official accounts mention chiefly the town's city planners and corporations, Ondaatje allots less narrative space to such functionaries and their visions and concentrates on those who built the city and their stories instead. His "study of the New World" (79) does not focus on the controlling centre but turns to the workers at the periphery. Their diversity is rendered best through oral narratives which defy conventional monomorphic presentations. In search of a narrative model, *In the Skin of a Lion* reverts to oral narrative strategies[1] and to the beginnings of story telling. The work finds structural and thematic underpinnings in the *Gilgamesh* epic from which its title and much of its characterization stems.[2] In addition, Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* presents a number of thematic similarities to oral narratives, such as its emphasis on the tale-telling nature of the story and its resistance to closure. The notion of audience participation is also prominently featured. Ondaatje's retelling of hitherto unwritten history emphasizes especially the problem of immigration and the continual struggle for an acceptable division of power within changing social constructs. Ultimately, the novel allows an egalitarian voicing of previously marginalized perspectives.

One of the workers who helps build Toronto's infrastructure and whose story sheds a new light on conventional civic histories[3] is Ondaatje's protagonist Patrick Lewis. Inspired by Alice and her political activism, he acts out her will and gets to "the centre of the city" (29) to undo its order. Patrick "literally 'infiltrates' the filtration plant from the outside tunnel he had earlier helped blast out of rock" (Hutcheon 102). The subsequent climactic scene of the novel is closely modeled after the *Gilgamesh* epic. With some preparatory work and help from others, Gilgamesh and Patrick both use artificial weights to dive deep into the waters towards the seat of power. Whereas Gilgamesh's quest led to the well, Patrick's travels end in what can be seen as the well of all of Toronto. Ondaatje's description of the descent echoes *Gilgamesh* repeatedly. As in the ancient epic, repetition intensifies the images of darkness and claustrophobia. Ondaatje retains a further detail: Patrick injures his hand. Like Gilgamesh, Patrick questions the outcome of his undertaking. In an earlier scene Patrick sees "his visage never emerging out of the shadows. Unhistorical" (172). Given the odds against him, Patrick's entrance into the "Palace of Purification" is in itself an achievement and a reward for his struggle. He has successfully overcome the danger of being obliterated by official histories.

Patrick's intrusion recalls also the *Gilgamesh* epic's notion of the outsider's move to the controlling centre. In the oral source text, the autocrat's civic order is created solely for his indulgence and veneration. Enkidu, the outsider, steps in to improve conditions for the citizens after he is lured from the wilderness by the goddess Ishtar and her servant. Similarly, the designs of Pomphrey and Harris are megalomaniac. Their vision initially excludes those who transform that very vision into reality. At first, their plans appear valuable in themselves: "Before the real city could be seen it had to be imagined, the way rumours and tall tales were a kind of charting" (29). In the process of creating, however, Nicholas the daredevil soon emerges as the hero of the bridge. His and Patrick's courage in shaping Toronto's infrastructure gives the city its character. As accounts of building the bridge are passed on and gradually become history, those who fought at the front line are immortalized while the planners who made the front page at its official opening sink into obscurity.

In the climactic confrontation between Harris and Patrick, with its oral narrative echoes, the values of the periphery oppose the values of the centre. Fittingly, a dynamiter comes to impress upon Harris "the extreme looseness of the structure of all objects" (135) and threatens to destroy the monumental project. "Do you know how many of us died in there?" Patrick asks. Harris invokes official history in a feeble attempt at a defense: "There was no record kept" (236). Conventional history has deliberately shut out the majority. Like Scheherazade, Harris resorts to tales to delay the threatening execution of Patrick's plans. He is talking for his life (235), and hastily he assembles limited stock arguments to justify capitalist excesses (236). At one point, he refers to classical literature to avoid Patrick's criticism (239). Thus he invokes canonical authority to stay in power. Given his life's work, this is the only credible position left to him.

Patrick, however, will not debate Harris on such terms. Instead of Harris's static confrontational mode, he seeks an exchange that will put him at peace with himself and others. Patrick's formative years include a distinct natural division of language: on the one hand, the letters found frozen in his rural mailbox after a snowstorm testify to the stasis of the written word, and on the other hand the square dance calls of his father form a body of ritualistic language. Verse, rhyme and repetition of the oral tradition found in "the only moments his father was verbal" (19) become a source of reassurance and life to Patrick. All that is frozen in time or static poses a threat and must be exploded. As dynamiters he and his father move about the countryside and employ their power to free the river's flow. To them, much that appears locked in certainty hangs merely in a precarious balance to be unhinged instantaneously. Harris, therefore, does not convince Patrick through argumentation. What he says is immaterial to his former employee. How and that he says it, on the other hand, saves him. Through the rhetoric, Harris not only gains time, but his strategy also leads to an unexpected opening. Overcome by the moment, Patrick finds in Harris a receptive listener. He therefore shares his story of Alice's death, and unburdens himself. In the end it becomes apparent that Patrick has sought the confessional more than the destruction of the waterworks. For him, the telling of the tale has inherent healing powers.

WHILE THE WORK'S MULTIPLE INDIVIDUAL HISTORIES dislodge conventional history, *In the Skin of a Lion* is also characterized by thematic similarities to oral narrative strategies. The novel announces itself as an oral tale. Hanna "gathers" the story in Patrick's Ford, and thus the opening frame tale defines the time and place of the telling and immediately identifies the teller as well as the audience. An Ondaatjean word play invokes the car's status as "vehicle of the story" and as a symbol of "the American way of life" but avoids the banality of both the pun and the cliché. The closing frame returns to the storyteller's round, and the final "Lights, he said" (244) signals, ironically, the start of a performance and further emphasises the tale-telling nature of the novel. Throughout the work, multiple tales combine into a shared history. The end itself, therefore, invites a retelling in which audiences can follow previously neglected strands of the story. Expanding curiosity replaces any sense of finality as readers encounter a series of beginnings which invite as many readings of the text, and history becomes subject to individual interpretations. As Robert Harlow puts it: "There is no such thing as history. There is only individual consciousness expanding" (Harlow 87). In the process, history is opened to questioning and investigation.

The story's resistance to closure is further apparent in Ondaatje's use of oral narrative strategies in his treatment of the theme of initiation. As the title "Little Seeds" suggests, the first chapter is devoted to origination. Patrick explores the prehistoric composition of the natural world around him, and his apprenticeship includes naming and mapping (9). After this primary context is established, "The Bridge" opens. For the second time in the novel, a Ford truck magically carries a Promethean flame to signal the coming of the new metropolis (25). Once the civic infrastructure is in place, the inauguration ceremonies become themselves a relay of beginnings: an anonymous cyclist claims the bridge before the official, but much earlier the workers and their lights commemorate their dead (27). Perpetual geneses thus create the sense of a resonant past in the making. The individual stories of all participants share tangential points. Yet these points are not plotted along a simple storyline and the novel thus resists closure. From the onset, the representation defies linearity, and the circles of narrative widen to include new characters and their associates. One after another, the outsiders assert themselves in the New World, while the official dignitaries at the centre of civic history are much muted.

In many ways the novel's typically oral resistance to closure is personified by Clara, who makes her influence felt throughout the novel. Patrick's final rejection of destructive power in the waterworks dream sequence, for example, may well have been prompted by her. Like Ishtar's servant in the *Gilgamesh* epic, Clara effaces the destructive impact of individual self-assertiveness. Instead, she favours the anonymity oral strategies paradoxically offer by replacing individual authorship with a shared responsibility for a story. As Patrick and Clara love each other and share the "white character" of Patrick's ejaculation, Clara is associated with history, oral narratives and fertility:

> [H]e bent down and put his mouth on hers. He took it, the white character, and they passed it back and forth between them till it no longer existed, till they didn't know who had him like a lost planet somewhere in the body. . . . He loved the eroticism of her history. (69)

The oral exchange of the seed makes the mouths wombs for a process of origination which subverts linear notions of causation. Infused with many individual contributions, history thus becomes a vigorously charged process. In a remark to Patrick, Small points to the source of Clara's influence: "It's her unfinished nature" (93). Both Clara's and Alice's powers are thus rooted in sexuality and the language of performance arts. Their emphasis and approach, however, differ, as do the contributions they make to their surroundings.

As mentioned earlier, the remaking of history draws together characters from vastly diverse backgrounds, many of whom initially join as participating audience members. Alice offers the following model for audience participation, which Patrick recalls when he sees himself as "a watcher" rather than "a hero of one of the [many] stories" that comprise the novel (157):

> The powerful matriarch removed her large coat from which animal pelts dangled and she passed it, along with her strength, to one of the minor characters . . . Each person had their moment when they assumed the skins of wild animals, when they took responsibility for the story. (157)

Alice's description of the oral performance model reminds readers also of the *Gilgamesh* epic and king Gilgamesh's acquisition of the lion skin. In Ondaatje's novel, the key gesture of taking the animal pelts precedes the telling. Amongst other conferred powers associated with the skin, the apparel transfers a character's identity to the storytelling. Individual players thus successively shape *In the Skin of a*

Lion with the urge to tell their story. Yet their interconnectedness emerges only gradually, as audiences learn that the various tales belong to a shared history. While the appearances of the characters provide colourful and often eccentric details, audience members must enter into active negotiations of meaning to form their impression of focal events. As authorial hierarchies are dismantled and passed to the minor actors, the participants become equals. No single 'hero' or 'heroine' commands the audience's attention.[4] Instead, each character offers a unique perspective on a number of shared events and thus invites a revision of history.

AS DIFFERENT CHARACTERS TAKE CONTROL of the story, the animal skin becomes associated with the challenge to official history offered by individual oral tales.[5] As if to draw attention to the lion skin as emblem, Ondaatje's only direct quotations from the *Gilgamesh* epic are the two references to animal pelts or lion skins. In the original tale, the passages follow each other immediately, though they are chronologically far apart. Gilgamesh's mourning and his enigmatic killing of two lions not only frames Ondaatje's story, but as his title suggests, the skin of a lion also defines the novel in its entirety: Patrick's taking the hide allows his participation in the process of retelling and shaping history. The actor's coat and the lion pelt are one.

Ondaatje enriches the skin-imagery in the tannery scenes, in which one's skin is emblematic of the gaining of a new cultural identity. At the same time, the workers' tales revise romanticized official accounts of an early Canadian trade:

> [men] leapt in embracing the skins of recently slaughtered animals . . . pulling wet hides out after them so it appeared they had removed the skins from their own bodies. They had leapt into different colours as if into different countries. (130)

Thus, the "skins" of the workers are associated with their cultural identity and with their position in the social power structure around them (130). In both the *Gilgamesh* epic and in Ondaatje's novel, the skin of the lion, therefore, suggests the acquisition of previously foreign attributes and qualities. Like the lion skin of the epic, these new qualities ultimately come to define the individual.[6] Once such a "skin of a lion" is attained, the workers are ready to tell their story and to take part in the social event that is the performance of history. Since his or her active contribution determines not only a character's identity but also the composite identity of the group of which he or she is a part, the negotiating or constructing of society and of history lies with all participants and not with any single dominant interest group.

The process of acquiring a skin or identity is accompanied by another obvious prerequisite to audience participation within the oral tradition. Nicholas Temelcoff soon notes that the immigrant's first step towards social consolidation is language acquisition (46). Shortly after his arrival in Canada — the country he chooses after listening to "Daniel Stoyanoff's tall tales" (44) — he participates in performance arts, as a first step towards adopting a new culture and language. The process begins in silence and ends in a unified uproar: "the audience around him was silent . . . [then] a terrible loudness entered the silent performance. The audience began to clap in unison" (117). Yet, the process need not always be charged with tension:

> [W]atching a Chaplin film he found himself laughing out loud, joining the others in their laughter. And he caught someone's eye, the body bending forward to look at him, who had the same realization — that this mutual laughter was conversation. (138)

Here, the popular medium of visual story telling becomes a meeting ground. In the absence of an audible narrative, audience members become aware of their articulated reactions. Subsequently, the audience response to the presented images turns into a sub-story. The laughter sparked by the performance gives the audience a feeling of security and thus liberates it from external and internal censors. In this relaxed atmosphere of the performance arts the new language becomes accessible to all levels of learners: "Most immigrants learned their English from recorded songs or, until the talkies came, through mimicking actors on stage" (47). Nick joins others in songs and plays, and although they remain mere parroting audience members, the immigrants prove that they are ready to take the stage at any time (47). As the new Canadians enter the work place, the live performance becomes their metaphor and means of successful association and first step towards cultural participation.

FAILURE TO ACQUIRE THE NEW LANGUAGE, on the other hand, results in the loss of political power. For example, Alice's silent puppet show demonstrates how the language barrier prevents the access of so-called ethnic minorities to society's institutions (116). But Alice's show does not end here. Following the exposure of social injustice, her presentation turns didactic. The climax of her performance requires audience participation for its resolution, and one evening Patrick commits himself and steps onto "this dangerous new country of the stage" (116). His dramatic intervention is both allegorical and actual. Thus, the open medium prompts Patrick's response and exemplifies how the newcomers' acts help to create a "neighbourhood intricate with history and ceremony" of their own (133).

Alice may favour gesture in her dramaturgy, but elocution remains the main source of her influence. Hers "was a party and a political meeting, all of them trespassing, waiting now for speeches and entertainment" (115). Alice's political theatre targets specifically the history of the nearly completed waterworks by foregrounding the lives of those who actually built the works as opposed to those who conceived them. Here "events of art" thus replace the "official histories [or] news stories [which] surround us daily" (146). Alice's effective blend of art and social criticism is most apparent backstage, where Patrick is reminded of Mogul Akbar — a potentate who displays his dominance by imposing intermittent stasis on his subjects under the threat of execution (118). In Alice's sphere, however, the king is hung (119).[7] The appeal of the performance arts transcends the dictator's decree. But Alice's most effective instrument in challenging existing versions of history is the spoken word. Similar to the 'word' in the Canadian native oral tradition, Alice's "'word' carrie[s] the power to create, to make things happen" (Petrone 10). After a discussion of the brutalities of early capitalism, Patrick asks Alice: "So what do you do"? Alice explains her strategy: "You name the enemy and destroy their power" (124). For Alice, at least, audience participation leads eventually to audience empowerment.

Increasingly, Patrick experiences the arresting quality of Alice's oral narrative strategies. At first he is captured by Clara's and Alice's stories: "the night kitchen with these two actresses is overwhelming. Clara and Alice slip into tongues, impersonate people, and keep each other talking long into the night" (74). In telling their histories, they employ professional skills to lend a voice to all parties involved. Yet they also use their creative power as a means to indulge themselves:

> Patrick . . . abandons himself to the sofa . . . The two women continue talking and laughing . . . After an hour or so they say to each other, 'Let's get him.' . . . One travels along a descant of insight and the other follows, completes the phrase, making the gesture safe. (75)

Their prehistoric "cave mural" (76) is a ritualistic mapping of Patrick. But while Alice would complete the picture, Clara begins a "riotous laughter." Her "mouth explodes with noise and she tugs Alice out . . . Clara's growls unnaming things" (76). Clara thus instigates a freeing catharsis, while Alice initially attempts to use the performance to fix Patrick's image. Alice is ready to transgress the boundaries of oral/aural worlds to her own ends. Without Clara, Alice later achieves her objectives, and Patrick is surprised when he learns that Alice has made him into a political activist: "He th[inks], I am moving like a puppet" (120). Her didacticism prompts him to break with safe routines in order to change the course of events to his cost.

The *Gilgamesh* quotations, however, foreshadow the inherent dangers of Alice's strategy by warning of the damaging consequences of her action. Patrick's destructive intentions, for example, are bound to harm him. Throughout the *Gilgamesh* epic, Ishtar and her servant control Gilgamesh and Enkidu, much as Alice and Clara influence Patrick and Nick. Alice's destructive naming which is to destroy the power of the enemy (124) further recalls Ishtar's morally equivocal power. As

Alice inherits both Ishtar's power to influence others, and Enkidu's tragic fate, she reveals the limitations of her manipulative use of oral strategies. Therefore, her story warns against any didactic or polemic usages of oral modes in historiography. It is a cautionary tale about cautionary tales.

Nevertheless, Ondaatje discredits neither Alice's political theatre nor her social criticism. Instead, her challenging of exploitative civic power structures is thematically anticipated in the ancient epic. Enkidu, for example, fights the ruler of the city not only to attain a place in his society but also to end the ruler's oppression. Similarly, Alice's tales of the workers testify to capitalist exploitation. Initially, Alice's "grand cause" (125) echoes Enkidu's cry to change the city's order. The refusal of the outsider to serve and to accept existing power struggles finally leads to the death of both Alice and Enkidu. Thus, Patrick is made tragically aware of the static properties of Alice's destructive naming of the enemy: "Alice ... He breathes out a dead name. Only a dead name is permanent" (165). Still, Patrick —like Gilgamesh—takes up the cause of his deceased companion. Like Gilgamesh who as "king and conqueror of the dreadful blaze" (Gilg. 84) controls fire, Patrick is a dynamiter who has the knowledge and tools to carry out the destruction his friend wishes for. Here too, the ancient epic serves as the model for the retelling of Toronto's history.

At the same time, *Gilgamesh* provides a character study which undermines the conventional portrayal of individuals of historic impact. Neither Patrick nor Gilgamesh has a zealous commitment to changing the existing order. Instead, they are motivated by sorrow and guilt over the loss of a loved one. As Patrick puts it: "I don't believe the language of politics, but I'll protect the friends I have. It's all I can handle" (122). This partly explains why he lets destructive power slip away when it ultimately lies literally within his grasp in the shape of a detonator. Patrick's tacit rejection of such power finally enables him to carry out Alice's brand of political activism without again endangering lives. His evasion of any final commitment is an affirmation of life, but it also obliges him to rely on others to carry on where he leaves off. Patrick's course of action thus allows for further communal participation, in accordance with oral narrative aesthetics. Unlike the heroic individual at the centre of conventional historiography whose actions are said to be felt by generations to come, Patrick is part of a human web and who is influenced by others as much as he influences them. His portrayal thus undermines conventional history and its official chronology of conflicts amongst "historic figures."

LIKE THE ANCIENT *Gilgamesh* epic, the novel lacks a conventional conclusion. Alice dies and Patrick embarks on a new course of action, perhaps to redeem himself. In the climactic dream sequence which concludes in the waterworks (220-242), he reaches his goal and holds power, only to let it slip away, "as if, having travelled all that distance to enter the castle in order to learn its wisdom for the grand cause, he now turns and walks away" (164). While Harris sees in Patrick merely an unwillingness to assume responsibility, his claims lack the resonance of Patrick's tragic awareness. Both men agree that the initial wish and even the process of acquiring power in the skin of a lion is worthwhile. The instant of attaining this skin, however, holds potential limitations. Thus Patrick endorses the struggle but rejects the position of final dominance. To do otherwise would mean a betrayal of his father, of his friends and even of Alice: Patrick would be written into history to be used by would-be followers to their ends.

As Patrick drowses off in the waterworks, Harris cites Gilgamesh's emblematic slaying of the lions: "He fell upon them like an arrow from the string . . ." (242). However, because of his own fear, he omits the epic's original images of fragmentation and explosion in which Gilgamesh ". . . struck and destroyed and scattered them" (Gilg. 97). Patrick is successful without having to destroy the waterworks. He can assert himself without dealing the final blow. His arrows connect where others sever.

Earlier Patrick sends off such an arrow, when he brings Nicholas an awareness of history. He shows Nicholas a photograph which recalls their shared story like a mnemonic device: suddenly everything falls into place as Patrick frees the flow of history.

> Nicholas is aware of himself standing there with the pleasure of recall. It is something new to him. This is what history means. He came to this country . . . Language, customs, family, salaries. Patrick's gift, that arrow into the past, shows him the wealth in himself, how he has been sewn into history. Now he will begin to tell stories. (149)

Both *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Gilgamesh* address three aspects of socialization and history: the emergence of civilization itself, immigration and the access to power. Ondaatje gives particular emphasis to the immigrant myth of the epic in which freedom is increasingly defined as the access to power in an evolving community. Although many of the details are rearranged, *In the Skin of a Lion* echoes *Gilgamesh* repeatedly. The resulting sense of rich intricacy and complexity — the "architecture of the past" (66) — is suggestive rather than conclusive and stands in direct opposition to linear conventional historiography.

Modeled after an oral poem, *In the Skin of a Lion* shares many thematic similarities with oral narratives. Compared to Ondaatje's earlier prose works, oral narrative strategies have lessened somewhat but oral narrative themes have been enriched and complicated. A many-layered web of symbolic connections replaces simple cause and effect relations and shifts the focus from the functionaries to the common worker. Just as Patrick rejects the power and finality of a destructive blow, Ondaatje surrenders the authority of a closed narrative system. In each episode his oral narrative strategies instead allow several points of departure for further tales. Ultimately, Toronto's civic history is negotiated in an interpretive retelling of events.

NOTES

[1] My discussion of translations from the oral to the printed medium draws upon the findings of Ruth Finnegan, who charts some of the no-man's land between oral and literary worlds.

[2] The three versions of *Gilgamesh* "are stories of folklore and romance which run back from the medieval courts through Celtic legend and minstrelsy to archaic Sumer, and perhaps further, to the very beginning of story-telling . . . We do not know how long the poem was recited, but the retention of those passages suggests an oral tradition alongside the written" (Sandars 46-8).

[3] This study's notion of conventional historiography is derived from Hayden White's definition of "history proper" (White 4).

[4] Martha Butterfield was the first critic to note the absence of a central hero.

[5] "The ex-centric, those on the margin of history — be they women, workers, immigrants (or writers) — have the power to change the perspective of the centre, and that power is given voice in *In the Skin of the Lion* [sic]" (Hutcheon 103).

[6] The newly gained identity, however, also contains new limitations and paradoxically fosters the need to "step out, in the erotica of being made free" (132).

[7] The puppet is a giant which is linked to the giant Humbaba of the *Gilgamesh* epic (117). Alice and Patrick reenact the slaying of that giant when Patrick steps onto the stage to resolve the dramatic crisis.

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FOUND POEM

John Marshall

Emily's
My Book Hou

cigaM esu
Gard

ne

ANot Abat
Wat I Hav
Bin Doing
IPatad
Today
Ysdrday

He lettered My
in huge blue crayon,
the mystery
at about three.
ANot is hers
in a delicate pencil,
we figure she was four.
It's an old care —
I tell her,
to write a facing page.
No point in repeating
the not-writing in books part.
And leaving off
the thirty odd years
gone somewhere.
Then she shows him
how to close the book
so that their hands
always touch.

SHAKESPEAREAN GARDEN

J. D. Carpenter

Rue
Sage

Anise
Angelica

Purple Basil
Yellow Bedstraw

Lemon Balm
Lemon Thyme

Garden Thyme
Wild Thyme

Wild Marjoram
Wood Betony

Sweet Woodruff
Salad Burnet

Summer Savory
Winter Savory

English Lavender
French Lavender

Fringed Lavender
Finochio

Tarragon
Bergamot

Lady's Mantle
Coriander

Costmary
Catnip

—*Stratford, Ontario*

SIBYLS

Echoes of French Feminism in "The Diviners" and "Lady Oracle"

Christian Bök

"The diviners" by Margaret Laurence and *Lady Oracle* by Margaret Atwood recount narratives about fictional writers, who each play the part of a metaphorical sibyl, for whom writing is a visionary experience. Morag Gunn in *The Diviners* and Joan Delacourt in *Lady Oracle* practise a psychographic stylistics, whose oracular overtones recall the writing strategies of French feminism, both the *parler-femme* of Luce Irigaray (*This Sex* 222) and the *écriture feminine* of Hélène Cixous (*The Newly* 168). While neither Laurence nor Atwood can in any way be said to advocate explicitly the theories of French feminism, theories largely advocated by female writers in Quebec, the experience of the protagonists in both texts does, nevertheless, invite a French feminist interpretation. Laurence and Atwood do not use their texts to stage the formalistic revolution of Irigaray and Cixous, but thematize this revolution while preserving formalistic traditions. Laurence and Atwood establish in content what Irigaray and Cixous establish in form so that French feminism in the two novels amounts to an intertextual trace that awaits definition, divination.

The Diviners and *Lady Oracle* describe writing as a cathartic process, in which the female writer renovates her life by accessing the unconscious, what Julia Kristeva might call the "semiotic" (*Revolution* 27), the nonthetic, prelinguistic realm of experience normally suppressed by the "symbolic" (27), the thetic, phallocentric realm of language: the *écrivaine*, as oracle or diviner, voices feminine experiences relegated by patriarchy to the margins of discourse. Elaine Showalter points out that French feminism is "sibylline" ("Wilderness" 338) and argues: "[t]he problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language" (341). Showalter describes an artistic dilemma that certainly faces both Morag and Joan, two women for whom writing becomes a "medium" in both senses of the term, both an encoded method of communication and a conduit through which voices "unincorporated" in discourse may speak. Both Atwood and Laurence may use such protagonists in order to allude vicariously to the obstacles that they themselves have faced as female writers in a patriarchal culture.

Atwood points out that "[t]he woman writer . . . exists in a society that, though it may turn certain individual writers into revered cult objects, has little respect for writing as a profession, and not much respect for woman either" ("On Being" 204), while Laurence points out that she experiences a "growing awareness of the . . . powerlessness of women, the tendency of women to accept [a] male definition of ourselves" ("Ivory Tower" 109). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that, throughout history, patriarchy has perpetuated a phallocentric myth of creativity, in which literary production is a male prerogative, and they respond by arguing that "women . . . must escape just those male texts which [. . .] deny them the autonomy to formulate alternatives to the authority that has imprisoned them" (*Madwoman* 13). Gilbert and Gubar present a manifesto consistent in part with the preconceptions of French feminists, who believe that western culture perpetuates a phallocentric standard of subjectivity — a standard to which Cixous responds by arguing that "[w]oman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" ("The Laugh" 875). Irigaray suggests that women must practise a *parler-femme* that reproduces a voluptuous surrender to the fluid polyvalency of lesbian sexuality (*This Sex* 209); similarly, Cixous suggests that women must develop an *écriture feminine* that makes women receptive to a maternal agency outside the patriarchal sociolect (*The Newly* 93). Both women valorize feminine solidarity.

French feminism proposes that the *écrivaine* can elude patriarchal discourse through a process that, according to Cixous, proceeds from a sublimation of the ego, followed by an attentiveness to the erotic rhythms of the unconscious (Conley 146). Cixous remarks that "[w]hat is going to write itself comes from long before me, *me* [. . .] being nothing but the bodily medium which [. . .] transcribes that which is dictated to me" (Conley 146). Cixous does not take personal credit for her *écriture*, but admits her debt to some oneiric voice outside herself:

> I am a dreamer. . . . I owe everything, almost everything to dream. . . . I owe everything to somebody else, and in my innocence of times past, I felt guilty because when I started to write under pressure, under dictation, under the influence of the dream, which made me terribly ashamed. I was not the one who was writing. (Conley 154-55)

Cixous asserts that the source of this oneiric voice is an idealized mother, "something [. . .] repairing and feeding, a force that [. . .] runs codes ragged" (*The Newly* 93). Cixous suggests that the *écrivaine* assumes the role of spokesperson for this maternal voice in order to become a sibyl, a woman similar to the Delphic Oracle, someone revered by the Ancient Greeks for her discursive insights normally inaccessible to men.

Catherine Clément observes that, historically, the sibyl has often been accused of either madness or sorcery in order to defuse her threat to phallocentric power: "the sorceress engenders without a father" (*The Newly* 56), but "the history of the sorceress . . . often ends in confinement or death" (8). Showalter observes too that, "[i]n ecstatic religions, women more frequently than men speak in tongues, a phenomenon attributed by anthropologists to their relative inarticulateness in formal religious discourse" (340); however, Showalter also observes that "unintelligible female 'languages' are scarcely cause for rejoicing; indeed, it was because witches were suspected of esoteric knowledge [. . .] that they were burned" (340). Gilbert and Gubar, on the other hand, suggest that such "terrible sorceress-goddesses" (34) are necessary opponents to patriarchy: after all, the demand for feminine self-abnegation implies that a woman can only hope to inspire subversive discourses vicariously, perhaps by playing the passive role of muse for a male artist; however, a woman cannot hope to express these subversive impulses independently without disrupting the patriarchal establishment.

"THE DIVINERS" and *Lady Oracle* foreground this theme of engendered power by featuring sibylline women who become their own muses. Both texts suggest an intimate relationship between female writers and female visionaries. Just as Morag has an abiding interest in "garbage-telling" and water divination, so also does Joan remain fascinated with occult spiritualism and automatic writing. Morag's bestselling fiction represents a ritual of divination, while Joan's bestselling poetry represents an experiment in psychography. Even the names of the characters establish a connection with mystical insight. Joan believes that her mother has named her not after Joan Crawford, the movie-star, but after Joan of Arc (337), the martyred prophetess, "accused of witchcraft, . . . roped to the stake" (337), and burned so that "only her heart remained" (337). Similarly, Morag sees herself sharing the name of Piper Gunn's wife, another legendary, sibylline woman endowed not only with the "faith of saints" (52), but also with "*the power and the second sight and the good eye and the strength of conviction*" (52). Moreover, both texts suggest that the protagonists have privileged access to the supernatural. Leda Sprott, the spiritualist in Atwood's text, emphasizes that Joan is endowed with some practical talent for the occult and encourages Joan to participate in automatic writing: "You have great gifts. . . . Great powers. You should develop them" (111). Similarly, Royland, the water-diviner in Laurence's text, draws an apt parallel between Morag and Joan of Arc (98), since Morag seems to commune with the spirit of a dead woman, Catherine Parr Traill, a woman whom Morag not only invokes as "Saint Catherine" (171), the "ghost" (405), "a lady of my acquaintance, who happens not to inhabit this vale of tears any more" (98), but also commands as though with sorcerous language: "Speak, oh lady of blessed memory" (96) or "[F]arewell, sweet saint — henceforth, I summon you not" (406). Just as Joan of Arc communes with the Virgin, so also do Morag and Joan learn to commune with apparently transcendental, maternalistic forces.

While the reader cannot be absolutely certain that either Joan or Morag produces subversive texts that conform strictly to the stylistic conventions of either *parler-femme* or *écriture feminine*, the protagonists do describe a creative process that bears the sibylline overtones of French feminist writing, for both protagonists believe that their work originates in some inexpressible agency beyond their conscious control. Within *Lady Oracle*, for example, automatic writing is portrayed as a surrender to spiritual possession, to "the feeling of [. . .] being taken over" (112). Joan remarks:

> When I would emerge from the trance . . . there would usually be a word, sometimes several words, occasionally even a sentence, on the notepad in front of me, though twice there was nothing but a scribble. I would stare at these words trying to make sense of them. . . . At first the sentences centred around the same figure, the same woman. After a while, I could almost see her: she lived under the earth somewhere, or inside something, a cave or a huge building; sometimes she was on a boat. She was enormously powerful, almost like a goddess, but it was an unhappy power. This woman puzzled me. (224)

The Diviners also endows creative writing with mystical overtones so that Morag's "divinations" call to mind Joan's "experiments":

> Morag is working on another story. . . . She does not know where it came from. It comes into your head and when you write it down, it surprises you, because you never knew what was going to happen until you put it down. (87)
>
> She had been working through the day, the words not having to be dredged up out of the caves of the mind, but rushing out in a spate so that her hand could not keep up with them. Odd feeling. Someone else dictating the words. Untrue, of course, but that was how it felt, the characters speaking. Not Morag's concern. Possession or self-hypnosis — it made no difference. Just let it keep on coming. (404)

When Joan remembers her past or writes stories with her eyes closed in order to "drift off into the world of shadows" (219), her experience recalls the professed need of Cixous to write "with eyes closed" (Conley 146). Literary scenes produced by Joan at such moments develop spontaneously with the same clarity as Morag's "mental cinemas" so that both women seem to retreat into a trance when they write. The texts not only reinforce this motif of the visionary, but also stress that the protagonists must confront the underprivileged status of female writers.

Both Joan and Morag have to contend with gendered disadvantages when trying to establish their literary vocation; they must at first overcome a variety of patriarchal obstacles, particularly the lack of male support. Joan, for example, must initially write within the shadow of the sexist Polish Count, who prefers to be called Paul — after the misogynist saint (151) — and who believes that "the mystery of man is the mind . . . whereas that of the woman is of the body" (166). Moreover, Joan must later write clandestinely, trying to fulfill adequately her role as good wife to Arthur, while indulging the literary aspirations of her "true" self. Joan believes that divulging her profession to Arthur must result in his disrespect for her intelligence (31-32). Similarly, Morag writes her first book amid domestic distractions normally reserved for a woman economically dependent upon a man. Morag's husband Brooke, like the Polish Count, encourages his female companion to assume the roles of both domestic supporter and childish lover. Brooke actually persuades Morag to quit university in order to marry him, and ultimately his power over her manifests itself not only in her own sense of claustrophobia, but also in his repeated words of solace, a male demand in fact for feminine silence: "Hush, love" (217). Within both texts, the female writer must transcend an inferiority complex, induced in part by the dismissive attitudes of males who subscribe, sometimes unwittingly, to the social expectations of patriarchy: the female writer must in effect operate in an environment where, according to Aunt Lou, "the tongue is the enemy of the neck" (37) — at least for women.

Both Morag and Joan have to face the contradiction between their own creative desires and patrisocial expectations. Joan, for example, remarks that "behind my compassionate smile was a set of tightly clenched teeth, and behind that a legion of voices, crying *What about me? What about me?* When is it my turn?" (90). Joan has "learned to stifle these voices, to be calm and receptive" (90), to indulge in what Gilbert and Gubar might call the "feminine schizophrenia of authorship" (17): the female protagonist cannot easily reconcile the tension between her life as the housewife Joan and her life as the writer Louise. Joan recognizes that sybilline figures operate at a disadvantage in their social context for "[w]hen you started hearing voices you were in trouble, especially if you believed them" (337). Morag also learns a similar lesson in repressive silence, particularly when she is publically chastised at school for using "bad" language (35) and concludes: "Hang onto your shit and never let them know you are ascared" (34). Moreover, Morag's first tentative efforts at poetry are not encouraged by her Sunday School teacher (80) because the writing of poetry does not suit the teacher's preconceived notion of Morag's gender role. Morag, like Joan, cannot be entirely certain that her talents are valuable, especially when judged according to a patriarchal standard of utility:

> Royland knew he had been a true diviner. There were the wells, proof positive. Water. Real wet water. There to be felt and tasted. Morag's magic tricks were of a different order. She would never know whether they actually worked or not, or to what extent. That wasn't given to her to know. In a sense, it did not matter. (452)

What is important is simply the literary act of expression, an act that becomes a political gesture of the sort normally denied to the female.

INTERESTINGLY, HOWEVER, the development of Morag's sibylline ability is strongly influenced by Royland and Christie, two adoptive fathers who not only act as spiritual mentors, but also appear to undermine the argument that the social attitudes of men are largely to blame for the literary woes of women. The predominance of male visionaries in the text may result from the fact that such characters are either marginalized by patriarchal society or have willingly surrendered their investment in its agenda. Kristeva believes that, although *écriture feminine* is often regarded as exclusively female, men too can access the semiotic, particularly when they oppose the patriarchal structures of the symbolic (218), perhaps by deliberately sharing the underprivileged position of women. Cixous concurs:

> Great care must be taken in working on feminine writing not to get trapped by names: to be signed with a woman's name doesn't necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. It could quite well be masculine writing, and conversely, the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity. It's rare, but you can sometimes find femininity in writings signed by men: it does happen. ("Castration" 52)

Cixous remarks that male poets are among the "closest allies of women" because they "let their femininity traverse them" (Conley 152). Male writers can in effect assume "sibylline" roles as prophets, depending upon their ability to disengage from patriarchal conventions.

Within *The Diviners,* Christie can therefore play the part of a mad shaman, "summoning up the ghosts of those who had never been and yet would always be" (244), doing so by virtue of his status as a town pariah, a shellshock victim who has foresworn his status as a war hero (40), only to be ostracized by the patriarchal community. Similarly, Royland can play not only the part a charismatic preacher retired from an ecstatic religion, but also the part of a water-diviner, from whom "Morag always felt she was about to learn something of great significance ... something which would explain everything" (4). Royland confesses that his experience as a preacher of a patriarchal religion leads to the misuse of his oracular talents, misuse that results in both sexual abstinence and domestic violence (240): "I thought ... that I had the Revealed Word. God was talking to me, sure as hell, and probably to no one else. At meetings I used to give 'em fire and brimstone" (240). Royland acquires his peaceful wisdom only after he uses his oracular talents to search for water, a traditional symbol of the feminine: "Seemed better to find water than to — " / "Raise fire" (241). Other male "diviners" include not only Jules Tonnerre, the Métis singer who calls himself a "shaman" (273), but also the historical figure of Louis Riel, the "Prophet" (146) who represents a male version of Joan of Arc — a male martyr who not only leads a politically disenfranchised people, but also "has the sight" (146) and "can see through walls [. . .] and see inside a man's head and see what people are thinking in there" (147). Such mystical insight seems to arise from patrisocial alienation.

Within *Lady Oracle*, Joan's sybilline talents are influenced almost exclusively by two adoptive mothers, Aunt Lou and Leda Sprott — women who, like Christie and Royland, act as spiritual guides, cultivating Joan's opposition to the prescribed codes of feminine behaviour. Joan's father is the only male accorded any mystical insight in *Lady Oracle*; he, too, is attributed with the prophetic talents typical of gifted "fathers" in *The Diviners*:

> He was a conjuror of spirits, a shaman with the voice of a dry, detached old opera commentator in a tuxedo. Or that's how I imagined him sounding, when I thought up the conversation I would have liked to have had with him but never did. I wanted him to tell me the truth about life, which my mother would not tell me and which he must have known something about, as he was a doctor and had been in the war, he'd killed people and raised the dead. (74)

Joan's father, like Christie, has endured military horrors and quietly resents being implicated in the violent agenda of a patriarchal order — an order championed, ironically enough, by a woman, Joan's mother, who takes macabre delight in her husband's wartime exploits, saying with thrilled admiration during a party: "There's nothing *wrong* with it. . . . I think it's great. . . . It took real courage" (72-73). Joan's mother displays a callousness that illustrates the degree to which women can be willingly subjected to the ideological terms of a masculine discourse. Such women conform to what Irigaray calls *la mascarade* (220), a false femininity that allows a woman to experience desire only insofar as it is prescribed by the desires of men.

Joan's father, however, exerts almost no explicit influence upon the artistic sensibilities of Joan, even though he bears some resemblance to Christie. Joan's father protests against the patriarchal discourse by refusing to participate in it, by resorting to silence, and this retreat prevents him from communicating meaningfully with his daughter. Joan in fact draws a striking parallel between phallocentric militancy and everyday language by suggesting that the two are inextricably linked: "[w]ords were not a prelude to war but the war itself, a devious, subterranean war that was unending because there were no decisive acts, no knockdown blows that could be delivered, no point at which you could say *I give in*" (53). Joan dramatizes what Jacques Derrida calls "the unity of violence and writing" (*Grammatology* 106) — the notion that social inequity is perpetuated through the very structures of discursive practice: in short, language is used primarily to oppress. Joan reveals that language is inherently phallocentric since it merely establishes relationships of power between a victim and victimizer — a fact that manifests itself most obviously in the attempts made by the sexist Fraser Buchanan to blackmail Joan (292-93), to assert power over her by threatening to speak. Joan tries in vain to escape such constraints assigned to her in advance by the various men in her life. Even her role as a female poet is orchestrated for her by her male publishers, who appreciate her feminist work not for reasons of literary merit, but for reasons of economic gain (227). Joan is forced to become what Irigaray might call *indifférente* (220), undifferentiated, in that Joan has no right to engender her own unique, creative identity, but must first submit to masculine definitions of it in order for her writing to be published.

Both Morag and Joan doubt the value of their oracular ability because they realize that writing is not an adequate vehicle for conveying the truth: language can only accommodate correspondences between differences. Atwood and Laurence in effect demonstrate that fact and fiction are indistinguishable in appearance and may well resemble each other in substance, for the apprehension of history, of memory, can only occur through the filter of discourse. French feminism tries to establish an unmediated connection with personal heritage by trying to circumvent both the male prescriptions of language and the male definitions of truth. Joan remarks that "every myth is a version of the truth" (90), an idea which reflects Atwood's own mythopoeic thematics, while Morag states that "myths are my truth now" (356), for she recognizes the disparity between different accounts of the same event, particularly when she compares the myths of Piper Gunn to the legends of Rider Tonnerre, only to discover that both stories are equally valid representations of the same history. Morag notes: "[a] popular misconception is that we can't change the past — everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revisiting it" (60). Joan demonstrates this thesis herself, rewriting her own past for the benefit of other people in the present. Joan lies to her husband Arthur about her life as a fat teenager, dreaming up stories about a fictional "Aunt Deirdre" in order to prevent disaster (89); eventually, these fictions become so numerous and complex that Joan must fake a suicide in order to simplify her polyvalent identity (295). Atwood and Laurence imply that, to the visionary, truth becomes ambiguous: truth is not reality, but the interpretation of reality at any given moment. Atwood and Laurence remain aware of the degree to which subjects are produced, spoken for, by the discursive system within which they operate, and the tentative attempts made by both Joan and Morag to rewrite their histories as women parallel the attempts of both Irigaray and Cixous to revise their own identities, to rewrite the feminine roles historically forced upon women. Atwood and Laurence participate in a similar project of feminist rewriting by revising the terms of reference for genres that have traditionally highlighted both the strength of man and the frailty of woman. The two writers adapt masculine genres to feminist purposes.

SUSAN J. ROSOWSKI points out, for example, that Atwood performs a feminist parody of the gothic ("Fantasy" 197). Traditionally, the gothic uses a sublime setting to depict a *defenseless* woman who evades the savage traps of glamorous villains so that she can eventually marry an urbane gentleman. Atwood's feminist revision, however, uses a banal setting to depict a *defensive* woman who evades the domestic traps of mundane gentlemen so that she can eventually secure her psychosexual independence. Atwood's *Lady Oracle* and Joan's *Lady Oracle* are in fact similar in that they both represent what Joan calls "one of [the] standard Costume Gothics, but a Gothic gone wrong" (234) — "upside down somehow" (234). Lucy M. Freibert also points out that Atwood performs a feminist parody of the picaresque ("Picaro" 23). Traditionally, the picaresque features a male libertine, whose psychosexual liberation implicates him in episodic imbroglios that usually require him to dupe women in order to escape. Atwood's feminist revision, however, features a female libertine, whose sense of psychosexual oppression implicates her in episodic imbroglios that usually require her to dupe men in order to escape. Both the gothic and the picaresque have traditionally reified masculine stereotypes of feminine behaviour, but the feminist satire renders these stereotypes absurd through a carnivalesque inversion of gendered conventions. Atwood uses the rules of masculine genres to satirize the rules of masculine genres. She adapts a patriarchal tradition to a feminist critique of the same patriarchal tradition.

Neither Rosowski nor Freibert, however, takes into account the ways in which this parody represents what Linda Hutcheon calls an "authorized transgression" (*A Theory* 101) that "inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence" (75). Atwood apparently risks sustaining the ideologies of the genres that she seeks to critique, and this complicity threatens to become especially problematic when she satirizes the automatic writing of her protagonist. Atwood appears to argue for the creative liberty of her protagonist while using comedic episodes to suggest that the writing style of her protagonist, a writing style championed by sibylline feminists, remains patently absurd as a serious form of creative expression. Joan's hermetic poetry is "reminiscent — of a mixture of Kahlil Gibran and Rod McKuen" (227), a pastiche of kitsch mysticism, whose style makes her a "successful bad writer" (240), a writer whose success stems largely from clever marketing rather than from artistic merit. Joan soon condemns her book, saying: "I should have taken it to a psychiatrist instead of a publisher" (234). Atwood, however, goes on to undercut this satire of automatic writing by placing all negative, aesthetic judgements in the mouth of her male characters: a publisher (227), an interviewer (239), a lover (240), and a blackmailer (291). Atwood maintains ambivalence, appearing to satirize poetic strategies of sibylline feminists, while appearing to criticize masculine standards of aesthetic value.

Laurence performs a similar set of feminist revisions, but does so without risking any inadvertent mockery of her own feminist position. Gayle Greene points out that Laurence performs a feminist parody of the *Künstlerroman* ("The Uses"

178-79). Traditionally, the *Künstlerroman* features a sensitive male, whose artistic development often involves a quest for a father as a part of the quest for the self. Laurence's feminist revision, however, features a sensitive female, whose artistic development involves, strangely enough, a quest not for a mother, as might be expected in a feminist revision, but for a father. Laurence, however, reforms this patriarchal quest by making its processes take precedence over its results. Greene suggests that the closure of the telic, a masculine end, is supposedly replaced with the aperture of the atelic, a feminine endlessness: "Laurence [. . .] suggests an alternative to Joyce's 'artificer' and her adaptation of epic quest and 'fortunate fall' redefines 'paradise' as a process, the 'the doing of the thing' . . . rather than something tangibly and finally won" (178-79). Barbara Godard also points out that Laurence performs a feminist parody of the Prospero myth ("Revolt" 210). Godard argues that, traditionally, the myth features a woman (Miranda) oppressed by a paternal creator (Prospero) who later suspends his power over her so that she might trade his paternal oppression for the marital oppression of another male (Francisco). Laurence's feminist revision, however, features a woman (Morag) who counteracts the oppression of a paternal creator (Brooke) so that she herself can take his place as a feminine creator who democratizes power and so mitigates the necessity to marry the other male (Jules). Both Morag and Joan suffer from an anxiety of influence, but whereas Joan escapes the heritage of her mother, Morag escapes the heritage of her spouse.

Laurence, like Atwood, must deploy the generic strategies being criticized in order to adapt them to her feminist purposes, and thus Laurence too risks maintaining the structures of the dominant genres that she wishes to subvert. Laurence, however, remains less ironic in tone than Atwood and appears to provide a less ambiguous, but nevertheless more conservative, revision of patriarchal genres. Moreover, Laurence appears to be more serious than Atwood about the stylistic possibilities of automatic writing, and thus Laurence does not undercut the aesthetic legitimacy of the writing style used by her protagonist. Laurence, however, cannot be said to conform more closely than Atwood to the preconceptions of French feminism by virtue of this seriousness. Godard observes that Laurence falls short of such a radical feminism because "*The Diviners* thematizes . . . a revolution in language but fails to stage that revolution" since "the sentence withstands the upheaval and exerts all the forces of its line to maintain coherence" ("Supplement" 54), a coherence that has been traditionally aligned with phallocentric rationality. Laurence, like Atwood, maintains a referential mandate, the stubborn imperative of nominative grammar. Both writers do indeed participate in a project of revision, but their feminist adaptations of masculine narratives are macrosyntactic, not microsyntactic. Both writers question traditional forms of narrative structure; however, neither writer questions traditional forms of grammatical structure;

consequently, the two writers do not indulge in the linguistic deconstruction characteristic of French feminists, many of whom insist upon a complete break with conventional forms of syntax, punctuation, spelling, and diction.

FRENCH FEMINISM perceives grammar, with its referential bias, as an ideological apparatus that confines subjects to patriarchal codes. Irigaray strives to "alter the syntax of discursive logic, based on the requirements of ... masculine sameness, in order to express ... feminine difference" (222). Similarly, Cixous writes that "[t]he logic of communication requires an economy ... of signs" (*The Newly* 92) in which "[t]he orator is asked to unwind a thin thread, dry and taut" (93), whereas the *écrivaine* assumes that "[t]o write is always to make allowances for [...] uselessness while slashing the exchange value that keeps the spoken word on its track" (92-93). Atwood and Laurence do indeed challenge the realist tradition of coherent narrativity, a tradition associated with the standard of phallocentric rationality. Both writers make use of interruptive flashbacks and intertextual digression, heteroglossic juxtaposition and metafictional reflexiveness — literary techniques available, to be sure, to all contemporary writers of either sex. Such strategies of narrative fragmentation do unsettle the coherence of an architectonic structure, but nevertheless sustain the coherence of each narrative fragment. The ideological project of the sentence, the smallest unit of propositional expression, escapes interrogation.

Atwood and Laurence may revise patriarchal genres, but they do not necessarily revise the potentially patriarchal means by which they interrogate such genres. Just as French feminism at times risks the inadvertent reification of the Pauline dichotomy between mind and body in inverting the terms of value without questioning the fundamental structure of this hierarchical opposition, so also do Atwood and Laurence risk the inadvertent reification of the very aesthetic ideologies that they question. Such a formalistic critique is not intended, however, to provide a procrustean assessment of the two writers, since to evaluate them according to the standards of French feminism, a theory in which neither writer is formally schooled, is to criticize the writers for failing to produce texts that the writers may have never intended to produce; instead, such a formalistic critique demonstrates the limits to which echoes of French feminism can be said to manifest themselves in the two texts. Both writers express the issues of such a feminism at the level of content rather than at the level of form, doing so in a way more thematic than schematic. Atwood and Laurence in fact disavow any restrictive loyalty to a predefined school of feminist ideology, for, as Atwood emphasizes, "writers, if they are honest, don't want to be wrongly identified as the children of a movement that did not give birth to them" ("On Being" 192) — a point that Laurence asserts when she writes: "I have not taken an active or direct part in the women's movement... simply because my work resides in my fiction, which must always feel easy with paradox and accommodate contradictions" ("Ivory Tower" 258). Clément points out that "the role of the sorceress . . . is ambiguous, antiestablishment, and conservative at the same time" (5), and indeed both Atwood and Laurence maintain an ideological tension in which any radical feminism is subverted to the point of being rendered aesthetically ambivalent.

Ultimately, Atwood and Laurence portray the female writer as a metaphorical sibyl, either an oracle or a diviner, a woman who can establish direct connections with the unconscious realm of personal heritage. Both writers deploy mystical imagery to strengthen the notion that the art of feminine writing is really a process of personal revelation, a process by which the artist may experience a kind of magical transformation of identity. This vision of feminine writing is consistent in tone with the sibylline preconceptions of both *parler-femme* and *écriture feminine*, writing strategies that encourage women to occupy a revolutionary role, to undermine traditional textuality by surrendering to an oneiric voice aligned with the unconscious. French feminists encourage women to rebel against phallocentric discourse since it does not adequately represent the desires of women, but discourages women from expressing themselves by devaluing their writing. While unschooled in any formal sense by this feminist perspective, both Atwood and Laurence are profoundly aware of the way in which language recruits subjects into a particular, ideological project. The two writers see that women, more than men, must face ideological obstacles when trying to cultivate literary talent: to both writers, the role of the sibyl in a patriarchal system is often fraught with the dangerous possibility of masculine reproach.

Both Atwood and Laurence argue that women who can be their own muse upset the phallocentric distribution of creative authority, and indeed the protagonists of both texts must contend with this ideological difficulty when trying to express themselves: they must resist a socialized exhortation to irrelevant silence, to feminine muteness. French feminism wishes to recontextualize the feminine voice, demonstrating that in the end both men and women can share discourse as autonomous equals. Royland, in *The Diviners*, makes an especially relevant comment about the nature of such oracular talents:

> It's something I don't understand, the divining [. . .] and it's not something that everybody can do, but the thing I don't usually let on about it is that quite a few people can learn to do it. You don't have to have the mark of God between your eyebrows. Or if you do, quite a few people have it. (451-52)

Sibylline experience is in the end not inherently engendered, but can be acquired by anyone, man or woman, who has the creative will to overturn the patriarchal demands of literature, and the hope that both sexes might be given equal opportunities to express such talent appears to be essential to the thinking of both writers.

Atwood in "Witches" in fact stresses that, while "[w]e still think of a powerful woman as an anomaly, a potentially dangerous anomaly" (331) the act of "[p]olitical witch-hunting has become a worldwide epidemic" (332) that no longer distinguishes between the sexes, not only because both sexes can write subversively, but also because the act of "writing itself is uncanny: . . . it is spell-making" (331), untameable, what Morag describes as "Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle" (5), a potentially turbulent force that not only authorizes power, but also simultaneously resists it.

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THE FAMILY GOLDMINER

Deborah Eibel

We always made great sacrifices,
So that the family goldminer
Could travel.

Whenever he left home,
To return to the gold rush,
Everything stopped —
Weddings, doctoral dissertations,
Shopping trips, concerts.
How could life go on
Without the family goldminer?

We were always complaining.
How long does a gold rush
Have to last?
Does any one ever stay
Until the very end?

We should all stay together,
While the family goldminer
Is away.

But gold rushes always inspired us.
We always urged
The family goldminer
To go back
To the gold rush.

Once you start something,
You have to finish it.

After a while
You develop an interest
In gold —
In art, commerce,
Goldsmiths, museums.

Gold mining
Is quiet work.
Gold mining
Is inspiring
To miners,
Artisans,
Curators. . . . .
— Until the end.

But some one who was here,
Before the gold rush started,
And who has no interest in gold, says
"This is my place.
You have no right
To be here."

ADAGIO CANTABILE

Deborah Eibel

The young man
Walking down
The back stairway
In full dress
Has just left
A dinner party.
His disappointed family
Has let him go again.
But this time
He is leaving
For good.
The young man
Is carrying
His metronome.

A concert pianist,
A guest at the party,
Follows him down
The back stairway.
"Don't you want to play
The Pathétique for us?"

"No."

"Of course
You can play it.
But do you really
Want to?"

"No."

"Then what do you really
Want to do?"

"I just want to play
The slow movement
Of *The Pathétique.*
But everyone is tired
Of it.

"The *adagio cantabile*
Has no future here,
I have no future here."

WALKING WITH HEIDI AMONG THE HAIDA

Hillel Schwartz

raven bearcub beaver seal the Haida raised them
above their ridgepoles until the Tlinkit could see them
across the waters, Tsimshian see them across
the waters, Kwakiutl see them across the waters,
North, East, South, and now West — you are pointing in green
anorak from green slipping cliff — lies Bowen Island

& the Spirits of the Waters, Karen & Terry,
each spoke of the wheel a name as you turn in the rain:
fiddle palette six-string icefield maple totems
rising ahead of us stern & isolate, cresting
to oystercatcher, salmon, killer whale, raven,
eagles who snatch up souls, mistaking them for children
as we hunt with bone tubes over this slope of poles
& lodges where there are to be illusions at two,
tall tales at three, impersonation at four, wind
rubbing masks into our faces like those we find in
side behind glass cases, demons caught in their throats,
kingfishers opening to silver men like shamans
borne at death to houses set out over water
on timber piers, bodies tattooed, heads in hinged masks
& feathers of flickers, coffins carved to otters
with men at their tails, whales with children in their bellies,
yours born light & still small, riding close to the hips,
a child crawling toward the drums you click from the floor
on your belly with telephoto & then he's
ten, works at green flickering screens as you teach the Gift,
the gifted, the unforthcoming, medicine wheel
to any compass point, Haida scattered now a tenth
of themselves, the rest masks & silver & black hand
size longboats in special atmospheres, clouds & fictions
of Queen Charlotte's Strait, of Charlotte's Web, of women
long gone single & strong shaking their black ghostly hair
at these circular emplacements, outlying breasts
of this lookout where men in stonesteel lodges waited
for enemies on the coast, tribes gliding like seals
under the waves in bone tubes that never came
as dark spirits come under those other names white
women take when they marry, great spiked baskets of love
& mountain laurel to ease the watching & slow
sentient walk out the doors of the museum downwind
past Nitobe Gardens & woods to cut open
a loaf of loganbread & drink water from the mouth
of the half-empty jar, N, E, W, S, drafts of
the jar half-full, S, E, W, N, & so on, & forth.

LE RÉCIT ET SES MIROIRS

Les procédés spéculaires dans "Une histoire américaine" de Jacques Godbout

Paul Raymond Coté

Depuis qu'André Gide a évoqué, en 1893, le modèle du blason afin d'expliquer sa prédilection esthétique pour la reprise à l'échelle réduite du sujet d'une œuvre à l'intérieur de cette même œuvre, les écrits théoriques cherchant à définir, à expliciter, à catégoriser et à hiérarchiser cette stratégie compositionnelle ne cessent de proliférer. Ce sont surtout les nouveaux romanciers qui, en passant de la réduplication de l'énoncé à la spécularisation de l'écrit, ont exploité, à son plus haut degré, les richesses du récit abymé, en incorporant les qualités itératives de cette technique dans les objectifs romanesques qu'ils se proposaient. Très en vogue chez les théoriciens d'obéissance postmoderne, l'autoreprésentation semble aujourd'hui omniprésente à un point tel que le critique Janet Paterson ressent le besoin de mettre le lecteur en garde contre la tentation de croire trop hâtivement que le moindre syntagme est *autoréférentiel* et de voir ce phénomène "un peu partout" (187). Or, les critères qui délimitent ce en quoi consiste la mise en abyme littéraire s'avèrent parfois fort discutables. Même l'ouvrage pénétrant de Lucien Dällenbach, travail qui représente, à bien des égards, le summum sur ce sujet, n'échappe pas à certains reproches. Christian Angelet affirme, par exemple, que Dällenbach "a fait fausse route en voulant obtenir de Gide une définition proprement formelle" (9). Et tandis qu'Yvon Bellemare parle de la spécularité dans le corpus romanesque de Jacques Godbout (Bellemare 200-11), Alain Piette conteste l'emploi que fait Bellemare des idées de Dällenbach (Piette 121-22).

Dans la présente analyse, il ne serait pas possible ni même souhaitable d'explorer toutes les catégories, parfois alambiquées il faut l'avouer, que la critique a imposées à la réduplication intégrale ou fragmentaire de l'œuvre d'art à l'intérieur d'elle-même. La définition suivante, la plus générale et la plus englobante que propose Dällenbach, servira donc de point de départ à cette étude d'*Une histoire américaine* sous le biais de la spécularité: "*est mise en abyme toute enclave entretenant une* *relation de similitude avec l'œuvre qui la contient*" (18). Ensuite, afin de leur assigner un ordre, les arguments seront groupés selon le schéma tripartite avancé par Janet Paterson dans son essai lucide, "L'Autoreprésentation: formes et discours," où l'approche est axée sur l'énonciation (en tenant compte du narrateur), l'énoncé (en considérant la narration sur le plan de la diégèse et du code), et enfin l'énonciation par rapport au narrataire. On doit également mentionner que notre propos est moins exégétique que démonstratif. Il s'agira de mettre en évidence des pratiques spéculaires afin de déceler comment elles contribuent à une production de sens en matérialisant, tant au niveau des structures narratives que sur le plan de la thématique, une symbolisation extraordinairement féconde.

I. Énonciation/Narrateur

Depuis longtemps l'écrit constitue la clef de voûte du roman godboutien, et ce de manière patente dans *Salut Galarneau!* et *D'Amour, P.Q.* Également voué à la recherche du bonheur, la personnage de François Galarneau, qui trouve dans l'écriture une sorte de compensation, se présenterait comme le frère spirituel de Gregory Francœur. Les deux rédigent leur texte entre les murs d'une prison, imaginaire pour l'un, réelle pour l'autre, dans un effort pour atteindre à la cohérence sans oublier la diversité. De manière parallèle et même plus poussée, c'est par le dédoublement de l'acte scriptural (et donc par la multiplication des narrateurs) que se crée une filiation entre *Une histoire américaine* et *D'Amour, P.Q.*, dont la structure est nettement plus complexe. Se voulant une histoire dans une histoire pour faire assister le lecteur au processus de son élaboration, *D'Amour, P.Q.* donne, à chaque lecture, l'impression d'être en train de s'écrire. Ces attributs circonscrivent également les modes opératoires d'*Une histoire américaine,* si bien que l'on peut se demander si ce dernier récit ne serait pas "aussi et finalement l'histoire de son écriture" (Milot 25).

Les liens qui rattachent l'auteur aux personnages de sa fiction, qui exercent la même fonction créatrice que lui, transforment, selon Dällenbach (100-104), le travail de création auquel se livrent ses figures auctorielles en une mise en abyme de l'acte énonciatif du narrateur implicite, s'est-à-dire de l'auteur lui-même. C'est en d'autres termes qu'André Belleau formule cette pensée: "Le roman, dit-il, qui met en scène un écrivain accomplit une réitération et même un dédoublement de l'auteur, de l'écriture et d'une idée de la littérature. [. . .] Le personnage-écrivain, quels que soient son ou ses rôles sur le plan des événements, met en cause le récit comme discours littéraire: par lui, la littérature parle d'elle-même, le discours s'autoréfère" (Cité par Paterson 179). Dans le cas d'*Une histoire américaine,* la situation est particulièrement intéressante. Un narrateur anonyme (déjà une extension du scripteur, Godbout), doit disputer les droits de narration au personnage principal, Gregory Francœur, qui accomplit en quelque sorte une tâche identique à celle des deux premiers, soit celle de relater cette aventure américaine.

En disséquant la narration, on constate que ni l'un ni l'autre des deux récits, celui du narrateur anonyme et celui de Gregory Francœur, ne peut fonctionner de façon autonome puisqu'ils se complètent mutuellement. Mais la rétroaction, si cruciale à la production des récits symbiotiques de Gide, semble assez précaire chez Godbout. Puisque l'auteur aurait bien pu supprimer la voix indéterminisée qui relaie la narration de Francœur et confier à son personnage principal la tâche entière de raconter, le lecteur est amené à s'interroger sur l'utilité de ce second véhicule de narration qui fait de l'histoire racontée par Francœur un récit enchâssé. Gilles Marcotte veut que cette double voix narrative soit un reflet de "la conscience déchirée du narrateur [. . .] divisé entre l'appel du bonheur, du bonheur intime, et d'autre part la fascination du spectacle du monde, de l'action sociale et politique" (164). Si ce recours à un narrateur anonyme et omniscient permet la présentation de certaines pensées intimes du personnage de Terounech (voir 131), il y a une autre conséquence majeure qu'il faut noter. D'emblée l'effet d'immédiateté du discours de Francœur se dissout, tandis que s'en accentue le caractère scriptural. Déterminante donc est l'inclusion, dans le titre de ce roman, du substantif *histoire* qui, tout en privilégiant l'écrit, ne signifie pas seulement une suite d'événements mais une production consciente.

Le narcissisme associé à la technique de l'autoréflexion littéraire est bien connu. Alain Goulet (57), comme Dällenbach (26-27) d'ailleurs, se référant au journal de l'auteur, fait remarquer que Gide rédigeait ses textes devant un miroir. Pour Klinkenberg, *Une histoire américaine* s'infléchit dans le sens de la thématisation du narcissisme de la société contemporaine, narcissisme finalement rejeté par le narrateur (242-49). Cette méditation sur soi dans les eaux profondes de l'écrit correspond à la fixation affective qui, selon Godbout, caractérise, au détriment de la collectivité, l'Amérique: "Nous en sommes là: préoccupés d'abord de notre bonheur personnel. Le collectif peut attendre" ("Une culture hors contrôle": 94). Sans rabâcher les nombreuses allusions à Narcisse que la critique a déjà dépouillées dans le texte, il importe de signaler ici quelques images qui anticipent sur les métaphores et les figurations abymées: la photo "encadrée" (26) de lui-même, que Francœur offre à sa femme avant son départ pour la Californie; et le "grand miroir biseauté" (74) dans lequel il s'examine. Ces mises en abyme iconiques sont à juxtaposer à l'interrogation constante de Francœur auprès de sa femme "comme la princesse son miroir; de le dire le plus beau" (26). Le fait que Francœur soit ici simultanément le générateur et le protagoniste renforce non seulement la modalité narcissique qui structure le texte mais aussi sa spécularité car ces images dépassent les limites de la chaîne causale pour refléter le projet de rédaction qui les enchâsse. Ce n'est pas seulement la vie de Francœur qui se met en spectacle ("cette prison avait des allures de plateau de tournage avec ses spots noirs montés sur tuyauterie amovible et ses gardiens en costume d'opérette" [18]) mais l'acte scriptural même.

II. Énoncé/Narration

Au niveau de la diégèse, Paterson signale plusieurs procédés autoréflexifs sur lesquels il serait utile de se pencher ici.

1) LA MISE EN ABYME. Le rêve est un moyen classique, parmi d'autres, d'insérer dans l'œuvre un segment textuel qui interrompt la diégèse en même temps qu'il réfléchit le contenu du récit premier. Dans *Une histoire américaine*, Francœur a une vision vaguement cauchemardesque qui offre un bon exemple de cette technique; on pourrait l'appeler *rétro-prospective* parce qu'elle récapitule et préfigure à la fois. S'il est vrai que son rêve regroupe, selon une configuration pour le moins bizarre, les éléments principaux et les personnages que le lecteur a rencontrés jusque-là dans le texte, c'est la nouvelle corrélation entre ces éléments qui leur confère une qualité préfiguratrice. Précisons que ce n'est pas sous l'angle de la psychocritique que nous analysons cette vision dysphorique, mais en fonction des structures spéculaires qui la relient au récit dans son ensemble: 1° dans ce rêve, l'enquête que mène Francœur sur le bonheur se voit entravée par le fait qu'il doit interroger "dix chiens tenus en laisse par des Africains" (32) (c'est en effet l'Afrique et plus spécifiquement les liens de Francœur avec l'Éthiopie qui l'empêcheront de mener à bien son travail); 2° des affiches de son fils Janvier "s'étalaient sur les murs" (à l'instar des coupures de presse que Janvier lui envoie en guise de lettres, ces posters sont comme autant de signaux d'un danger imminent); 3° Francœur se fait conduire en voiture par son concierge qu'il a surnommé Maritain (ce détail anticipe la mission de Maritain qui, en tant qu'acolyte d'Allan Hunger, servira de guide ou de passeur à Francœur[1]); 4° la voiture heurte la jeune fille ou fille-orchestre que Francœur avait vue devant son hôtel juste avant de faire ce rêve, tandis qu'un joueur de basket distribue des pilules multicolores (ce dernier personnage, qui rappelle un drogué que Francœur avait croisé dans l'ascenseur, apporte à cette suite d'images l'idée du trafic illégal de stupéfiants, activité qui se matérialisera plus loin dans le récit sous forme de trafic d'immigrés); 5° soudain Francœur se trouve au lit avec la fille-orchestre "pendant que Suzanne jouait de ses instruments" (cette inversion des rôles entre la femme de Francœur et la chanteuse de rue, dont le lien avec l'Éthiopie a déjà été établi par le fait que cette femme chantait au bénéfice de l'Afrique, prépare la liaison qui s'instaurera entre Francœur et Terounech).

La mise en abyme la plus frappante dans *Une histoire américaine* est sans aucun doute le rêve que fait Terounech durant sa première nuit en Californie. Ce songe, également rétro-prospectif, est encadré et donc disjoint du récit-porteur par divers moyens: changement de la voix narrative (c'est la "mammitée" de Terounech qui parle); emploi d'une transition traditionnelle (*En ce temps-là*) pour signaler le passage à un autre temps et à un autre monde de références; italique et retrait qui isolent le récit de ce qui l'entoure. A l'exemple de Balkis, reine de Saba, qui, dans ce rêve, va à la rencontre de Salomon, Terounech quitte son pays pour se rendre en

Californie où se trouve Francœur. Si Salomon est "*entouré de richesses uniques*" (139), cela rappelle la plénitude matérielle de l'Amérique évoquée par Terounech lorsque Francœur l'amène en voiture chez lui. Comme Salomon, Francœur est "*rapidement séduit par la beauté altière de sa jeune visiteuse*" (139) et de même que Salomon doit instruire Balkis, Francœur est censé exercer une fonction formatrice auprès de Terounech en lui enseignant le métier de journaliste. Dans la vision onirique de Terounech, un enfant naît de l'union Balkis-Salomon pour devenir le "*premier régent de la dynastie des Salomonides*" (140). Le lecteur peut-il en déduire qu'un fils naîtra aussi de l'union du narrateur avec cette Éthiopienne, et qu'il sera, comme le prétend Francœur, "le premier descendant de la dynastie des Planétaristes" (183)?

D'autres mises en abyme interrompent de manière analogue la narration pour paradoxalement la faire avancer. A l'instar du rêve de Terounech, les deux coupures de journaux, sortes de méta-récits, font appel à un narrateur différent et sont détachées du texte enchâssant, cette fois grâce à l'emploi de caractères réduits. La première, qui affirme l'existence littérale du diable (29-30), et la seconde, qui raconte la libération de prison d'un certain Theodore Streleski, incarcéré pour le meurtre de son professeur de mathématiques (77), présagent une issue violente de ce séjour californien. Selon Francœur, ces extraits contiennent "des signes, des prémonitions et un avertissement: professeur, procès, prison étaient les plus évidents" (77-78). Or, si, au niveau diégétique, les valeurs réflexives de ces bribes d'information semblent incertaines, elles contribuent, à coup sûr, à ce processus scriptural qui met l'écrit en spectacle, tout en multipliant les messages pour en subvertir le sens. A qui identifier Francœur dans cette histoire: au professeur (Francœur est professeur) ou au meurtrier emprisonné (Francœr est emprisonné); ou, question plus importante, en qui Francœur se reconnaît-il lui même: la victime ou le meurtrier?

La question devient d'autant plus intrigante lorsque le narrateur décrit une histoire que Francœur lit dans le journal local à propos d'une agression cruelle perpétrée contre deux jeunes filles. Multiples sont les ponts que jette la narration entre le malfaiteur, gardien du "Château Pullman," et Francœur, gardien du "Château des chats," tous deux enfermés dans la "même prison" (38). Le transport nocturne des deux victimes par l'agresseur dans le coffre de sa Dodge Dart préfigure le trajet effectué à la dérobée par Francœur avec, à l'intérieur du coffre de la Toyota qu'on a mise à sa disposition, deux membres du Front révolutionnaire recherchés par les services d'immigration américains. S'agit-il, dans ce micro-récit, d'une image brouillée de la situation de Francœur où les deux jeunes victimes du gardien s'allieraient symboliquement à Mary Ann Wong et à Terounech, les deux femmes que rencontre le héros en Californie? Il n'en reste pas moins que le message de cette séquence abymée et les rapports spéculaires qu'elle entretient avec les activités de Francœur ajoutent à l'ambivalence qui est le fond du discours.

La lettre en provenance d'Éthiopie, rédigée par Mary Ann Wong, constitue un miroir analeptique en ce sens que la sélection de Terounech (dont il est question dans cette missive) par les Adventistes du Septième Jour paraît une variante de ce qui explique la présence de Francœur en Californie, sélectionné, lui, pourrait-on l'imaginer, à l'instigation d'Allen Hunger, par la Fédération des Communicateurs. Mais la lettre de Wong, imprimée en retrait, à simple interligne, en caractères plus petits que ceux du reste du texte, contient aussi plusieurs éléments de réflexion prospective qu'il faut mentionner: les avertissements au cocher, la question de pot-de-vin; l'empressement du destinataire (Hunger) de trouver "une pupille" et la promesse de "résultats sous peu" (46). Ces faits, tout comme les coupures de presse, renferment des signes dont le sens n'est pas immédiatement explicite mais qui connote le danger et l'illégalité. En fin de compte, Francœur finit, en un très court délai, par remplir le rôle de "pupille" du Professeur Hunger.

2) LA RÉDUPLICATION. Il arrive souvent qu'un texte qui privilégie l'autoreprésentation réitère, sous des formes moins développées, ses dispositions spéculaires. A l'intérieur d'*Une histoire américaine*, dont la narration s'inscrit dès le début sous le signe du double, puisque Francœur est chargé de deux crimes et se demande s'il y aura donc deux procès, il émerge un certain nombre de répétitions de situation qui mettent en valeur la spécularité sur laquelle repose l'architecture de l'ensemble. Aussi est-il possible de relever une série de scènes jumelées, comme, par exemple, la description des animaux encagés à Addis-Abeba, dont l'état est une image anticipée de celui de Francœur emprisonné: "A son tour maintenant d'être servi dans une cage!" (70). Il y a aussi le "face à face" (145) dans le parloir de la prison, entre Francœur et le procureur québécois, et encore le "face à face" (117) entre Francœur et Hunger, où ce militant américain parle de son engagement politico-humanitaire. Dans les deux cas, la communication est dépersonnalisée par la technologie. Si, chez Hunger, chacun reste enfermé dans "sa bulle de plastique miroitante" et fait son échange verbal avec l'autre "comme au téléphone" (117), Francœur et le procureur, à cause de la cloison vitrée qui les sépare, n'ont pas d'autre alternative que de communiquer "par téléphone" (145).

Le but que se fixe Francœur d'arriver, au moyen de son journal, au fond de cette histoire américaine, met en branle, au niveau de l'énoncé, toute une thématique de la quête qui, à son tour, subit des réduplications textuelles. En effet, plusieurs scènes de fouille étayent ce réseau thématique. Non seulement Francœur lit-il les lettres qui ne lui sont pas destinées, mais il procède à un examen peu discret des affaires de son camarade de bureau: "J'ai ouvert et fouillé tous ses tiroirs, j'ai parcouru toutes les notes qui me tombaient sous la main, j'ai lu les mémos qui lui étaient adressés par le doyen et j'ai flairé son courrier, à la recherche de parfums" (44). Cette quête des parfums d'Abyssinie motive un comportement également étrange dans la maison qu'il loue: "J'avais fouillé le garage et le grenier à la recherche d'objets qui pourraient évoquer une Éthiopie familière, une Afrique apprivoisée. Je débusquai des photographies d'animaux sauvages, des poteries peintes, des tissus étincelants, des paniers tressés de rouge et de noir, des machettes gainées, etc." (83). Il faut voir dans tous ces gestes répétés appartenant à une quête dont l'objet n'est pas clair, ainsi que dans la poursuite du bonheur par les statistiques, des réitérations symboliques non seulement de la démarche investigatrice représentée par le journal de Francœur mais aussi du macro-récit qui le contient.[2]

L'imbrication d'une triple topologie, regroupant le Québec, la Californie et l'Éthiopie, engendre un dialogue par images contrastées, qui mérite une attention particulière puisque la réduplication en constitue le pivot. Perçue comme un pays de cogagne, la Californie fournit à Francœur l'occasion d'échapper au repli étouffant qu'est pour lui sa terre natale, ce "pays glacé des tuques et du goupillon" (19), et de combler, pense-t-il, le manque qu'il ressent dans sa vie. Cette confrontation nord/sud s'investit d'une autre dimension grâce aux images récurrentes d'Addis-Abeba, lieu où Francœur travaillait comme professeur de philosophie trente ans auparavant. Si pratiquement chaque expérience en Californie a son double prodromique dans l'aventure éthiopienne, c'est par un jeu de reflets parallèles (faisant de l'un la mise en abyme de l'autre) que ces deux lieux de refuge nourrissent une interrogation continue. La perte de la foi politique qui incite Francœur à plier bagages pour la Californie après l'échec du référendum sur la souveraineté ne trouve-t-elle pas son analogon dans la perte de la foi religieuse qui a provoqué sa fuite en Éthiopie quand il était jeune? Et la Volkswagen que propose Maritain à Francœur n'est-elle pas l'image ressuscitée de sa première voiture en Éthiopie, également une Volkswagen? Est-ce aussi un hasard si le nom de l'habitant du Peoples Park qui attaque Francœur, au moment où celui-ci achète la voiture, est Aristote (105), le même nom que Francœur n'arrivait pas à écrire au tableau noir le premier jour de classe à Addis-Abeba, paralysé par l'absurdité de la situation? La violence des deux sociétés est adroitement homogénéisée par deux images spéculaires saisissantes: en Éthiopie, les membres coupés, "talons, doigts, têtes d'enfants" (34), de victimes politiques que les vidangeurs ramassaient chaque matin; en Californie, "les doigts d'une main [. . .] distribués par la poste" (149), œuvre de sectes fanatiques. La mise en contiguïté symbolique des deux pays se réaffirme au moyen d'une réduplication fantaisiste par laquelle Francœur imagine ces deux mondes en train de se regarder simultanément à la télévision: des Pygmées incrédules devant une émission policière dont l'action se déroule à San Francisco; les habitants de San Francisco visionnant un documentaire sur les Pygmées (54).

3) MÉTAPHORES ET FIGURATIONS. "Enfermé dans le bureau poussiéreux de l'université, Gregory Francœur rédigeait en silence la problématique d'une enquête sur le bonheur à quarante ans" (49). En raison des résonances claustrales véhiculées par l'adjectif "enfermé" et de l'image de solitude générale produite par cette brève

description, cet incipit du chapitre quatre semble la (re)présentation, sous forme métonymique, de Francœur, en prison, en train de noircir les pages de son journal. Si l'acte de rédiger ce projet est un reflet spéculaire de l'opération scripturale du journal, c'est encore un rêve que fait Francœur qui se présente comme la synthèse métamorphosée de ces deux entreprises écrites: "Des rêves échevelés la ramenèrent à la bibliothèque de son père où il passa une éternité à classer des encyclopédies qui n'étaient jamais dans le bon ordre" (179).

Moins en tant que mise en abyme inaugurale qu'expression métaphorique du sens premier du texte, la scène liminaire du roman invite le lecteur à en contempler les structures narratives. Un enchâssement textuel se réalise, au niveau du personnage, sur le plan visuel, puisque Francœur assiste à la scène décrite de sa fenêtre, lieu qui devient à la fois l'écran sur lequel se joue un spectacle et le miroir dans lequel Francœur entrevoit le déroulement de son propre drame. La comédie qu'on présente dans ce cadre polyvalent, "la mise en terre [. . .] d'un vieux dattier trapu" (9), est en effet une allégorie du sujet du récit. Ce vieil arbre représente Francœur ("J'avais été une plante fragile" [25]) qui se désigne à maintes reprises comme un vieil homme; semblable au dattier, il ne peut se fixer en sol étranger (l'arbre "refuse de prendre racine en prison" [178]). A l'exemple de Gide écrivant devant sa glace, Francœur ne reprend pas la rédaction quotidienne de son journal sans regarder ce miroir-écran: "Tous le jours, avant d'écrire, je salue le vieux dattier" (178).

Ces moyens qui, au niveau de la diégèse, redoublent ou redisent l'énoncé et l'énonciation, pour dénuder ainsi les procédés scripturaux, sont étoffés par le code du récit, qui dispose aussi de certains mécanismes mettant en relief l'autoréflexion.

1) INTERTEXTUALITÉ. Dans sa cellule, Francœur, en regardant de sa fenêtre le vieux dattier, tente de se rappeler "un poème appris en classe de versification dans lequel rimaient palmes et calme" (9). Il s'agit de *Sagesse* III, 6 de Paul Verlaine: "Le Ciel est, par dessus le toit, / Si bleu, si calme! / Un arbre, par dessus le toit, / Berce sa palme", — poème composé par le poète dans la prison des Petits-Carmes en Belgique. Cette évocation tacite du sort de Francœur par l'intermédiaire de la littérature, ainsi que son identification directe, à plusieurs reprises, avec Arthur Rimbaud,—rappelons que, déçu de la littérature, Rimbaud part pour l'Abyssinie afin d'y faire fortune — confèrent au récit une profondeur textuelle qui fait du domaine littéraire un référent important. Effectivement, dans *Une histoire américaine* pullule un amas de noms de poètes et d'écrivains qui, par leur vie et/ou leur œuvre, reflètent explicitement les thèmes de la quête et de l'errance (Verlaine, Rimbaud, Cervantès, Kerouac), ou du crime (Dostoïevski, Dante, Verlaine). Ce procédé agit comme variante de la mise en abyme pour souligner de nouveau la scripturalité de l'entreprise de Francœur aussi bien que du narrateur anonyme.

Selon Dällenbach, les miroirs à l'intérieur d'un texte prennent souvent la forme d'un roman, d'un conte, d'une nouvelle, etc., afin de "pactiser avec une réalité homogène à celle qu'elle reflète: *une œuvre d'art*" (95). Dans *Une histoire américaine*, ce sont surtout les contes de fées qui sont mis à l'honneur: le Petit Poucet (108); Cendrillon (102); les contes de Grimm (28). Rappelons que la scène évoquée plus haut, où Francœur interroge sa femme "comme la princesse son miroir," s'inspire de l'histoire de Blanche Neige et que l'article de journal décrivant l'agression du gardien du Château Pullman était, à en croire le narrateur, une "histoire [. . .] horrible comme un conte de fées" (37). La participation du motif du conte de fées à la production de ce récit en rehausse indiscutablement les propriétés fabulatrices, voire fabuleuses. A deux reprises, ce rôle de conteur échoit de manière catégorique à Francœuer: "Pour le plaisir. Je m'étais inventé une histoire. J'en serais le héros, coûte que coûte!" (68); "Gregory pouvait toujours [. . .] rédiger des contes de fées dont il était le héros" (143). Or, tout événement qui éveille chez Francœur le souvenir de l'Éthiopie se métamorphose dans son journal pour relever de la fable. C'est ainsi que les *chammas* qu'il découvre dans la maison qu'il loue sont "une deuxième pierre blanche!" (44), comme les restaurants éthiopiens dont il apprend l'existence dans cette "histoire du Petit Poucet [qui] se répétait" (108). Si les thèmes de la quête et de la fabulation se joignent dans cette image ("Où menait le sentier?" [44]), cette mise en perspective devient, à son tour, le reflet de la scène que décrira Francœur, et où, suite à une expédition matinale de chasse aux gazelles en Éthiopie, il accroche aux arbres, ci et là le long du chemin de retour au camp, des vêtements, comme autant de points de repère ou de "pierres blanches" pour l'aider à retrouver son gibier (93-94).

Outre cette intertextualité avec le monde de l'écrit, il faut mentionner l'omniprésence d'un autre référent déterminant: le cinéma.[3] Sans entrer dans l'analyse de cet aspect important de l'œuvre, qu'il suffise de dire qu'il y a scénarisation voulue du décor romanesque: "[Terounech] montrait de sa main aux doigts effilés les paysages en cinémascope couleur qui se succédaient sur l'écran du pare-brise" (164). Cette transformation du monde en spectacle "a pour effet de tout dédoubler, ou détripler" (Klinkenberg 237), et, de cette façon, d'irréaliser ou de fictionaliser, à la manière des motifs du conte de fées, le quotidien dont se nourrit le roman.

2) LES JEUX DU SIGNIFIANT. On peut déceler dans *Une histoire américaine* une volonté incontestable de contourner le sens des mots, de faire des calembours, ou d'employer des expressions fixes dans un contexte qui les rend comiques ou ironiques. Cette pratique ludique participe de l'autoréflexion en exposant à la fois les possibilités créatrices et l'équivoque du langage. Dans une narration qui cultive des thèmes greffés sur le démoniaque et l'aspect mystérieux des félins (le chat dont Francœur doit s'occuper répond au nom de Lucifer), il est amusant de trouver des clichés tels que se débattre "comme un diable dans l'eau bénite" (13) et avoir "d'autres chats à fouetter" (76). Parallèlement, le nom de Hunger paraît quelque peu narquois dans le contexte de la lutte contre la famine en Éthiopie. Parfois, ces jeux du signifiant passent par la déformation d'une expression connue du lecteur,

comme c'est le cas lorsque Francœur, qui n'arrive pas à trouver sa voiture après sa sortie de l'hôpital, se demande: "Que sert à l'homme de gagner l'univers, s'il perd sa voiture?" (107-8). Après la chasse aux gazelles, Francœur se dit "heureux comme un Pygmée" (94), et suite à une discussion sur l'avenir du Québec dans un café de la rue Saint-Denis, il s'exclame: "Passez la monnaie! [. . .] Libre change" (17). Le gardien du Château Pullman, après avoir violenté les deux jeunes filles, se rend chez sa sœur pour faire une partie de Monopoly au cours de laquelle il reçoit la carte où il est indiqué *Do not pass go* (38). Vient immédiatement à l'esprit la première partie de ce message qui prédit non seulement le sort du gardien mais aussi celui de Francœur: *Go directly to jail.* Néanmoins, les tournures, très nombreuses d'ailleurs, qu'il convient de signaler dans le contexte de cette étude sont celles qui exploitent la réduplication: "papa traînait sur les courts où maman entraînait les espoirs" (14); "Mon collègue invisible visiblement lisait le français" (43); "L'un se payait de mots, l'autre était payé au mot" (73); "Son père était peut-être un vison sauvage. Une vision sauvage?" (75); "un picbois de laiton qui picorait la porte" (111-12); "le consul consulait" (159); "des activistes trop actifs" (167), etc.

3) LE CHAMP LEXICAL. Au dire de Janet Paterson, "l'étude d'un texte marqué par l'autoreprésentation, révèle souvent la présence d'un champ lexical organisé autour de certains noyaux sémantiques dont les plus communs sont: récit, écriture, parole, livre" (185). Dans cette narration où l'écrit joue à plein sur les plans événementiel, thématique et compositionnel, il n'est pas étonnant de voir les vocables "écrire," "rédiger," "journal," et "histoire" émailler le texte. Ces réseaux, orientés vers la production écrite, sont appuyés par un autre groupe lexical axé sur la bibliothèque. Ainsi, outre la bibliothèque du père de Francœur évoquée dans un rêve (179), les manifestations suivantes sont à noter: la cellule de Francœur est attenante à la bibliothèque de la prison (12); il rédige son journal dans la bibliothèque de la prison (142); le meurtrier du professeur de mathématiques passait le plus clair de son temps dans la bibliothèque de la prison (77); Allan Hunger se trouvait "le plus souvent à la bibliothèque centrale" (76); Francœur voit Hunger pour la première fois dans la bibliothèque universitaire (81). Il serait possible d'ajouter ici des syntagmes dont les valeurs sémantiques connexes sont évidentes: libraire (73); librairie (52); livre (43, 167); dictionnaire (82 + 82); et roman (64). Terounech est même le produit de l'écrit, "née d'une lettre oubliée" (170).

III. Énonciation/Narrataire

Si "le texte narcissique fait apparaître littéralement un lecteur (Paterson 186), son apparition dans *Une histoire américaine* se voit multipliée par un processus de réduplication analogue à celui qui gouverne les autres stratégies que nous avons examinées. Vu la futilité de l'activité scripturale entreprise par Francœur (Harel 191), une question inévitable se pose: Qui est le narrataire de ce journal de prison? Le texte livre toute une liste de possibilités: "le jury et les chargés d'enquête" (12); Suzanne, la femme de Francœur (145); Francœur lui-même (Remarquons que c'est Francœur qui termine le roman et non pas le narrateur omniscient. Dans quel but Francœur continue-t-il donc la rédaction de son journal après qu'on lui annonce sa libération?). Or, ce journal devient, à des étapes variées de sa rédaction, l'objet de plusieurs duplications faites à l'intention de divers destinataires. Roenicke (73) et Marleau (145) partent chacun avec une photocopie des pages déjà complétées, tandis que Francœur en garde l'original. Et une fois achevé, le journal aura son propre miroir ou double puisqu'il sera traduit, "opération duplicatrice par excellence" (Brisset 153). Ce jeu multiplicatif se complique lorsqu'on considère que le journal n'est pas assimilable au roman qui, lui, contient des sections émanant de la voix narrative anonyme ne faisant pas partie de cette plaidoirie écrite. Il a, par conséquent, un autre destinataire: le lecteur. Ajoutons que la sensibilité à la réception du texte, manifestée par le narrateur-auteur, n'est pas exempte de mise en abyme. Lorsque Francœur s'adresse directement à ceux qui liront son document ("Mais cela ne vous intéresse probablement pas" [14]), le "vous" qu'il emploie semble destiné autant aux autorités et aux autres narrataires mentionnés dans le discours qu'aux vrais lecteurs du roman. Ainsi le souci de Francœur, signalé par le narrateur anonyme, "d'inviter les lecteurs à partager sa démarche" (15), pourrait aussi bien être celui de l'auteur. Tout compte fait, Godbout a réussi de façon admirable à jeter le voile de la spécularité sur tous les aspects de son roman: énonciation, énoncés, narrateurs et narrataires.

Que dire des procédés spécularisants qui sous-tendent ce roman dans son intégralité? Si l'une des fonctions de l'autoréflexion dans *Une histoire américaine* est la thématisation de l'énonciation, le cumul des parties abymées du récit finit par constituer un véhicule d'expression qui devient producteur d'un sens littéraire. Par cette perturbation, forme et fond sont mis en doute. Rien dans ce récit n'est comme il pourrait le sembler à première vue. Gregory Francœur n'est pas accusé de l'effraction à la loi dont il est coupable (trafic d'immigrés illégaux) mais d'autre chose: viol et incendie volontaire. Son journal, qui se propose de montrer l'innocence de son auteur, ne traite pas des questions essentielles qui sont censées avoir motivé son projet d'écriture, ce qui fait qu'à la fin du récit "on retrouve, presque intacts, les deux chefs d'accusation" (Milot 25). Klinkenberg, pour sa part, souligne l'équivoque qui règne partout dans le texte, équivoque qui atteint son point culminant dans l'explicit intriguant du livre où Francœur s'écrie à propos des laboratoires de la Californie (qui préparent, selon ce personnage, la fin du monde): "Qu'ils brûlent!" (Klinkenberg 240). Ces constatations sont à rapprocher de l'observation de Dällenbach qui fait ressortir "la propriété commune au miroir et au blason d'*inverser* systématiquement ce qu'ils représentent" (183). Ne pourrait-on pas voir dans la spécularité godboutienne un moyen subtile d'avertir le lecteur de l'inversion du message que recèle la narration de Gregory Francœur qui, tout en prétextant son innocence, avoue subrepticement sa participation aux actes dont il est inculpé? Ou, au contraire, puisque tout semble passer à côté de l'essentiel dans ce texte, doit-on déduire de cela que, en esquivant toute tentative de disculpation, les narrateurs veulent faire état de son innocence? Somme toute, il faut conclure que l'innocence ou la culpabilité de ce personnage ne constituent pas le vrai sujet du récit et c'est bien ce qui est annoncé dès la deuxième page: "Il [. . .] se doutait bien que le cartable contenait le premier chapitre d'*un récit qui lui échapperait entièrement*" (10) (C'est nous qui soulignons).

La Californie hypermédiatisée dépeinte par Godbout baigne dans une prolifération de messages éphémères qui annulent toute possibilité de communication. Ainsi la pléiade d'éléments tournant autour du thème de la communication (littérature, cinéma, télévision, publicité, presse écrite, lettres, et même rêves), quoi qu'ils puissent paraître déconnectés, se rassemblent inéluctablement tous sous la houlette d'un narcissisme interrogatif, mettant en vedette le concept de la quête qui est à la base du texte. Paradigme de la société américaine, la Californie godboutienne, où "tout [. . .] a la profondeur du celluloïd" (141), vient secourir la méditation de l'auteur sur une panoplie de questions touchant à la problématique de l'identité culturelle, au rôle du cosmopolitisme dans l'appropriation de cette identité de plus en plus fuyante, et à l'articulation de la collectivité et de l'individualité. Bien que toutes ces questions soient relativisées par les effets aplanissants de l'incommunicabilité, c'est en partie par l'entremise de la spéculation du récit, qui ne cesse d'afficher ses vertus fictionnelles, qu'*Une histoire américaine* réussit à battre en brèche les mythes et les lieux communs qu'elle semble, au premier abord, mettre en place, et que la récusation narratologique devient essentiellement une contestation idéologique.

NOTES

[1] Ruth Mésavage a raison de voir dans cette situation la représentation symbolique d'un "manque d'autonomie psychologique" (54) chez Francœur. En plus, envisager Maritain comme une sorte de Charon se conforme à l'ambiance infernale générée par de nombreux éléments signalés par R. Mésavage, ainsi que par l'évocation constante du nom de Dante dans le texte.

[2] En parlant de la réduplication, il est possible de voir dans le concierge Maritain la doublure de Francœur en raison du fait que lui aussi se consacre à un projet scriptural: la rédaction d'une thèse de maîtrise. En même temps, il faut se demander si Hunger ne fait pas office de doublure inverse de Francœur (c'est en effet le militant que Francœur rêvait d'être), les deux se contrastant par la manie de cultiver le désordre chez le premier (43) et celle de l'ordre chez le second (35). Incarnation du rêve secret des personnages godboutiens, cet activiste et auteur de renommée réussit la "vécriture," cette impossible harmonisation des deux tendances contradictoires de vivre et d'écrire, suggérée par Godbout dans *Salut Galarneau!*.

[3] Qu'est-ce que l'Amérique de Godbout (et la Californie où se déroule l'action) sinon la Mecque de l'industrie cinématographique, activité qui, tout en favorisant la pro-

duction de miroirs (déformants) de la société, reflue sur la vie journalière de tous puisque chacun se sent obligé d'assumer une identité qui n'a souvent rien à voir avec sa réalité intérieure. A titre d'illustration, rappelons la séquence où le restaurateur mexicain, qui avoue qu'il n'est pas du tout mexicain mais juif, né à Bagdad, déclare qu'en Amérique, "pour gagner sa vie, il faut jouer un rôle. C'est celui que j'ai choisi il y a trente-cinq ans! Quel est le vôtre?" (110). Cette question posée à Francœur s'avère bisémique, s'appliquant non seulement à la trame des événements mais aussi aux structures énonciatives du texte. Cela est d'autant plus vrai lorsqu'on la juxtapose à d'autres formules déclaratives ou interrogatives (n'ayant à première vue aucun rapport les unes avec les autres) qui parsèment et le journal de Francœur et le récit du narrateur anonyme: "les événements malgré moi s'enchaînent" (114); "Quelle était cette histoire?" (115); "Tout dans cette histoire respirait l'absurde" (73); "Gregory sentit, pour la première fois, que cette histoire lui glissait entre les doigts" (144). La visée de ces insertions semble double: souligner la scripturalité de la narration dans son ensemble; rappeler la nature problématique des faits qui y sont racontés.

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(T)RIAL SEPARATION

Mark Cochrane

in which the author tells of a branch line, a black hole, &
the end of a Saskatchewan marriage:

Over a bed of arrowheads, cross-
ties, flagellant with fox tails, deliver
the bands of nationhood to Yellowgrass.

Or:

Rusty rails, steely as dimes on top,
run tandem into town, elevators & poplar,
& converge eventually, Einstein insists.

Or:

An iron-shod buffalo
has trod this fallow in the night.

No:

Conceive instead three pairs of tracks.
You & I pace the fretted rostrum
of a flatcar, unmoving on the center set.

On each side, an infinite train
of flatcars blurs past, contrary & urgent
conveyances — one eastbound & one west.

You say: *We must escape this static stage,*
plain on the horizon of event.

I agree, toe the old hitch
with my boot. The sun collapses
its bourne. I lick the sweat
from my lip. Agreed: we are frozen
on the flange of a great dearth,
swallower of light, upturned
bowl of sky & swirl of earth.

This relationship is dead cold.
A real nothing, but I love you.
A void, sucking time to a stop, but me too.
Maybe we should see other people.
Actually I have someone in mind.
Actually I have someone in mind.

With gravity, we link our fingers.

Should we jump?

An uncertain snap at the end of the arm & we twirl
                    / like galaxies

                                        vanish in each other's distance
(one eastbound & one west.

ICARUS OF MONTREAL

Mark Cochrane

You people in the city of signs
never knew me. I played the meek
traveler, the ascetic
unlearned in the local tongue.
You only encountered my head
on a stick.

              Now I interpret
the wilderness, stocky among firs,
and my bootprints brim
with the seepage of glaciers
into the Pacific. I act the father
to mountain goats and naiades, teeming
and sootless in the air. Give me
a moment, grant me a year: I will fly.

I will return with the sun's heat
in my muscle, my span a sickle
of shadow that passes. I will bring
harvest to your streets. I am buoyant,
pregnant with the softness of a bee.
A new life rises from the East.

THE POET AS TRANSLATOR

Margaret Avison's "Hungarian Snap"

Richard Teleky

Several years before the publication of her first volume of poetry, *Winter Sun* (1960), Margaret Avison was walking through the then-outdoor courtyard of Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum, admiring its Chinese tomb lions. Nearby, Marshall McLuhan sat entertaining two Hungarian émigrés, Ilona Duczyńska and her husband Karl Polanyi. Spotting Avison, he motioned her to join them, saying, "Here's a poet you should use in your project."[1]

As with many collaborative efforts, a fortunate accident was at the start of this one — a collection of translations of some of Hungary's greatest twentieth-century writers, including Attila József, Gyula Illyés, and Ferenc Juhász. Hungarian literature has long been neglected by English translators, for various reasons. Since the end of the Second World War, only half a dozen anthologies of its poetry or short stories have been published, and equally few novelists. Avison's translations were to be part of *The Plough and the Pen: Writings from Hungary 1930-1956*, introduced by W. H. Auden and published in 1963.[2] For her collection *No Time* (1989), Avison included one of these translations, revised, and she offered several of them in her *Selected Poems* (1991). Her translations are exemplary, deserving study for themselves and for the issues they raise.[3]

The poet as translator has a long, impressive history, especially when poets work with languages they know well. But there is a fascinating side-line to this tradition when poets translate from languages they don't understand. William Butler Yeats's lack of Greek never stopped him from translating Sophicles. Auden and Pound worked with poems in languages they couldn't read, and more recently Robert Lowell, W. S. Merwin, Elaine Feinstein, Phyllis Webb and Gwendolyn MacEwen (to list only a few) have taken the risk to enrich our sense of the possibilities of English while introducing unfamiliar writers.

Although the reasons for such translations differ among the poets themselves, certain technical concerns remain constant even when the languages vary. Lowell raised many of these in the preface to *Imitations*, his collection of translations of

Western poetry from Homer to Pasternak. "I have been restless with literal meaning," he confessed, "and labored hard to get the tone. Most often *a* tone for *the* tone is something that will always more or less escape transference to another language and cultural moment."[4] Like many poets faced with writing in an unknown language, he had to rely on intermediaries. Of Pasternak he wrote: "I have rashly tried to improve on other translations, and have been helped by exact prose versions given me by Russian readers." This is "an old practice," as he recognized — an old practice that yields new poems twice removed from the originals.

INEVITABLY A POET BRINGS TO THE ACT of translating personal associations with a language, culture or writer. Avison recalls the Polanyis as her first experience of European intellectuals, "something I'd known from novels, and here it was in the flesh." Both had been actively involved in leftist politics in Hungary before becoming exiles. After meeting in Austria, they settled in England during the 1930s. Duczyńska taught science, and became an Associate Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society; Polanyi taught in Vienna and London, and eventually became a professor of economics at Columbia University. Fortunately the Polanyis were able to overcome Avison's fear, because of their country's policies during the Second World War, that all Hungarians were anti-Semites. Duczyńska was Jewish, Polanyi a Christian, and they represented a side of the Hungarian character new to Avison. Having admired the abortive Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and been appalled that the West had encouraged the freedom fighters and then "dumped" them, she was intrigued by the couple's commitment to politics and literature.

Along with the Polanyis, another factor that came to interest Avison — who knew some German and high-school French — was the Hungarian language itself. The effect of spoken Hungarian reminded her of Finnish, which she happily associated with girlhood school friends. (Hungarian and Finnish are both part of the Finno-Ugric language group, and distantly related.) While the pronunciation of Hungarian words tends to evenness, there is often a slight stress on the first syllable, giving the hint of an accent. Musicians have called this stress "the Hungarian snap," thinking of such composers as Bartók and Kodály. Avison immediately liked the sound of spoken Hungarian.

Duczyńska made the initial selection of poets. Her reasons for choosing them, Avison recalls, were partly political — a way of introducing her view of non-Stalinist Hungary to the West. Since the Revolution of 1848, Hungarian writers have been a major political force in national life, preserving Hungarian identity and speaking out against oppression. The Populists, who emerged in the early

1930s, were a loosely formed radical movement of peasant intelligentsia. Attempting to do for letters what Bartók had done for Hungarian music, they studied the sociology of rural life and advocated partition of the great landed estates. Some were Marxists, holding its early humanist vision; others converted to communism; and still others wanted to reform the Communist Party. Many of Hungary's leading writers between the two world wars were part of the group, or touched by it in a significant way. They were, in effect, the progenitors of the Revolution of 1956.[5]

Finally, a geographical element drew Avison to Illyés and Juhász, writers associated with the Hungarian landscape. Initially Duczyńska gave her translators little choice when assigning poems, and Avison had to compete with Kenneth McRobbie for Juhász, eventually sharing the poet. Illyés' descriptions of the Hungarian plain — a region not unlike Manitoba's prairie landscape, familiar to Avison from her youth — especially appealed to her, and she was also sympathetic to the despair he felt facing the onset of the Second World War, a despair particularly bleak after "our pacifist growing-up period, which made the Illyes intensity natural to me too. It said something."

Hungarian poetry can be read apart from the country's historical and cultural situation. However, a quest to preserve national identity is central to all of the poets Duczyńska asked Avison to translate. While communist poets such as László Benjámin, Zoltán Zelk, and Lajos Tomási were important in the national context, their poems — expressing first idealism, then disillusion with party corruption — were not especially well suited to translation. They were effective in the Polanyis' anthology mainly as examples of Hungarian writing of the period, but Avison was wise not to include her translations of Zelk and Benjámin in her own collections. On the other hand, Attila József (1905-37), Gyula Illyés (1902-83) and Ferenc Juhász (b. 1928) wrote poems that almost invite a wider audience, and translation.

HUNGARIAN IS A NOTORIOUSLY difficult language, with a unique system of grammar and few cross-over words. It has little in common with the more familiar Indo-European languages. Based, in part, on an elaborate system of suffixes, it is an agglutinative language that offers particular problems for translators of poetry: Hungarian syntax and word order differ greatly from those in English. Simply by the nature of the language, poetry in Hungarian is bound to be more compact than most poetry in English. At the same time, the Hungarian language may seem more formal because it has not undergone as rapid a shift to colloquial usage as North-American English.

Initially Avison was given the Hungarian texts, marked with the accents of the language and the metrical stresses of the verse, as well as notations of "rhyme and assonance patterns, number of syllables and rhythmic pictures."[6] Literal translations accompanied each poem, with the corresponding English word under the Hungarian original, so that she could recognize each word and gauge its weight in the original poem. There were also free-flowing prose translations, although Duczyńska urged Avison not to work from them. Instead, they went over each poem together, word by word. Finally, tapes were made of the poems so that Avison could hear the sounds: "And I played the tapes and played the tapes and played the tapes, and once I got to know what the words literally meant, I tried to see if I could get an English one that was at all able to echo it." Avison also listened to recordings of Hungarian music. She especially loved the Bartók string quartets, and recalled them as "the thing that keyed me most of all in that period."

Each translation went through more than twenty drafts. Avison spent long hours with the Polanyis, even staying overnight at their home and working on into the next day, "battling over four or five lines, sometimes." When asked if the process had been frustrating — especially for a writer accustomed to working by herself — she laughed, saying, "If it hadn't been for the enormous appeal of these two people, I couldn't have stayed the course." This process ran over a period of four years, and was often spotty, since Duczyńska was involved with other translators as well.[7]

Translation is not simply a linguistic act, but also an interpretative one, where affinity matters. The "optic heart" in Avison's poems, the heart that *sees*, is not far removed from the concern with consciousness and perception in Juhász"s "Farm, at Dark, on the Great Plain" ("*Tanya az Alföldön*"), which opens with a rhapsodic evocation of the natural world of a farm at night, emphasizing the universal molecular life where "breathless, matter lives."[8] Not until the beginning of stanza 13 does a speaker say, directly, "I lie in drenched grass," establishing the struggle for individual consciousness on that "strange, blissful night, primal, voluptuous — / random — with nothing of passion's single-mindedness. / Plant cannot guess — nor planet — the knowledge a human bears." The speaker turns his attention to the farm below with a simple, intimate "I love you" — an almost shocking shift in tone. The following portrait of an aging farm couple (perhaps Juhász's parents, who occur frequently in his work) and the hardships of their rural existence momentarily distracts the speaker, who returns to the issue of consciousness, confessing his love for the earth, and for an absent partner — "Only with you I believe, I feel at one, / nor need my heart at last go so mercilessly alone / to its corruption." The moment of consciousness carries within it the desire to escape and merge, to return to the anonymous "glimmer" of the natural world that closes the poem. These few passages alone should suggest the richness of Avison's translation, and the affinity she felt for Juhász.

Technical or linguistic matters, however, shape the affinity. Avison generally followed the stanzaic order of the original poems, although she did not maintain exact meters or line breaks. In stanza five of Juhász's poem, for example, she made two sentences out of three, included a parenthetical clause and expanded the diction:

The moonlight's liquid glass	*A holdfény folyékony üveg*
wells over the earth	*amely vastagon a világra csurog,*
and quells the very silence in its clasp	*anyagát e csönd dermeszti meg.*
to crystal blocks,	*Üveg-tömbök,*
glass turrets,	*üveg-tornyok,*
tinkling vine-stems.	*üveg-liánok csengenek.*
Still — how this silence (silvery bushes,	*Ez mégis a csönd. Áttetsző bozótok,*
half-guessed-at-stalks, dim files of foliate)	*sejtelem-szárú növényzetek*
entangles and engulfs the din of empty space	*fonják, növik be az űr zaját,*
and murmurous flower-scent from the garden-beds.	*s a szagos virágos-kerteket.*[9]

Juhász repeats the word "glass" (*üveg*) four times, including it in a descriptive series, while Avison uses it only twice, substituting "crystal" once, and deleting it the final time. The incantory quality of the original has been changed to something more ornate, yet this ornateness is not false to the original. (As Lowell said, a translation catches *a* tone, not *the* tone.) In the second stanza of the same poem, Avison's translation reads:

Glass-petalled flowers, leaves of thin glass	*Üveg-virágok, üveg-lombok*
are incandescent, as	*izzanak,*
our anguish.	*mint a gondok.*

More literally translated, the stanza would read:

Glass-flowers, glass leaves
are incandescent,
as our troubles.

While "anguish" is too strong a translation of the Hungarian word ”*gond*” (care, worry, anxiety, trouble), which Juhász uses in the plural form, the lushness of Avison's version suggests the tradition of English Romantic poetry, and this is not entirely inappropriate to Juhász. His diction and imagery, his concern with human isolation and use of the Hungarian landscape as an emblem of states of mind, resonate with familiar echoes that Avison powerfully conveys.[10]

When asked if she felt any kinship with Attila József's "*Ars Poetica*," Avison admitted that she had to overcome her lack of sympathy with the poet's self-assertive stance: "One of the things I don't like about it is its superiority towards other people who are caught." Unlike Juhász's poem, which can be enjoyed independently of his other work, and apart from its Hungarian context, '*Ars Poetica*' requires some background. József, who committed suicide in 1937 at the age of thirty-two, is considered by many Hungarian critics to rank with the nation's greatest poets, Sándor Petőfi (1823-49) and Endre Ady (1877-1919). Consumed by self-analysis, he watched with increasing horror as the forces of fascism swept across his country. Yet for all his championing of the people — József is a true socialist poet — the source of his writing often seems to be a more private suffering, and Avison was not incorrect in sensing this — it is part of the tension that makes his poetry worth careful reading.

"*Ars Poetica*" opens with a bold assertion: "I *am* a poet. What do I care / about Poesy?",[11] although the character of the original is missing ("*Költő vagyok — mit érdekelne / engem a költészet maga?*").[12] By breaking the Hungarian sentence into two statements — a separate declaration followed by a question — a quality of arrogance, of swagger, enters the speaker's voice, and this is not present in the original. The necessary shift in word order — "*költő*" (poet) opens the original, while "I *am*," with an italicized verb for emphasis, opens the translation — solidifies this impression. The word "Poesy" bothers Avison today — "I remember hating the second line and putting the word 'Poesy' in, but Ilona insisted." Translated literally, the poet's question is "Why should I be interested in poetry itself?" "Poesy" is not the best solution to "*költészet maga*" ("poetry itself") because it has archaic and arch connotations for a modern English-speaking audience that the word "*költészet*" lacks for Hungarian readers. Since Duczyńska not only provided the literal translations but also edited the anthology, Avison's translations were subject to the potential pitfalls of any collaborative work. Though admirably translated, "*Ars Poetica*" is not likely to win readers to József's work.

No such problems occurred with her translations of Gyula Illyés' "Ode to Bartók" ("*Bartók*"), "The Plough Moves" ("*Megy az eke*"), and "Of Tyranny, in One Breath" ("*Egy mondat a zsarnokságrol*"), and her inclusion of the ode in several collections attests to her estimation of its power. Speaking of Illyés, she said: "There is nothing that gets in the way, there's no ego that gets in the poem, there's just utterance." This "utterance," she she called it, "was always a combination of reasonable statement and enormous power of feeling." Avison, who is not thought of as a political poet, was in fact drawn to Illyés' politics. In a note added to the ode for her own collections, she explained the unusual circumstances of its publication, which are worth relating here not only for what they suggest about the poem, but also because they may have contributed to Avison's sympathetic reading of it. Written in the autumn of 1955, when the Rákosi regime was urging Hungarian writers to follow the dictates of socialist realism, the ode paid tribute to Bartók on the tenth anniversary of his death. The composer's music, then banned in Hungary, was a rallying point for anyone unsympathetic to Rákosi. Published in a popular weekly Budapest entertainment magazine, *Szinház és Mozi* (Stage and Cinema), with a print-run of over 60,000, the poem had a powerful effect, and several days after its appearance police removed all remaining copies from the newsstands.

The ode is a stirring call to freedom, first linking it with artistic creation, principally Bartók's use of folk material in his music ("O speak for us, / stern artist, true musician").[13] Only from the discord of his creations can true harmony emerge. Illyés contends that Bartók's music has the power to solace a suffering people because it embodies their song, their dream; it is crucial to the survival of the nation.

This was a dangerous poem to have written at that time, and Avison admired Illyés for taking the risk.

Again she followed the poet's stanzaic pattern, although the shorter concluding stanzas of the original have been linked together, for a soaring effect. Regarding her version, Avison wrote that "an attempt has been made to echo the sound and syllabics of Illyés' poem in the English translating."[14] This was no easy task, as the opening stanza indicates:

"Jangling discords?" Yes! If you call it this, that has
such potency for us.
Yes, the splintering and smashing
glass strewn upon earth — the lash's
crack, the curses, the saw-teeth's screeching
scrape and shriek — let the violins learn this dementia,
and the singers' voices, let them learn from these;
let there be no peace,
no stained glass, perfumed ease
under the gilt and the velvet and the gargoyles
of the concert hall, no sanctuary from turmoil
while our hearts are gutted with grief and know no peace.

"Hangzavart"? — Azt! Ha nekik az,
ami nekünk vigasz!
Azt! Földre hullt
pohár fölcsattanó
szitok-szavát, fűrész foga közé szorult
reszelő sikongató
jatát tunulja hegedű
s éneklő gége — ne legyen béke, ne legyen derű
a bearanyozott, a fennen
finom, elzárt zeneteremben,
mig nincs a jaj-sötét szivekben![15]

Clearly the original is a much more compact poem. Avison's pyrotechnic sounds, however, have caught the Hungarian, even suggesting its brilliance. Phrases like "the saw-teeth's screeching / scrap and shriek" and "gutted with grief" recall Hopkins, and remind us that a good English translation will contain echoes of the tradition of English poetry as it introduces another tradition. Yet Avison's use of alliteration and assonance (especially on the letters s, c, and g), like Illyés', evokes Bartók's musical line, and is true to the tone of the original.

Regarding her revisions to the ode, made before including it in *No Time* (1989), Avison said: "Some of them were for ear. If you remember the 'glass flashing' — my ear was offended and I was sure in the original it couldn't have been quite so blatant. And sometimes because I thought the logic was easier to follow with a little more care, just so that it would be a little more syntactically correct. The Hungarian seemed to be constructed in logical as well as musical terms, and I thought we sacrificed something there as I went over it. I think Ilona would not have minded." This is not the place to enumerate all of her revisions, but several examples are worth noting. In line 4, for example, "glass flashing from earth" was aptly changed to "glass strewn upon earth." In stanza four, line six, the "T" in "That," which begins the line, has been capitalized to establish the following ten lines as part of a continuous — though twisting — phrase, also giving it prominence over the use of the lowered-case "that" in the opening of the next several lines. More important than these small changes is the fact that Avison made any revisions at all to work published years before — they suggest the care that she has taken with her writing.

The poet-speaker of Illyés' "The Plough Moves" equates a plough slowly digging a furrow with a hand writing a book. As the details of this metaphor are developed and sustained over five stanzas, farmer and poet merge into parts of the same "immutable creative force":[16] "Your story, Hungary, is being written / here in these furrows." With the "vast plain his book," farmer and poet share a similar fate — they make gestures to the future, to "all that still lies ahead." This is Populist poetry with a vengeance, and yet its simplicity is moving. (Duczyńska and Polanyi clearly took the title of their anthology from Illyés' poem.) Written in the rhythm of popular folksongs — a rhythm also associated with the poet Petófi — "The Plough Moves" must have been difficult to translate:

The plough moves and the moving furrow slowly	*Megy az eke, szaporodik*
builds up the row	*a barázda*
like a hand writing in an open book	*mintha egy nagy könyv iródnék*
for all to know;	*olvasásra.*
its paper the vast plain, a feathery ocean	*Papirosa a határ, a*
the heavens span	*tengerszéles,*
from brim to brim; the writing hand one aging	*a tolla meg az a zegény*
hired man.	*öregbéres.*[17]

Whereas her translation of the ode is suitably cacophonous, Avison here used a less ornate language, as the poem demands. She maintained its rhyme scheme: row/know (*barázda/olvasásra*), span/man (*tengerszéles/öregbéres*), and came close to some exact correspondences (*barázda* = furrow; *olvasásra* = to be read; *tengerszéles* = sea wide; *öregbéres* = aged farmhand). In Hungarian poetry assonance is a common form of rhyme, and such partial rhymes are valued for their originality. Avison's pure rhymes (row/know), here based on one-syllable words, do not suggest the original's more complex pattern. She was, however, writing an English poem, not a Hungarian one, and her poem needed to work in the conventions of its own language.

For "Of Tyranny, in one Breath," which did not appear in *The Plough and the Pen* but instead in *The Dumbfounding*, Avison used a similarly direct poetic line and diction. An indictment of political oppression (specifically the Rákosi dictatorship), the poem is made up of one sentence that runs for forty-six short stanzas, varying from two to four lines in length — an almost breathless technical feat.

Beginning with bren guns and questioning police, it becomes an exhaustive catalogue of all forms of tyranny, from the overt actions of a totalitarian state to the ways in which tyranny can overwhelm a society, informing daily life until "*you*/are the prison bars you're staring through."[18] An example of what Avison regarded as Illyés' "combination of reasonable statement and enormous power of feeling," the poem is held together by repetitions — "where tyranny settles in . . .", "for tyranny is . . ." "it is . . ." — until "tyranny" becomes a looming, inescapable "it." As in the Bartók ode, the tone of urgency here has a hallucinatory quality; it comes from the tension between Illyés' statements and the depth of his attachment to freedom — a tension that Avison found sympathetic, and successfully conveyed.

WHILE SOME POETS DECIDE to translate poetry during difficult creative periods (as Lowell admitted in *Imitations*), other find that translating can accompany a rich time of personal work. Avison made her translations during the heady years of her debut as a poet. The acclaim for *Winter Sun* gave her both an audience and a social role that was a creative stimulus — "recognition, like it or lump it, helps." This new status, together with the collaborative nature of the translation project, and the friendships it brought, may have affected the preparation of her next collection, *The Dumbfounding* (1963). As Avison recalled, "It was just a nice synchronizing of things."

The shift in tone between her first and second collections, which many critics have discussed (in some cases linking it to her religious conversion), may have also been related to her translations; as Ernest Redekop wrote: "Sometimes, indeed, it is tempting to think that she may have been influenced by some of the images and concepts that she had translated."[19] Yet such speculations are difficult to prove, and to look for comparable "images and concepts" is to ignore the collaborative process that shaped Avison's translations. Equally conjectural, my own suspicion is that Avison's meetings with Ducszyńska may have had a subtle effect on the questions she asked herself in revising her own poems — in fact, on the entire process of revision. The intensity that characterized their sessions together, and the emphasis on clarity, precision, accuracy, and feeling, could not have been lost on someone as thoughtful as Avison. When asked if, after her experience with Hungarian poetry, she ever wanted to translate other poems, she replied, with a wry smile: "I don't like writing. I never tackle a piece of writing if I'm not asked to, persuasively enough — that's the trouble." That no one asked her is our loss, for her Hungarian translations — and especially of Júhasz's "The Farm, at Dark, on the Great Plain" and Illyés' "Ode to Bartók" — belong with the finest translations made by contemporary poets.

NOTES

[1] Avison's comments were made during a taped interview on 3 July 1991. We had had several previous discussions about her translations while I edited her *Selected Poems* (Toronto: Oxford, 1991), and Avison knew of my studies of the Hungarian language. All further comments by Avison are from this interview.

[2] Along with Avison, Duczyńska was able to gather around her a number of Canadian poets who contributed translations, including Earle Birney (2), John Robert Colombo (1), Louis Dudek (2), Eustace Ross (1, with Avison), A. J. M. Smith (3), and Raymond Souster (2), as well as Kenneth McRobbie, a co-editor of *Mosaic* and a professor of history at the University of Manitoba, whose wife was Hungarian. However, Avison's eight translations included the longest poems (apart from McRobbie's translation of Juhász's "The Boy Changed into a Stag cries out at the Gate of Secrets") and totalled eighteen pages, making them the most significant contribution to the anthology and the most sustained effort at translation.

[3] In his article "The Only Political Duty: Margaret Avison's Translations of Hungarian Poems," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 13.2 (July 1972): 157-70), Ernest Redekop wrote: "Without knowledge of Hungarian or even of the literal translations, it is difficult to sort out Avison's particular contributions to the original [*sic*] poems. Nevertheless, certain familiar images do appear, and some of the diction is recognizably hers." Redekop's main interest is in noting similar concepts ("the nature of the individual human being") and images ("the Milky way") in Avison's translations and in her own poetry. His title is a phrase from the Foreword to *The Plough and the Pen*, where Auden suggested that a writer's "only political duty" is to translate the fiction and poetry of other countries.

[4] Robert Lowell, *Imitations* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1958): xi-xiii. All further quotations from Lowell come from this edition.

[5] Hungary is still a culture of the word, not the image. As recently as June, 1990, when the distinguished émigré poet George Faludy returned to Budapest, his publisher brought out a new collection of his sonnets with a first printing of 80,000 copies. In Canada, where the print-run of books by established poets is rarely more than 1,000, this figure seems astronomical.

[6] Ilona Duczyńska and Karl Polanyi (eds.), *The Plough and the Pen: Writings from Hungary 1930-1956* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1963): 15. In their preface to the anthology the Polanyis describe the bilingual "work sheets" they gave their translators.

[7] Adding further strain, during this time Karl Polanyi, who had originally been teaching at Columbia and flying back-and-forth between New York to Toronto, was slowly dying of cancer.

[8] Ilona Duczyńska and Karl Polanyi (eds.): 199-203.

[9] Ferenc Juhász, *A Mindenség Szerelme: A Szarvassá változott fiú* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1971): 575-79.

[10] Avison's translation of "Farm, at Dark, on the Great Plain" was included in *Ferenc Juhász/The Boy Changed into a Stag/Selected Poems 1949-1967*, translated by Kenneth McRobbie and Ilona Duczyńska (Toronto: Oxford, 1970).

[11] Ilona Duczynska and Karl Polanyi (eds.): 169-70.

[12] Attila József, *Összes Versei 2./1928-1937* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984): 343-46.

[13] Margaret Avison, *No Time* (Hantsport, N.S.: Lancelot, 1989): 107-11.

[14] *No Time*, 107.

[15] Gyula Illyés, *Összegyüjtött versei/Második kötet* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1977): pp. 240-43.

[16] Duczyńska and Polanyi (eds.), 173-74.

[17] Illyés, *Összegyüjtött versei/Elsö kötet* 556-57.

[18] Margaret Avison, *The Dumbfounding* (New York: Norton, 1966): 67-72.

[19] Redekop, 159.

TO MY DAUGHTER

Gregory Nyte

Who at sixteen months
speaks with the phonetic purity
of the Impressionists
the rounded corners
the trenchant edges
so exact, like "ba" is bath
and "co" is cold

And it must be very cold too
for while I bundle her
in boots and hats and scarves
she persuades me noddingly
with knowing eyes "Co co co"

And yet despite the snow outside
and the draft below the doors
and from the chimney
from her sleeves her hands always emerge
springing forth as little fists
which into pretty flowers sadly grow

FLIGHT

Gregory Nyte

The pilot never mentioned Lockerbie

Turbans, bluejeans, and flowing robes
Simmered in the airport,
Staring at each other.
From above "Afternoon Delight" played
 our shadows instrumentally,
Bending and twisting to possess the light.

This was all congenial, though
On board we preferred ignoring each other
In books and magazines
Making believe we were still adults
Heavy and invulnerable

The flight was long, nine hours of morning
 and breakfasts below
Where our children emptied cereal boxes
Continentally
Like
Dominoes
While
Overhead
We could have been the sun to them were it
Spilling milk across the sky instead of mopping it,
 and their tears:

They missed us
But their white lips and spoony voices
Were unconcerned with the blueprints and physics
 and wings and technicians
That held us up —
Their awe of pilots carried us home

To adulthood: plummeting slowly toward the poised
 clenched fist

books in review

PUT IN HER PLACE

GEORGE MCWHIRTER, *The Listeners.* Oberon, $29.95/15.95.

JAKE MCDONALD, *Two Tickets to Paradise.* Oberon, $12.95.

HÉLÈNE HOLDER, *Snow.* Oberon, $12.95.

SHOULD ONE be surprised at the absence, in three recent works of fiction, of a single interesting or sympathetic female character? Perhaps not; but the undisguised misogyny in George McWhirter's novel, *The Listeners*, is nevertheless disturbing to a woman reader, as is the more circumspect hostility in Jake McDonald's short story collection, *Two Tickets to Paradise*, in which most of the female characters are reduced to comic-strip bimbos. Hélène Holder's narrative attitudes and sexual politics are harder to divine than these male writers', but the women with whom she peoples her extraordinary novel, *Snow*, are all just as fixated on sex and the male-female connection as McDonald's bimbos. However, her male characters, unlike McDonald's, are all similarly obsessed.

McWhirter's story of father-son bonding is set in Northern Ireland on the Glorious Twelfth of July, with numerous flashbacks to the earlier lives of old Mr. Kerr and his precociously musical son, Martin. Martin's instrument is the flute, for whose music his father displays an almost idolatrous passion. The phallic, autoerotic nature of this instrument, and its connection with a "clean," valorized masculinity are exhibited in such passages as:

> Mr. Kerr's tastes were simple and natural. Your flute was bare bone basic, and the fingering on it was clean.

The bassoon, "a whole set of plumbing set up to disguise a fart," represents a false masculinity into which Martin has been lured, when, at the beginning of the novel, he is seen drunkenly playing a bassoon in his father-in-law's brass band. The father-in-law is, of course, a false, or unnatural, father, brought into the young man's life by a woman. The novel's plot traces Martin's passage back to the true father, a concept associated with another patriarchal construct: patriotism. In a rather far-fetched final scene, Martin's playing of a genuine gold flute at a banquet for V.I.P.'s and politicians comes to symbolize not only the Kerrs' mutual reconciliation, but also a harmonious solution to the political problems of Northern Ireland. As the father and son reunion is brought about by a sort of kindly-strict punishment and humiliation of the perverse genius Martin, so, the allegory insists, must the inveterately perverse genius of the Irish people be brought to heel, in the same spirit of stern but loving paternalism.

This brief summary suggests that there are no important female characters in *The Listeners* at all. And indeed, the total possessiveness of Mr. Kerr's love for his son frequently seems to exclude any female share in reproduction, nurturing or education. But some female characters do appear, though the boy's mother, who dies young, hardly amounts to one of them. There is Martin's wife, shadowly portrayed, the Delilah who betrays him to her father's brass band. There is Eithne McMurran, the flute teacher to whom Martin is sent because, being rebellious, he "need(s) a woman's touch"; Martin questions her authority precisely because she is a woman. There is Mr. Kerr's supremely undervalued daughter, who lives with him and looks after him. She is quite gratuitously ugly, "thick-lipped and bow-legged," and her obsession with cleaning, in which she resembles her mother, is seen as typical of the sex generally:

> Women were great for pulling and hauling: dragging in clotheslines, hauling sheets up out of the washtub, stretching and snapping them to clear the wrinkles before folding.

The female reader is comforted to learn that she has some uses.

Humour in *The Listeners* is dependent mainly on the comic dialect of the principle focalizer, Mr. Kerr, but another source of amusement is found — predictably enough — in the female sex. Early on, in a little paroxysm of dislike for the older women in a crowd, Mr. Kerr feels that he would rather confront their pink headscarves from behind,

> which was better than from the front, where their noses and their tongues stuck out under them silk scoops of roses, as sharp as bloody thorns.

Later, when a woman is described running uphill, the bouncing of her bosom is singled out for comment, both by the narrator and by a male character who remarks: "'A right sight of hams and venison that is.'" The ribaldry and the repulsion add up to a fairly consistent attitude that does not endear a female reader — nor give her much faith in McWhirter's vision of the future for Ireland.

McDonald's female characters are not repellent so much as "attractive" in stereotypical ways. The title of one of the stories, "Moving Up, Moving Out," aptly describes the kind of mobility they are typically granted in this collection. All the stories, with the exception of the first, are told from the perspective of a central male character, either a narrator or a focalizer. Female motion is, from this perspective, satellite motion. Women's attempts to rise in the world involve moving in with men, moving out on men, and moving to distant or exotic places in the company of men.

However, women are rarely victims in these stories, since the central male consciousness has cornered the market on vulnerability. The heroes are all sensitive creative types, sometimes rough diamonds, who share a certain apprehensiveness about women. What gives McDonald's women power is their sexuality, a kind of adolescent boy's fantasy of female sexuality. One character is described as "a showstopper of a woman in high heels and tiny earrings," another, as "a big blonde in an electric green rayon cocktail dress." Women described as "unattractive," such as those in the hero's creative writing class in "A Wedding By the Sea," who sport accessories such as "army boots" and "thick eyeglasses," never even enter the action.

The only apparent exception to the rule is the first story, the one after which the collection is named, which has a female focalizer. Being the central consciousness and officially the focus of the narrator's sympathy, she would seem to demand a more complete realization than the other stories' bimbos. But she, too, spends plenty of time applying makeup and adjusting her hair; like them, her aim is to catch a man, and her method of doing this involves the purchase of a silk nightie. That the story is a comic one, turning on her victory over male bonding — specifically, a friendship between her awful boyfriend and his unspeakable buddy — does not justify the bimbo factor. A more complex female character would in fact make the story more forceful.

In Holder's novel, the complexity of the female characters varies, but one cannot really tell whether it contributes to the forcefulness of the story, because the story is so difficult to follow anyway. This is a selfconsciously postmodernist novel, in which a character, who happens to be dying, is the author who creates and destroys the other characters. Certain minor characters get to read the manuscript into which they are written. Eventually, nearly all the characters, including, presumably, the author, are killed by a snowstorm which wipes out the whole of a city (a fictionalized version of Montreal) — except, impossibly, for three survivors, who are finally rescued.

The book is, of course, deliberately "unreadable," though its actual written style is ironically more fluent and assured than either McWhirter's or McDonald's. One can, however, say of its female characters that they are all fixated on sex and romantic — usually adulterous — love. This may be a satirical point, for the fictional "author" of these characters is male, and he creates females for his own delectation. But the text is too unstable for the reader to know whether a particular tendency is being satirized consistently. This is a pity, because Holder is capable, even in so disjointed a genre as this, of creating quite plausible dialogue and characterization. In a less selfconsciously unreadable work, she might hold the reader's attention quite successfully. In *Snow*, unfortunately, she does not. *The Listeners* and *Two Tickets to Paradise* are far more entertaining — a factor which cannot be ignored by a novelist, however serious she may be about her art.

CATHERINE ADDISON

WHAT IS TRUTH?

DOROTHY LIVESAY, *Journey With My Selves: A Memoir, 1909-1963*. Douglas & McIntyre, $26.95.

WHO IS DOROTHY LIVESAY? What is truth? These are questions it seems fitting Dorothy Livesay should ask in her recently published memoir, *Journey With My Selves: A Memoir, 1909-1963*, for hers has been a life devoted to the quest for self-knowledge and for knowledge of those worlds in which the self is destined to live: the world of nature, the world of the spirit, the world of politics, and the world of the family and community. In this intimate self-portrait, Livesay explores her complex feelings towards all these worlds of being, using the first question — what is truth? — as a key to unlock the mysteries of the second — who is Dorothy Livesay?

The memoir journeys through many decades — from her birth in 1909 until 1963 — but throughout, it retains its commitment to a belief in the multifacetedness of the human personality, in human life as a drama, and in the primacy of perception in creating meaning out of human life. Thus Livesay writes:

> "What is truth?" I like Emily Dickinson's evasive answer: "Tell the Truth but tell it slant." Autobiography, or memoirs, are not written to satisfy a secret personal urge. They are written by an actor who performs behind a mask. The aim must be to attract an audience. A formidable task; and one much akin to the novelist.

If this is truth, then who is Dorothy Livesay? She is, as she tells us, "the sum of all these perspectives," the ones urged upon her by father, mother, sisters, lovers, friends, children. She plays many parts. The result is "a series of selves" formed through the dynamic interplay of her life with those of her intimates. It is, she tells us, without shame that she "sets down what seems to be the truth" of all these lives intertwined. For to set them down is "not to relinquish them, but to remember. Always with longing to remember."

In her confessional style, Livesay sets out to do just that: to seek the truth, her own, by remembering. She explores the often troubling relationship with her parents; thrilling and devastating girlhood experiences of love; her marriage and children; the friendships — literary and otherwise — which sustained her over the years; the environments which enabled her to thrive and blossom; and, not least of all, those painful experiences which enabled her to don, in her own metaphor, that final "hood" — selfhood.

How truthful is her remembering? If

she is, as she claims, telling things "slant" she does so through omission. She stops at 1963, she tells us in the "After Words" in order to protect those who are "living, and still vulnerable." In fact, it is hard to imagine a more searingly personal confession than the one Livesay writes, almost in the form of a loveletter, to her lifelong friend, "Gina."

In a very early poem, the young Dorothy Livesay defiantly challenges an intimate friend: "I shall lie like this when I am dead — / But with one more secret in my head" ("Going to Sleep"). Why not lie? (And the pun, no doubt, is intended.) Why not keep secrets unto the grave? So unflinchingly honest is Livesay's portrait of this friendship and of other experiences such as the illegal abortion she had in her twenties, one cannot help but wonder why such truths should be remembered at all before a reading public.

The answer is found throughout the memoir itself in the poignant emotions of much of Livesay's remembering. This was not an easy book to write. Nonetheless this "sort of farewell testimonial" had to be written.

If there is one truth about autobiography implicit in Livesay's memoir, it is this: in autobiography, the greatest sin is the sin of omission. In *Journey With My Selves*, we have as much of the whole picture as we can expect in one volume covering the years 1909-1963. A further installment covering the years between 1963 and the present, might flesh out that picture. We would like to know a little more about her children, about her personal life after the rejuvenating experience of Africa, about growing old, and about those final phases of love and their many faces. But if Dorothy Livesay does not give this to us, she can be forgiven. Her poetry has always told and continues to tell all the truth.

SANDRA HUTCHISON

SOCIOCRITIQUES

ANNIE BRISSET, *Sociocritique de la traduction.* Preambule Edns, n.p.

CLAUDE LAPOINTE, *André Brassard.* VLB Editions, n.p.

COMMENT LE THÉÂTRE québécois s'est-il constitué comme théâtre national? Deux essais récents, de Claude Lapointe et d'Annie Brisset, présentent deux manières différentes non seulement d'instituer une littérature nationale, mais aussi de regarder le rapport entre création et nation.

L'étude d'Annie Brisset s'intitule *Sociocritique de la traduction.* S'inscrivant dans le cadre d'études du polysystème littéraire telle que conçue par l'école de Tel Aviv, elle tient compte des pratiques de la traduction et du fonctionnement des oeuvres traduites dans le système d'arrivée: "A quelles règles obéissent les stratégies de traduction? A quelles conditions l'oeuvre dramatique étrangère doit-elle son insertion dans le discours de la société québécoise?" Un texte traduit fonctionne dans le "polysystème de la littérature d'arrivée" selon "la place que l'institution leur y assigne," assujetti à la régulation du système de valeurs et de ses "idéologèmes."

Selon Annie Brisset, "la traduction du texte étranger est prise en charge par un discours sur l'identité, à l'intérieur du champ de pertinence où est circonscrit l'objet 'Québec'." Cette prise en charge s'effectue bien avant l'acte de transfert. Comme le laisse supposer son sous-titre, *Théâtre et altérité au Québec (1968-1988)*, l'étude de la traduction permet de connaître les normes discursives du théâtre québécois, surtout en ce qui concerne leurs discours sur "l'Autre." La systématicité des choix translatifs offre une perspective privilégiée sur "les éléments constitutifs de l'institution littéraire propre au milieu-cible."

La composante théorique de l'étude est impressionante à la fois dans son étendue et dans sa pertinence, qui est évidente dans l'étude des pièces de Shakespeare jouées sur la scène québécoise. Annie Brisset est l'une des rares théoriciennes capables de saisir un détail, comme le fait que les noms de lieux de la pièce de Shakespeare sont réduits à des imprécisions (en entreprenant le genre de travail traductologique systématique, presque statistique, qui fait défaut dans le peu d'études comparatives des versions originale et traduite) et ensuite de l'exploiter pour développer une perspective d'ensemble sur les pratiques discursives littéraires et autres. En l'occurence, le fait que M. Garneau évite de dire *Fife, Dunsinane, Inverness*, etc., y substituant des termes comme *campagne, au loin dans la plaine, le coeur d'la bataille*, est révélateur de la conception d'idéologème "pays du Québec" et de l'idée que les désignations géographiques sont des marques d'altérité qui doivent être effacées lorsqu'on "traduit en québécois."

Les observations et méthodes d'A. Brisset vaudraient aussi pour d'autres genres littéraires et la lecture de son étude laisse rêver à leur application à d'autres systèmes. Par exemple, est-ce que les mêmes normes s'appliquent aux pièces de provenances diverses? La formation de l'identité nationale étant aussi une préoccupation de la littérature canadienne-anglaise, l'absence des parallèles dans la réception de la littérature des deux côtés continue à mériter l'attention des chercheuses et chercheurs, et cet essai offre des pistes intéressants à emprunter dans de telles études comparatistes. La naturalisation ne joue pas de la même manière au Canada anglais, où les oeuvres québécoises sont reçues à la fois comme Même (le système canadien intègre dans son corpus certains textes québécois) et comme Autre (il préfère les textes qui représentent clairement la société québécoise en ce qu'elle a de particulier). En lisant son traitement du corpus québécois, on se demande quelles stratégies jouent dans d'autres contextes discursifs.

En adressant l'objection que la version garnélienne de *Macbeth* illustre d'autres "contraintes de production," A. Brisset explique que "la traduction et la mise en scène sont ici le produit d'un même état de société et qu'elles procèdent d'une même formation idéologique." Elle remarque le fait que *Lysistrata, adapté par A. Brassard et M. Tremblay*, fait partie de la collection *Répertoire québécois à l'intérieur de la collection* Théâtre canadien, et que la traduction met en correspondance deux sociétés pourtant radicalement opposées, une des façons dont un texte étranger fonctionne pour renforcer l'identité nationale. L'intérêt de Claude Lapointe est, cependant, autre. Il présente André Brassard en ce qu'il a d'unique à offrir au théâtré québécois, et selon un point de vue personnalisé, celui d'un auteur qui a suivi de près le travail d'A. Brassard de 1982 en 1984. C. Lapointe est à ce point clair dans ses intentions:

> En dépit des multiples conditions qui restreignent les options d'un metteur en scène-directeur artistique, j'ai choisi de montrer un André Brassard apparement dégagé autant des contraintes économiques et sociales que des contraintes de temps ou de lieu, et donc pleinement et librement responsable de chacun des éléments de chacune des productions ... tout ici est placé sous sa responsabilité....

Claude Lapointe pose un regard attentif et respectueux sur le travail d'André Brassard, et en fait le bilan de façon très complète et informée. Si A. Brassard a besoin de "se faire accepter, approuver, reconnaître par l'autre," il trouve un public exemplaire chez C. Lapointe, qui cherche à découvrir son caractère unique. A. Brisset dit que "Publier ou jouer telle pièce étrangère plutôt que telle autre constitue un choix arbitraire. Pourtant,

tous ces choix rassemblés font système." C. Lapointe cherche le schéma qui sous-tend les stratégies individuelles de Brassard, et en présente un basé sur le changement et la révolte contre l'acquis. Ce n'est pas très loin du schéma organisateur de l'institutionalisation de la langue québécoise. Cependant, certains contradictions ressortent entre le Brassard présenté par Lapointe et celui qu'il présente lui-même dans son entrevue. Par exemple, il déclare avoir "de moins en moins envie de prendre beaucoup de place" dans son travail, ce qui va à l'encontre du point de vue de C. Lapointe qui veut le voir comme prenant tout en charge; il met en question le degré élévé de transposition du réel dans des pièces comme *Sainte Carmen de la Main*; malgré l'attention portée par Lapointe à l'improvisation des acteurs et actrices, Brassard les conseille de ne pas trop changer d'un soir à l'autre. La conception du changement est donc discutable, et on finit par croire que la vérité se trouve dans le changement même ...

Les deux essais discutent de la question d'adaptation. Chez C. Lapointe, on parle des changements effectués dans son travail: Brassard fait des simplifications, des coupures, des clarifications, des transpositions de lieu. En lisant l'essai d'Annie Brisset, on comprend mieux pourquoi on fait de telles adaptations, ce qui permet de replacer l'individualité d'un metteur en scène comme André Brassard dans un contexte qui relie ses changements à l'ensemble des pratiques discursives québécoises.

JO-ANNE ELDER

IN PARIS

W. O. MITCHELL, *Roses are Difficult Here*. McClelland & Stewart, $26.95.

JOHN BARTH ONCE remarked that his books tend to come in pairs. W. O. Mitchell, it seems, works on the same principle, except that the elements of his literary pairs are sometimes decades apart. During the 1980's, Mitchell published books complementing *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *Since Daisy Creek*, and *Jake and the Kid*, and with his latest novel Mitchell has returned to the fictional landscape of Shelby, Alberta, which he had already used in *The Kite* (1962). Except for Daddy Sherry, who makes one brief and quite pointless appearance on one of his bad days, all the characters have different names, but little else is new.

In *Roses are Difficult Here*, Mitchell describes events that take place in Shelby during about twelve months in the 1950s. As in *The Kite*, the external frame to the reported events is the visit of an outsider, this time an Ontario sociologist planning to study Shelby as a typical small town. While the first few chapters make the reader expect yet another version of the "Eastern sophistication versus Western common sense" variety of comedy, the novel devotes only little space to this possibility. The sociologist turns out to be little more than a reminder that there is a world beyond the district for Matt Stanley, editor of the *Shelby Chinook* and central character of the novel. In addition to Matt Stanley, several other focalizers take part in the narrative. Mitchell handles this aspect of the narrative quite well, although the various voices are not always distinct enough in tone and diction to identify them as originating with separate characters. Particularly good, however, is the voice of Millie Clocker whose addiction to romance fiction is blended convincingly into her observations and expressions.

Roses are Difficult Here presents some of the episodes about which Matt Stanley writes in his paper, such as the competition with the neighbouring community about the first sign of spring or the completely uneventful Annual Fair and Rodeo. The further one reads in the novel, the more one comes to understand Matt's dissatisfaction with "the quiet backwater life he was leading." Nothing significant ever happens. The most "dramatic" events are mysterious dog poisonings (whose mystery dissolves into nothing when the culprit appears out of the blue, declares his reasons, and disappears again just as quickly) and the standard feature of small town fiction, anonymous letters (whose author the reader knows) claiming an affair to exist between Matt Stanley and June Melquist, the sociologist.

Nothing in the novel convinces. The writing is average Mitchell quality with few flaws but even fewer highlights, and of a plot there is little worth mentioning. But what is sadder is that even the few comic highlights, usually a Mitchell trademark, appear laboured and somewhat dull. One has to wonder why Mitchell decided to publish *Roses are Difficult Here* at this stage. The book contains some interesting raw material, but there is no central idea to the book which would save it as a novel. All we have now are notes about life in a small town. Matt Stanley concludes that while living in Shelby may be emotionally satisfying, writing about this life is often quite boring. For reasons known only to him, Mitchell himself did not honour the insights he ascribed to his character.

AXEL KNOENAGEL

POET'S DILEMMA

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *NELLIGAN: livret d'opéra*. Leméac, n.p.

THERE IS NO DOUBT that Emile Nelligan, Québec's "national poet," has not loosened his hold on the Québec imagination. As I write this review, a major commemorative conference, "Colloque Nelligan: 50 ans après sa mort" is taking place in Ottawa. It will culminate in the launching of "l'édition critique de l'oeuvre nelliganienne."

Nelligan's poems, which are unquestionably evocative and moving, echo the Symbolists he admired, and with a few, striking exceptions are set in an oneiric rather than a localized world. His renowned sonnet, *Le vaisseau d'or*, which sinks "dans l'abîme du rêve" has been set to music, choreographed, and used as the name of a restaurant operated by former Montreal mayor, Jean Drapeau. As Jean Larose's astute study, *Le mythe de Nelligan*, pointed out, Nelligan, handsome, tortured, perfectly symbolized a national schizophrenia — French patrimonie versus anglophone North American context. His was the sad story of a young man devoted to poetry, who wrote fervently from age 16 to 19 (1896 to 1899), at which point he was incarcerated in mental institutions for 42 years and thereby forever silenced. He prefigured many Quebec literary heroes who dreamed heroically, but failed, sinking dismally, like Nelligan's ship of gold, like his own youthful spirit. Think of Hubert Aquin's protagonists.

It was therefore a splendid idea to create an opera about Nelligan, and most appropriate that Michel Tremblay, by now another Quebec "mythe," produce the libretto. The well known Quebec composer, André Gagnon, wrote the score and collaborated with Tremblay. The debut of this opera was eagerly anticipated and surrounded by lavish publicity. Performed by the Opera of Montreal, it opened first in Quebec City in February 1990, and then in March in Montreal. Always interested in the twists and turns of "le mythe de Nelligan" I had wanted to hear the Opera. Luckily fate brought me to Montreal at the right moment.

As a spectacle, NELLIGAN was an inspired performance — rich costumes, a simple but powerfully choreographed set, an impressive cast including Louise Forestier (Emilie, Nelligan's mother) and Renée Claude (Françoise). But although the performers were impassioned in their delivery, the opera was a disappointment. Quite simply, Gagnon's music, Tremblay's libretto and presentation of the story were cliched and tainted by a superficial and unconvincing nineteenth-century veneer. A stronger sense of Nelligan's milieu, and indeed of his troubled personality could have been developed (what comes through are merely childish petulance and adolescent alcoholism). Instead, we were presented only with the banal threads of a tragic story, which is still not fully understood, since by Quebec law psychiatric records are not open to the public.

Tremblay's libretto opens, effectively enough, with a professor come to visit the elderly Nelligan just before his death in the hôpital Saint-Jean-de-Dieu. Nelligan then obligingly and pathetically attempts to recite "Le vaisseau d'or," but falters, misremembering his own lines. (Tremblay draws his material from Paul Wyczynski's detailed biography, *Nelligan, 1879-1941*, and from Bernard Courteau's more idiosyncratic, *Nelligan n'était pas fou*). Then while the elderly Nelligan watches, the last few months before the young Nelligan's incarceration are enacted. These unfortunately are stylized, predictable set pieces, redeemed only by the pathos of the older Nelligan observing events roll to their ineluctable end, and trying vainly to intervene. A series of scenes involve his mother, Emilie, a Quebecoise with whom Nelligan has a particularly close relationship (though she was much troubled by the direction of his poems and may have destroyed some), his father, David, who speaks mainly in English (he was played by a former American, Jim Corcoran) his two sisters, his bohemian friends, Charles Gill and Arthur de Bussières, the priest, Eugène Seers (later Louis Dantin, who posthumously published Nelligan's poems), and Françoise, a journalist and kindred spirit.

Tremblay's lines do not rise to his usual exuberant eloquence, they remain pedestrian, hobbled by flat end rhymes: for example, listen to Emilie: "Pourquoi nommez-vous folie / ce qui n'est que mélocolie / d'un poète." These lines reflect banal notions of a tormented poetic soul. Most disturbing, however, is the tremendous importance of the French-English/mother-father conflict in Nelligan's unhappy life. Tremblay carries Philip Larkin's "they fuck you up, your mum and dad" to simplistic, annoying extremes. David Nelligan is forced to sing idiotic lines like "I don't want this son of mine to destroy everything. I worked hard all my life! A poet! For God's sake! Why not a murderer! Why not Jack the Ripper!". The young Nelligan responds later, equally inanely, with "La seule chose que vous me dites en français, c'est que je suis fou. . . ." While obviously librettos are constrained by the need for repetition, often exacerbated by hackneyed end rhymes, surely Tremblay with his wonderful ear for the cadence of speech, could have been more inventive. This opera was produced in the midst of Quebec's language war, but to present Nelligan's sad fate as a consequence of the conflict with his *English* speaking (and pugnaciously philistine) father, and of the quarrel between French (mother) and English (father) seems to me by now a battered platitude. This disappointing interpretation is all the more puzzling since there seems to be an autobiographical element in Tremblay's portrayal of Nelligan. He obviously identifies with the poet's dilemma — the absent father who works in English, the mother to whom he is warmly attached, and the defiant embracing of a career as writer. Nelligan's psychosis and his undiminished significance to the people of Quebec deserved better. Alas.

KATHY MEZEI

THEATRE HISTORY

DENIS W. JOHNSTON, *Up the Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto's Alternative Theatres, 1968-1975*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $45.00, pa. $17.95.

ANN SADDLEMYER, ed., *Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario 1800-1914*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $40.00, pa. $17.95.

THESE LONG-AWAITED HISTORIES of theatre in Ontario, cover a broad range of activity across the province. The scholarship in *Early Stages* is impeccable, the articles are well written, and the approach is conservative.

J. M. S. Careless sets the tone for the volume in a thoroughly "old-historicist" essay on "Ontario Society to 1914" that traces what he considers to be "rising cultural standards," moving from "vulgar farce," "low-class variety show[s]," "not-so-legitimate theatre," and "a low level of public entertainment," to "higher levels of entertainment" such as "musical and choral societies," and "professional drama of sound quality," "patronized by the best society" in "handsomely appointed" Opera Houses and auditoriums. The essay makes no attempt to analyze how or in what social or cultural context the period's varieties of theatre *meant*, or whose interests they served, and his silence in these areas is shared by his fellow contributors. Leslie O'Dell, for example, in describing the activities of the "Amateurs of the Regiment," fails to ask whether the army's function in stemming rebellion, together with its alliance with Upper Canada's upper classes, was related to its officers' theatrical efforts, to the kind of theatre they performed, or to their contribution to what amateur theatre later became in Ontario.

Imperialism is in evidence in Robertson Davies' description of the nineteenth-century repertoire, though little nationalism: Davies chooses not to discuss Canadian plays, because, "although many ... did get one production, very few remained within the professional repertoire." His essay is less about Ontario than the English-speaking world, and as such there is little in it that is new. Davies dismisses the heavy concentration of "trivial pieces," "catchpenny shows," and "trash" in the repertoire — the period's equivalent of television he claims. Davies is quite open about his prejudices, however, and he makes no real pretence to objectivity. His fellow contributors to *Early Stages* are for the most part less forthcoming about their selection principles; few interrogate their sources with any rigour, and few inquire into the social or cultural role of theatrical practices. Mary M. Brown, for example, does not comment on what it *means* to receive one's theatre through the touring circuits she describes; Gerald Lenton-Young seems largely unaware of the different social and cultural functions of "variety theatre" and so-called "legitimate theatre," even though he points to telling "double standards" in the regulations governing different kinds and classes of event; and Robert Fairfield, though he introduces his article on theatre architecture with Winston Churchill's observation that "we make our houses and our houses make us," himself makes nothing *of* the insight in his precise empirical survey of Ontario's nineteenth-century theatres.

This is not to say that there are not valuable observations in the volume; there are many, though many of them raise more questions than the collection answers. Among my favorites is Ann Saddlemyer's description of the function of amateur theatre societies in forming ties among immigrant groups (which she compares to 20th-century multicultural organizations), particularly her example of the Toronto Coloured Young Men's Amateur Theatrical Society in 1849 and its objections to black-face minstrel shows. Lenton-Young, too, provides the intriguing observation that in the 1850s and 60s *all* racial stereotypes — Dutch, German, or Hebrew — were performed in black face.

In *Up the Mainstream* Denis Johnston makes no acknowledgement that his history is anything other than a transparent window on the past, and no attempt is made to historicize source material. But meticulous research unearths a good deal of information, and Johnston constructs a compelling narrative. The history focuses on Theatre Passe Muraille (two chapters), The Factory Theatre Lab, Tarragon Theatre, and Toronto Free Theatre. Johnston also includes chapters on "The Off-Yonge-Street Theatres" (Studio Lab, Global Village and Creation Two), "The Second Wave" (New Theatre, Open Circle, and Phoenix Theatre), and NDWT. The account of each theatre begins with a background of its founder(s) and proceeds through a description of its mandate, to a chronological account of its seasons or shows with evaluative commentary quoted from Kareda and Whittaker. Johnston appends a useful Chronology, Playlist, Bibliography and Index.

The most disturbing feature of the book is its imprecise use of terms, particularly terms such as "mainstream" and "alternative." The latter, which is most often used in criticism to refer to theatre with political or aesthetic purposes *opposed* to a "mainstream," or dominant theatrical style or organization, is not clearly distinguished here from "avant garde," theatre that presents itself as *ahead* of its time. Is "the mainstream" an aesthetic, social, political, or corporate entity? Johnston uses "mainstream" most often as an astonishingly flexible adjective, and employs such a slippery range of phrases as "mainstream values and connection," "mainstream methodology and vocabulary," "mainstream ambitions," and "mainstream subsidy and promotion." When discussing issues such as censorship, Johnston even seems to confuse legal constructs such as consensual community moral standards with "mainstream" credibility in the theatre.

Given the terminological confusion, it's difficult at times to know what *Up the Mainstream* is actually *about*, except insofar as one can read in it a teleological narrative of small nationalist theatres "rising" to some externally determined level of "success" that is variously measured by longevity, financial growth, architectural size or permanence, production "standards," critical reputation, or assimilation into an "established" theatrical community.

But *Up the Mainstream* and *Early Stages* make available a great deal of interesting information. Both would benefit, however, from a greater willingness to let slip what Johnston calls "the halo of objectivity" in favour of a more engaged and more methodologically self-conscious historiography.

RICHARD PAUL KNOWLES

CANON OR NOT

GERALD LYNCH, *Bliss Carman: A Reappraisal.* University of Ottawa, $24.95.

DERMOT MCCARTHY, *A Poetics of Place: The Poetry of Ralph Gustafson.* McGill-Queen's, $39.95.

GERALD LYNCH has collected the papers presented at the sixteenth "Reappraisals: Canadian Writers" colloquium sponsored by the University of Ottawa Department of English. Carman joins the other Confederation poets in this series: Lampman, D. C. Scott, and Roberts. His belated arrival best proves Lynch's thesis that Carman "to a greater extent perhaps than his fellow Canadian writers of the nineteenth century, has suffered from the misrepresentation and neglect that can be attributed to the slash-and-burn tactics practiced by many Canadian critics on their own literary heritage since the beginning of Canadian modernism in the 1920s." This "reappraisal" is an apologetics for Carman's recanonization.

Mary G. McGillivray begins with a biographical overview of Carman's public popularity and critical rejection; she appeals for a revaluation of the enduring mystical elements in his best lyrics. Three poet-critics — Al Purdy, Elizabeth Brewster, and D. G. Jones — then analyze the personal influence and poetic merit Carman represents for them. In a neat synthesis, Jones sees Purdy as "a transmogrified Carman."

Careful bibliographical research supports the next four papers. James Doyle analyzes Carman's close relationship with the late-nineteenth century literary milieu in the United States, where he lived and wrote for most of his adult life. John Sorfleet argues that earlier critics constructed their theories of Carman's development on a false chronology based on publication rather than composition. For the correct record, however, he refers us to his earlier articles (from 1974 and 1976, so this theory is not exactly "news"), Terry Whalen reappraises Carman's literary and social criticism, particularly his uncollected writings from 1890-1905, approving of his anti-modernist balance of social and spiritual commitment. D. M. R. Bentley considers Carman's poetry as part of the "mind-cure movement that flourished in New England around the turn of the century." Bentley illustrates this bibliotherapy for post-industrial neurasthenia in several poems, ending with a "Delsartian analysis" of the Sappho "Lyric XXIII."

Particular studies of the poetry include Tracy Ware's analysis of some elegies from *By the Aurelian Wall* as the inluence on Carman of the English Romantics. Louis K. MacKendrick follows with a consideration of the specifically Gothic characteristics of Romanticism found in Carman's work in a close reading of the spectral and erotic elements in thirteen of his poems. A. R. Kizuk presents a "psycho-analytical-Lacanian" arugment ("the essence of Carman's lyricism lies in a submission to the Mother in contravention of Oedipal law") which is entertaining but unrelated (except for one paragraph) to the title of his paper, "Bliss Carman's Lyrics and their Influence on Early Twentieth-Century Poetry in Canada." Similarly, Laurel Boone's interesting biography of Carman (with an incidental and undocumented mention of the masques he wrote with Mary Perry King) demonstrates only a very tenuous connection between him and "the Genesis of Modern Dance" in her title.

R. L. McDougall, D. M. R. Bentley, and Douglas Lochhead provide a sensible conclusion to these proceedings. The final verdict of this reappraisal would seem to be voiced by Lochhead: that Carman is "indeed good and worth pursuing" though not "great."

While Gerald Lynch aims to resurrect Carman from critical obscurity, Dermot McCarthy wants to canonize Ralph Gustafson as "a major Canadian poet of the twentieth century." He argues that Gustafson's minor status is a result of his marginalized position in terms of the Can-lit coterie, but that his achievement is of great "literary-historical significance . . . to the development of modern Canadian poetry." To support his argument, McCarthy conducts a close reading of poetry from his six phases of Gustafson's fifty-five year career, within a biographical and historical context.

McCarthy's thesis is that "the relation between style and sensibility" in Gustafson's poetry has always been "pragmatic and processive": his sensibility eclectically adopting or discarding influences as it matures; his style serving this process of self-knowledge and self-expression. In the 1930s Gustafson's poetry moved from Romantic imitation, which both expressed and stifled his Romantic sensibility, to modernism of technique but not ideology. His poetry of the 1940s and 1950s represents a synthesis of modernism in style and Neo-Romanticism in aesthetic in his first period of poetic maturity.

McCarthy believes 1960 represents a turning-point in Gustafson's development with the publication of *Rivers among Rocks* and *Rocky Mountain Poems.* These volumes anticipate his 1963 return to Canada after more than thirty years abroad. More important, the latter book expresses a major step in Gustafson's advance beyond modernism toward "his version of a postmodernist poetics." McCarthy defines Gustafson's postmodernism as a "view of the world as mysterious, dangerous, uncanny, and beyond the traditional strategies of logocentric discourse." However, he continues to analyse Gustafson's poetry in terms of "numinous experience," "yearning for an essence," "a fixed moral base," "humanism" and (with reference to Charles Altieri's theory) a "religious" attempt "to forge a balance between mind and world which satisfies a deep personal desire for value" — terms which suggest that Gustafson's (or McCarthy's) "version" of postmodernism may not be the most common one. Although McCarthy admits that Gustafson's other volumes of the 1960s represent a backsliding into modernism, he attempts to demonstrate the poet's clear development toward "this stance, which I have chosen to call postmodernist," connecting it to the "larger shift in contemporary Canadian poetry" toward postmodernism.

Gustafson's poetry of the 1970s integrates his "concentric" (as opposed to egocentric) humanism, his "immanentist theology," his intuition that "man is doomed amid magnificence," his "witness poetry" of social responsibility, and his travel poems. The long poem-sequence *Gradations of Grandeur* (1979) summarizes fifty years of Gustafson's poetics in a synthesis of the poet's creative art with "the divinity immanent in the world." His last and most prolific decade of poetry continues these themes in a contemplation of the "sacral world," his "new world northern." His poetics of place is not characterized by terror but love, and he describes his art with Wallace Stevens' phrase as "a sacrament of praise."

In the Conclusion, McCarthy argues against the distortions of previous thematic criticism of Gustafson's poetry and reiterates his thesis that the poet has evolved from romanticism to modernism to postmodernism. The reader may be more convinced by evidence of romanticism than postmodernism in McCarthy's analyses and may not always perceive the "development" so clearly. But, despite some semantic quibbles and chronological confusions, this is a clearly written and impressively researched book. McCarthy has carefully integrated Gustafson's essays, correspondence, and original manuscripts with a detailed examination of poetic influences and excellent close-readings of over sixty poems. This book should centre some attention on one of Canada's unfairly neglected poets.

BARBARA PELL

'CA NADA, 'CA MUCHO

AGNES GRANT, ed. *Our Bit of Truth: An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature.* Pemmican, $19.95.

ARNOLD HARRICHAND ITWARU, *The Invention of Canada: Literary Text and the Immigrant Imagination.* TSAR, $15.95.

A CONTEMPORARY Canadian historian explains how Canada got its name: Spanish conquistadors reported, "*Acá nada*" — "There's nothing there." We have learned to mistrust pronouncements by European explorers of North America. Agnes Grant's wide-ranging collection of Native Canadian literature reveals only one of many Canadian treasure-stores that prove "*Acá mucho*" — "There's a lot there."

A boon to anyone wishing to read some traditional and contemporary works by Native peoples, Grant's anthology is a necessity for anyone wanting to understand or teach such works responsibly. Indeed, the trend toward developing multicultural curricula throughout North American schools and universities is both significant and daunting. On the one hand, "minority" literature deserves at least as much respect and attention as that of the dominant culture. On the other hand, careless and uninformed attention to such works is perhaps worse than no attention at all. As Grant points out, "Before Native literature can be fully appreciated for its unique qualities it is imperative to identify assumptions underlying the cultural beliefs and practices of Métis and Native societies."

Grant's anthology features a variety of Native works and genres; it also informs us about the appropriate frames of reference within which to interpret their meaning. Moreover, the traditional works in the first half of Grant's collection shed light on the contemporary works in the second half. Most of the authors of these latter works assume their audience's familiarity with traditional material, just as a writer of Western, Judeo-Christian heritage would assume the reader's familiarity with, for example, the story of Adam and Eve. Naturally, Grant's introductory remarks will not make a reader an expert in Native Canadian literature, but they do establish the importance of understanding a culture before we attempt to interpret and evaluate its art. As Eva McKay, one of the writers included in the anthology, declares: "if we are to find the rewards of life, we have to start by the roots."

While Native authors with "roots" in Canadian earth command Grant's attention, Arnold Harrichand Itwaru's critical analysis concerns uprooted people — immigrants to Canada hoping to reap the "rewards of life" denied them in their native countries. Itwaru studies ten immigrant authors writing about immigrant experience in Canada — Ethel Wilson, Henry Kreisel, John Marlyn, Gabriel Szohner, Steve Vizinczey, Austin Clarke, Brian Moore, Jan Drabek, Stephen Gill, and Ved Devajee.

Itwaru argues that these writers' works expose insidious contradictions in Canadian national mythology. From a basically Marxist perspective, Itwaru examines novels showing immigrants struggling in the gap between "the state's articulation [of reality] and the [reality of] peoples whose labour it monopolizes." Two features of Itwaru's project command immediate attention — his valid critique of the concept of "multiculturalism," and his much more problematic rationale for inclusion and exclusion of certain Canadian immigrant writers in his study.

Itwaru cuts to the heart of the Canadian or any other nation's claim that different ethnic groups can maintain their cultural identity and still participate fully in national life. First, says Itwaru, adopting the dominant language of any country necessarily transforms the immigrant's individual and communal identity. Moreover, personal and economic survival in a new country demands change: "At this very basic level the retainance of ethnic identity and full participation in national life are contradictory concepts." According to Itwaru, Canada molds its citizens according to Anglo-centric standards even as it proclaims itself to be a "mosaic" or multicultural society where anyone may prosper, ethnic origins notwithstanding. Itwaru argues that certain Canadian immigrant authors expose "the Canadian dream for what it is: a mythology grounded in the exploitation of hope and labour."

More controversial than Itwaru's claims about contradictions inherent in multiculturalism is his rationale for including certain immigrant authors and excluding others. He treats only works written in English and published in Canada. He contends that such works underscore two facts of Canadian immigrant experience: first, such works allow us to observe the "linguistic conversion factor" in a "mosaic" society that, in fact, militates against "retainance of ethnic identity"; second, as novels published in Canada, these works reflect "the cultural gatekeeping functions inherent in the roles of the editors and the publishers involved." Unfortunately, Itwaru never straightforwardly or fully supports his provocative assertions about the "linguistic conversion factor." His tendency to veer into sociological analysis and, sometimes, into Marxist rhetoric deflect his attention away from his potentially rich subject. Furthermore, since Canadian presses do not publish only works in English, and since they do in fact publish such works as Itwaru shows to be highly critical of Canada, Itwaru's claims about "cultural gatekeeping" appear overstated. In any case, Itwaru excludes from his discussion works by Canadian immigrants that might contradict his sometimes simplistically stated claims.

Despite flaws, Itwaru's study of the immigrant imagination contains valuable insights into Canada's creation partially from the "outside" by newcomers; likewise, Grant's anthology contains valuable introductions to Native authors creating Canada from the "inside." Contrary to the early Spanish explorers who saw "acá nada," both Natives and immigrants to Canada see an apparently inexhaustible source of artistic inspiration.

CATHERINE RAINWATER

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INTROSPECTION

ELIZABETH BREWSTER, *Spring Again Poems*. Oberon, n.p.

ANNE SZUMIGALSKI, *The Word, The Voice, The Text*. Fifth House, $16.95.

MAXINE TYNES, *Woman Talking Woman*. Pottersfield, $9.95.

THREE RECENTLY PUBLISHED volumes of verse by Canadian women poets demonstrate that an introspective yet public mode requires the precision and sureness of mature, seasoned poets; for their younger, less experienced counterparts this approach can prove difficult to control.

In casting much of *Spring Again* as a journal and in using (uncharacteristically) her own voice, Elizabeth Brewster allows the reader to overhear the inner conversations that produce her poems. Much of the collection takes the form of responses to what she is reading, especially the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, though "Pound's just an excuse, of course, / I have to admit. / My poem is mine." These poems often turn on the play between the esoteric sphere of Pound's poetry to the mundane yet equally important world of Brewster's daily life:

> How to juxtapose
> Ezra Pound with my garden,
> not to mention letters to the editor
> of the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix*.

Brewster also uses this tension to meditate upon sources of myth, from the tarot through fairy tales to the bible, exploring their relationship to a twentieth-century Canadian prairie reality. She is interested in the details as much as in the universals: "I cannot make it new / but I can make it Canadian." Other poems turn to Christian faith and the reality of biblical stories, another familiar strain in Brewster's work: here her ironic wit is tempered with willing susceptibility to the beauty of such stories, and faith in the face of sometimes depressingly ordinary reality. Brewster's structure and subjects in *Spring Again* are looser, more relaxed than in earlier collections, but her technique remains elegant and subtle: her control of her material releases the full potency of plain language, and her observations are as trenchant and moving as ever.

In *The Word, The Voice, The Text*, Anne Szumigalski adopts a more direct approach, developing prose analogues to previously published poems, reprinted here, that are both essays on writing and memoirs of the increasing grip of language and narrative that made her a poet while still a child. Like Brewster, Szumigalski is fascinated by the relationship between her ordinary life and the poetry that it supports:

> How, in fact, did we come to write anything: what's behind our passion for narrative, our devotion to words: must we always be unsatisfied with what we write, what we imagine, what we express? . . . Digging in the garden, soaking in the bathtub, eating my solitary supper, my mind always returns to these speculations and arguments.

Szumigalski is remarkably lacking in the arrogance one encounters all too often in writers' autobiographies and books in which writers discuss how to write (the "how-I-became-a-genius" syndrome); she has a refreshing scepticism about the impulses to write in either mode and about the success of the results. For Szumigalski, the experience of writing, though solitary, is not unique to herself or to any single writer. On the subject of detachment in order to observe other people, she says, "I share this habit with so many of the people I know that it doesn't bother me that much of the time I am being observed myself. There has to be some give and take between spies after all." This lack of self-centeredness results in an engaging tone both for her reminiscences and for her real subject, the tricks of perspective and language, slippages of mind, and mental games that sometimes result in poetry. This book is a welcome companion to Szumigalski's poetry, which transforms common experience into bizarre parables, fables, and fairy tales using disturbing, dream-like transitions in perspective and an often brutal violence of imagery and subject. In *The Word, the Voice, the Text*, the dislocating shift from the familiar into the strange is mitigated: the sense of threat created by the disjunction evaporates, while the mystery, beauty, and joy remain.

Maxine Tynes has allowed herself to reveal a more vulnerable, less confident self in *Woman Talking Woman* than in her first collection, *Borrowed Beauty* (Pottersfield Press, 1987), especially in the occasional poems written upon having her portrait painted and in the love poems (the latter are so nakedly unguarded that one feels a certain voyeuristic discomfiture upon reading them). She appears to be somewhat alarmed at having become a public figure in Halifax, though her poems are often public declarations of social and political injustice or celebrations of the Black Nova Scotia community. Tynes' poetic technique, however, holds few surprises: whatever her subject matter, she continues to use a style that relies on repetition, both of phrasing and of language, especially litanies of such abstractions as "woman," "Black," "pride," and "community," and the chanting of names, places, and tribes in the "Black Power Nova Scotia" poems. She often uses the idiom of political activism, especially feminism and black and native resistance (the omission of articles, the loading of nouns as modifiers), and of popular culture:

> throw another heart on the barbie
> get those unrequited flames going real good
> get those coals to glowing embers
> marshmallow-toast my heart like a happy
> camper

These strategies are all legacies of an oral tradition, and I suspect that their success depends upon Tynes' physical presence and speaking voice for its power: the absence of narrative, detail or description, of extended figures or complex syntax renders the poems rather substanceless on the page. The final items in the collection are three stories, two of which suggest that Tynes might profitably work further in this genre. The stories satisfy because they spring from memory and history, thus supplying a narrative and hence some of the detail and experience that the poetry lacks. Tynes must decide whether her intention is to speak to her community or to share that community's experience with those outside it.

ANNE RAYNER

WORD WORK

AUDREY THOMAS, *The Wild Blue Yonder.* Viking/Penguin, $24.95.

AUDREY THOMAS's typical form emerges in this collection of thirteen recent stories as the sketch *engagé/dégagé*. She finds an impetus, a core story, in recent history, usually violent — the Hungerford massacre, Tianamen Square, a generic newspaper story of a young murderer who preys on older women. In reshaping this story, Thomas expresses her strong social commitment, but more so her interest in how these public events affect the individual psyche and distort, however subtly, the narrative of the soul. Interrupting, disfiguring, and generally providing an alternative is the story that language tells itself. The metalinguistic element is not invariable, as in Daphne Marlatt, and seldom affects syntax, as in Gertrude Stein, but slides into parentheses (either actual or virtual) where homophones, morphemes, and etymologies press their case. In such byways, character and author become detached: each contemplates the universe as a labyrinth of words, and an impossible patchwork of paradox. The word play has a narrative function: it often diverts the story into the fantastic and then the grotesque. A reader is never sure when the placidly quotidian narrative will turn sharply into the bizarre, or when the weird will drop abruptly into a bathetic joke.

Parenthetic word-play is the most prominent feature of Thomas's signature. "'I want to know what really gets "stroked" when you have a stroke,'" one character wonders. It's difficult to imagine Atwood, Munro or Gallant dropping in such a line with so little preparation. (Margaret Laurence, a writer with whom Thomas seems to have more and more kinship, might.) Or, if they did, they would do so mockingly, not in order to tease out the meaningful ambiguity that rests in the apparently trite echo.

Other recognizable details of Thomas's signature figure prominently in *The Wild Blue Yonder.* The motifs of blood and physical illness identify islands and mental hospitals; settings from North America and the United Kingdom overlap, in the same story, Greek and African worlds; she slips easily into children's stories and nursery rhymes, and into a style whose repetitions and simplicity accommodate themselves to these genres. Almost all the stories are about women, or from a woman's point of view, and find Thomas rethinking feminism, repeatedly noting with anguish or amusement the paradoxes and politics of sisterhood. To the familiar elements of Thomas's fiction some new ones begin to be added in this book: the colour blue and blue skies, the serenity of baking, and the telling, centrally or obliquely, of the vigils of the elderly and aging.

Not surprisingly, given the *engagé/dégagé* tension in Thomas, one dimension of this last subject is the inescapable lousiness of growing old, the ignorance evident in a society growing old ungracefully. Most interesting perhaps — and here Thomas's objective approach to language emerges again — is the reading of old age as having, or *being*, an alternative language: "Maybe she's just usin' language, usin' memory, in a way I haven't thought about before." says Charlie in an insight that follows the passage on the stroking in a stroke. One entire story "Sunday Morning, June 4, 1989" takes as its primary discourse the codes, and the gaps (and the decoding) of an aging mother's long distance telephone talk.

Again, Thomas seems to discover her most vivid and unusual perspectives/*ficciones* in a metalinguistic pondering. Word play is word work. "Compression" opens with a reference to bp Nichol's *The Martyrology* and uses that poem's primary deconstructive strategy ("'St Ill. He runs the infirmary.'") to question the coincidence and logic of the Hungerford massacre, and to escape and define the account of Veronica's mammogram. In the opening story, "Roots," the central male character is an inveterate, unstoppable amateur etymologist. Quietly, Thomas turns her own key strategy on its head: she appears, as it were, as a male character, and thus considers in the intimate (and uneasy) relationship of man and wife, the relationship of language-conscious writer to loving reader.

Often in my reading notes for this book I find question marks following verbs. My uncertainties indicate that the binary of *engagé/dégagé* is triangulated in almost every Thomas story by the absence where a reader expects resolution or conclusion. Usually this strategy sends me to reading and re-reading. A wife may have drowned her own child rather than live the life of a missionary to Africa. *Why?* "Blue Spanish Eyes" ends with an idyllic flirtation, but it begins with a brief piece of journalese that points to an incomprehensible rape and murder. *Who?*

The narrative gaps are a way of extending the *engagé/dégagé* irony. The stories are left in suspension — for reader or character are frustrated, hypnotized curiosity. Such a pattern compels attention in almost all the stories, and nowhere more intriguingly than in "Ascension," for me the strongest story in the collection. "Ascension" searches for the psychologies of a friendship between an island tourist and a resident Greek mother, and discovers the shared perceptions of very different women coming together in their necessarily shared lives. The story ends with a bizarre turn and a narrative gap *and* with a skilfully old-fashioned tying up, by Thomas's repeating with alterations the story's beginning. Mrs. Papoutsia will "try make bread in space." Christine will also rise up lighter than air. This blue yonder is truly an ascension to celebrate.

LAURIE RICOU

LIMINAL VOICES

CHARLOTTE ERICKSON, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century America.* Cornell Univ. Press, $14.95.

ANTHONY JULIAN TAMBURRI, PAOLO A. GIORDANO, FRED L. GARDAPHÉ, eds., *From the Margin: Writings in Italian Americana.* Purdue Univ. Press, $37.50; pa. $19.95.

LESTER D. FRIEDMAN, ed., *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema.* Univ. of Illinois Press, $45.00; pa. $18.95.

TO READ THE MORE than 200 letters included in Charlotte Erickson's valuable *Invisible Immigrants* is not merely to hear the liminal voices of 19th-century English and Scottish immigrants; to read them is to encounter a general human response to making one's way in everyday life. Their particular circumstances perhaps identify them as a group, but their emotional records typically register, by turns, pride, humour, poignancy, loneliness, and anger.

The degree to which financial problems beset these immigrants may at first seem to be a special feature of their status as strangers in a strange land. In fact, however, economic problems motivated most of them to emigrate, lurked beneath the conception of America in their minds, and unfortunately followed many of them across the Atlantic.

Both devotion to family identity and the perils of maintaining this identity in America which is evident in these letters of English and Scottish immigrants also surface in the Italian-American prose, poetry, drama, and critical essays anthologized in *From the Margin*. Like the Scots, Italians carried to America similar illusions and suffered similar misunderstanding and prejudice. Eventually, Italian *hyphenated* authors (to use Daniel Aaron's phrase) overtly sought to counter this resistance. Specifically, they tried in various ways to recover *italianità*, a sense of ethnic cultural heritage redeemed from the worthlessness accorded it in the new land. *From the Margin* provides an ample and useful sample of this recovery.

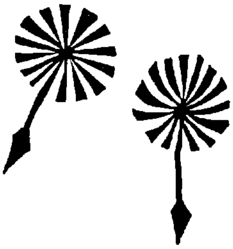
The two essays in *From the Margin* on the Italian-American presence in films readily segue to *Unspeakable Images*, an instructive collection of 15 critical essays. Exposing the deceptions of the American dream is not only a concern of Italian-American films. Ethnic American cinema in general often portrays this dream as a nightmare of contradictions. The consideration of this perspective and related matters provides one feature of writing critically about such films. Another feature, a main interest in Lester D. Friedman's anthology in fact, concerns the very nature of cinematic critical discourse.

Several essayists, for instance, disclose how the examination of ethnic issues revises and reinvigorates the traditional use of historical, auteurist, and genre modes of film analysis. These discussions include broad assessments of ethnicity and role-playing, ethnicity and stardom, and Catholicism and film. Several other essayists apply more recent developments in critical discourse: cultural studies, ethnography, postmodernism, and feminism. They emphasize such concerns as the bourgeois commodification of black bodies, cultural colonization, Bakhtinian heteroglossia, and Jewish displacement and overdetermination. All of these essays, and Friedman's introductory overview of theories concerning ethnicity, are certainly worth the price of admission.

One strength of *Unspeakable Images* is its avoidance of a type of exclusivity that often occurs in discussions of ethnicity and marginalization. In America, in contrast to Canada, concern with ethnicity frequently stresses only the African-American or the Latino-American struggle with the dominant cultures. Whenever this happens, by design or by accident, these discussions are prone to replicate the very same hegemonic pattern of thought they seek to expose and decry. By including women, Asians, Jews, Catholics, and Native Americans, Friedman's anthology implicitly recognizes that marginal status, or liminality, is a very pervasive human experience. It is something known by many people, including Caucasians of various beliefs and economic conditions. The Scots and English of *Invisible Immigrants* and the Italians of *From the Margin* certainly qualify, as do the impoverished and the homeless everywhere in the world. For liminal voices do not exist only, or especially, in North America; they are regrettably, a worldwide phenomenon.

All three of these books intrinsically reveal how difficult the experience of ethnicity is to comprehend. They provide numerous clues to the difficulties theorists have in agreeing on whether ethnicity results from objective factors, from self-adopted beliefs, or from subjective perceptions.

WILLIAM J. SCHEICK



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WE WAIT

PATRICK BRODE, *The Odyssey of John Anderson*. The Osgoode Society/Univ. of Toronto Press, n.p.

ELFRIEDA READ, *Guns and Magnolias*. Oberon, n.p.

MUCH IS MADE these days, in literary circles at least, of the subjective, and therefore ultimately "fictional" nature of virtually all writing, history and autobiography included. Elfreida Read, I think, would have little trouble with this concept; her autobiographical *Guns and Magnolias* is a self-consciously subjective view of living in Shanghai in the pre-war years from 1937-1942. While the text's background is political/historical, its foreground is clearly and openly personal; it is, indeed, the autobiographical counterpart of the *bildungsroman*, in which Read traces her own growth and development from late adolescence to young adulthood. Patrick Brode's *The Odyssey of John Anderson*, by contrast, was clearly written under the old supposition that historical texts *can* be, and indeed *are*, objective accounts of people and events. This text, published by the Osgoode Society, and described by its President and Editor-in-Chief as a "compelling reconstruction of one of the most remarkable legal encounters in pre-Confederation Canada," is shaped by Brode's own subjective assessment of the past, by his elitism, and finally by his (not always hidden) agenda — to prove that Canada's legal institutions were right, and public sentiment wrong or at the very least misguided, in their conflicting views concerning the fate of John Anderson.

John Anderson, an escaped slave from Missouri, had been living in Canada for seven years, when, in 1860, he was arrested in Ontario for having murdered a Southern plantation owner who had attempted to stop his escape back in 1853. The state of Missouri wanted Anderson extradited to face trial on this charge, or more likely, to lynch him. The Canadian public, however, resisted Anderson's return to what they knew would be his almost certain death, and massive demonstrations accompanied virtually every stage of the extradition hearings, which ultimately became an international *cause célèbre*. Yet, even while Brode reports this emotional response to the plight of this black man who risked everything in order to be free, he undercuts it, noting time and again that "the intricacies of the case were beyond most people" (elsewhere referred to as "the common people"), who merely "looked upon the issue as one of good versus evil, slavery versus freedom."

Brode's chief concern throughout the book, has, in fact, little to do with John Anderson, though his name does appear on the cover. Rather, Brode's intent is to prove that "the judges had done their duty as law-interpreters, not law-makers" and that the outcome of the case (in which Anderson was ultimately released on a technicality, based on the faulty wording of his arrest warrant) was "testimony to the strength of the rule of law in Canada." "In the tradition of British justice," claims the author, Judges Robinson and Burns "had given an objective interpretation of the law in the face of an outraged public. . . . Such men are the ballast of nations." What Brode fails to question, either here in his conclusion, or elsewhere in the book, is the "tradition" of British justice itself: what makes it worthy of being upheld? what makes it right, or even just? And what kind of nation supports human bondage? Concerned as he is with clearing the name, in retrospect, of the legal system in Canada, Brode fails to look beyond the "facts" of the case; as a result, he provides no critical assessment of the institution itself, nor does he acknowledge the plight of the human being caught within it, who for most of the book remains in the background (and in jail), on the periphery of the more "significant" legal and political happenings that overshadow him.

The main "character" of Elfreida Read's autobiography suffers no such fate; she is at the centre of the text, and the reader's only view of the political and historical events occuring in Shanghai between 1937 and 1942 is filtered through her consciousness (or, in some cases, the lack thereof). As I have already noted, the text employs the *bildungsroman* format; it is, indeed, a generic cousin to Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Like Pip, who looks back upon his life critically, yet also (re)lives the experiences of childhood, Read's narrator repeatedly shifts her perspective from adulthood and her authorhood to the throes of adolescence. As an adult, for example, she is able to view the colonial enterprise through keener eyes, whereas as a youth she notes that it "never occurred to me to question the presence of those authoritarian persons in someone else's land or their assumptions of hegemony"; indeed, as a sixteen-year old, her concerns extend only to playing tennis and wearing makeup, which was "surely the ticket to success."

Read's hindsight is particularly interesting given that she herself, as an Estonian emigrant to China following the Russian Revolution, was as much an "other" in British eyes as were the Chinese. If Read's narrative is sometimes overly self-conscious, perhaps almost artificial, in its intermingling of past and present à la Dickens, it nevertheless is sustained by its openly self-conscious perspective. *Guns and Magnolias* is the second volume of Read's autobiographical series, entitled *Days of Wonder*. The text's momentum builds as the Japanese enter into the Second World War, and Read and her family are declared "enemy nationals" and forced to wear red armbands at all times. As the volume comes to a close, "spring changes into summer," though "we no longer play tennis nor go to the races." "We wait," says the wistful narrator, and these, her final words, apply also to us as readers.

SUE SCHENK

COMMENTARY

M. H. ABRAMS, *Doing Things With Texts: Essays in Criticism and Critical Theory,* ed. Michael Fisher. Norton, n.p.

JOSEPH NATOLI, ed., *Literary Theory's Future(s).* Univ. of Illinois Press, n.p.

JULIET SYCHRAVA, *Schiller to Derrida: Idealism in Aesthetics.* Cambridge Univ. Press, n.p.

DOING THINGS WITH TEXTS is a defense of the view that reading literature is a practice without a method, like understanding conversation. It is composed of essays written over the last thirty years, and is divided into four sections. In the first Abrams offers his pragmatic theory of theory: it is only as good as the criticism it produces. In the second, he takes on New Criticism by historicizing the idea of the aesthetic upon which it was based. In the third, he continues the critique of theory via reviews of Wheelright's *The Burning Fountain* and Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and then demonstrates his formidable "oldreader" skills in an exemplary analysis of "Lycidas." In the last section he tries to show the weaknesses in deconstruction and political criticism. By Abrams' pragmatic criterion New Criticism was misguided and erred on the side of formalism, but gets a pretty good grade because it produced some good readings. Deconstruction keeps alive the attention to detail and demands great skill, but does not lead to good readings since its best practitioners are dedicated to ferreting out what texts *might mean* but in all probability don't. Political criticism is unlikely to produce good readings, is unamusing (unlike some deconstruction), is careless about texts, and is deeply misleading.

Abrams believes that literature addresses perennial concerns, and that deconstruction and cultural criticism (what Abrams calls political critcism) are ultimately doomed because they are too far removed from what literature is really about, i.e. "modes of experience that we share with the poet." He places his faith in the persistence of a tradition of criticism that assumes that understanding a literary work is ultimately no different from understanding any other utterance. We need to have the proper background, which is whatever the poet expected his best readers to know and bring to bear, and after that we can only use some cultivated natural abilities: "good sense, sagacity, tact, sensibility, taste." There is no more a method for reading than there is for writing. One learns by imitation, for both reading and writing are practices deeply embedded in culture. Abram's book is an excellent work of a genial "oldreader," and it will warm and chill cockles in the expected way, although some in both camps may be surprised that Abrams is a critic of New Criticism. However, that just makes him an even older " "oldreader," that is, one who thinks Aristotle and his friends probably understood Greek tragedy better than anyone since.

Unhappily for Abrams, Joseph Natoli's volume, as well as academic history since 1988, suggest that cultural criticism is, for better or worse, where it is and shall be at for some time to come. Cultural criticism is a complex form of moral criticism, the most persistent form of literary commentary. (The other major form, allegorical interpretation, is simply a way for the critic to instruct us in what the poet really meant but couldn't, by virtue of some sort of repression, say.) Natoli's book consists of eight essays on the future of various forms of theory, among them Lacanian psychoanalysis, deconstruction, Said's secular criticism, Gerard's de-mything, and many Marxisms. Various as these approaches are, they share some common assumptions. The first is that all criticism is ideological, and therefore all claims to disinterestedness, objectivity and universality are false. Secondly, capitalism is bad, even demonic. Thirdly, any position one adopts within this system is fraught with contradiction. "Revolutionary action, or even democratic participation, [shouldn't the order be reversed?] is transformed into a veritable theatre of consumption," (Michael Clark paraphrasing Baudrillard), and "Teaching 'marginalized' cultural texts only aids the state by 'proving' to everyone how 'liberal' and 'free' we are": Terry Eagleton via Susan Horton.

It is hard to know all the sources of the appeal of the deep and wide appeal of cultural criticism, but it verges on the Puritanical in its sense of the demonically, if unconsciously, clever regime it opposes, its moral urgency, the vacillation it exhibits in deciding whether god or the devil will triumph and the intense self-scrutiny and self-incrimination it advocates. What engages many of the writers is how to understand their own work as critics, that is how to assess it ideologically and not be taken in by the ever-vigilant false consciousness. The final essay by Susan Horton is a complex and gentle meditation on this theme. The problem is that one is not usually thought of as the best judge in one's own case. Moreover, the price for this self-condemnation is self-righteousness and dogmatism. It is a puzzle, except to the righteous, how it is that billions of citizens choose to live under the regime they abhor and demonize. Cultural criticism is against politics, for in politics one is always dealing with the Enemy, and there is therefore an anti-democratic flavor to it. It is sad that people in the center (the right to some) seem more willing to debate the "other" than those on the left. That is perhaps a sign that the conservatives are in the driver's seat and can thus afford tolerance, while the left is desperate.

In *Schiller to Derrida* Juliet Sychrava argues that Schiller's division of literature into naive and sentimental was the starting point for a distinction and a prejudice that has dominated and distorted criticism and theory since the later eighteenth century to the present. Sychrava's work is part of what I believe is today the most compelling topic in the history of criticism, the significance and implications of the transformation from the classical to the romantic theory of literature. Sychrava argues that while there was a shift in *subject matter* in the Romantic period from the external to the internal (a very crude way of putting it), literary theory fell under the spell of sentimentalism, that is the internal. There is, she claims, no essential difference between Wordsworth's and Clare's poetry, just a difference in topic; Clare wrote about animals, Wordsworth about the self, but Romantic theory has the effect of making Clare look like no poet at all. Unhappily Clare is not a very good poet, but it is nevertheless true that from the perspective of the expressive theory of poetry, we cannot easily appreciate what he actually does. However, Sychrava's argument for Clare's *self-conscious* anti-sentimentalism seems weak to me. Despite considerable repetition, the failure to rehabilitate Clare, and a rather quirky use of the work of other theorists, that is Nelson Goodman, this work is a lucid, thorough and significant addition to the re-examination of Romanticism.

ROGER SEAMON

* * *

TRANSLATION IMAGES

DAVID HOMEL & SHERRY SIMON, eds., *Mapping Literature: The Art and Politics of Translation.* Véhicule, $12.95.

JOHN THOMPSON, *I Dreamed Myself Into Being: Collected Works,* ed. James Polk. Anansi, $16.95.

MOST OF THE material in *Mapping Literature* was written not for the eye, but for the ear. Editors Homel and Simon tell us that the translators they include contributed to a conference entitled "Literary Translation and Literary Identity" and that they have transcribed the material of that conference — editing and reorganizing it to suit the medium of print — out of its oral context and into a written one. But shifting the medium is not a neutral gesture. Several voices are represented, each one relating experiences, concerns, and theories about translation to his or her specific work. Separately, they are informative, critical, and entertaining. The chapters Homel and Simon create, grouping the presentations according to their primary concerns, strengthen the debates begun at the conference and bring the concerns of translators to public attention with clarity and assertion.

Translator Barry Callaghan tells of his discovery that one can translate works of a language one does not know. Robert Melançon relates the experience of being translated; for him, Philip Stratford was an "ideal reader" whose questions inspired him to rewrite sections he was never quite satisfied with. Barbara Godard asks whether the function of the translator is to cloak or expose the translation of a text: for her the translator should not attempt linguistic equivalency but should flaunt the "womanhandling" of the original. Godard sees the translator as "affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing." For Susanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood,

> Translation is a metaphor used by women writers to describe their experience; like translated texts they can be betrayed, transformed, invented, and created.

Jacques Godbout's focus is the "betrayal" that must occur as a translator creates a new text within a new context of language and culture. He says "fear and translation" are related, for our curiosity about the literature of another culture is motivated by the power we perceive *it* to have over *us.* Support for translations of Quebecois texts into English was highest when Canadian unity was threatened by Quebec separatism in the early 1980s.

On first reading of *I Dreamed Myself Into Being,* I am more aware of James Polk's impressions of John Thompson than I am of the poems themselves. Polk observes in his introduction that Thompson was always "precise" about the presentation of his work: "the arrangement on the page, the order. About his art he was always careful." But Polk, not Thompson, chose the line from *Stilt Jack* (Ghazal xxiii) to serve as the title of this collection. Since a title functions as a directive sign, indeed, as an integral part of the work itself, readers may begin to find new resonance in the poems that Thompson did not precisely control.

Polk begins, "The first time I met John Thompson, I was outraged"; already I am hooked. His suggestion that the thirty-eight ghazals that make up *Stilt Jack* comprise "a brilliant suicide note" — even though Thompson's death was recorded an accident — would affect anyone's reading of the work for who can help searching its lines for evidence of the poet's reality. Whatever Polk's motivations, his new packaging of *At the Edge of the Chopping There Are No Secrets* (1973) and *Stilt Jack* (1978) in this *Collected Works* transforms Thompson from a writer of two thin and little read volumes of poetry into a familiar character in a great Canadian story. I read the introduction with fascination. But then I read the poems all too well guided by Polk's story. Perhaps, sadly, this is what it takes for Canadians to give Thompson's poetry the attention it deserves.

Thompson's poems often turn on images of translation — he was himself a translator — where experience becomes utterance and utterance experience. Passive verbs declare what *is* against what *was*: "white field bruised with warmth"; "the glazed snow." Colons indicate the irretrievability of the past: "there are ways, and signs: the woods / point one way."

Translators, say Homel and Simon, create "a new space" that occupies "a middle ground" between the original and the translated works. Thompson seems informed by similar relationships and focuses on space — like that created by the "aboideau" which releases fresh marsh water into the salt sea — which are the sites of change. In a short series of images sweeping life into death, we experience change itself: "and then to be honest, as a hair / a still hand, a plain box." A landscape is a kind of language to Thompson's poet

> I am without grace, I cannot shape
> those languages, the knots
> of light and silence:
> the newness of being
> still, the press
> of the snow's whiteness

and though no landscape can be affected by a translation, another landscape is drawn by the words which articulates, if nothing else, the "new space" between original and translated landscapes. And sometimes the poet evokes the very experience of *being* in translation, of becoming a part of landscape:

> and stand before the window
>   my eyes rimy
>   with frost, glittering
>   with owls' flights, my mouth
>   full of dead ferns

The poems survive Polk's engaging story about Thompson's life. They continue to yield new ideas as I continue reading them. Besides, he's funny:

> Yeats. Yeats. Yeats. Yeats. Yeats. Yeats.
>   Yeats.
> Why wouldn't the man shut up?

Translation, I've learned from both these books, is at once a metaphor (that is not nearly exhausted), an act or state of being, a poetics, a politics, and a way of reading and of being read. But translators must still struggle for both recognition and rights. In Canada, the Copyright Act states that all translated works are "subject to the right of the owner of the underlying work." In the U.S., the person who commissions the translation has the right to copyright it, not the translator. *Mapping* is an important book because it represents the voices and issues of a community whose members usually work alone and meet publishers alone.

JANE ENNENBERG

SEVEN VOICES

INGE ISRAEL, *Raking Zen Furrows*. Cacanadadada, n.p.

HAROLD ENRICO, *Dog Star*. Cacanadadada, n.p.

J. MICHAEL YATES, *Light Like A Summons*. Cacanadadada, n.p.

> Art should bring myth and cosmology together. There is one mythology in the world and it is inflected into various cultures.
> — JOSEPH CAMPBELL

IT MIGHT BE USEFUL to start this review with the epigraph to J. Michael Yates' Afterword to his collection of poems by five new West Coast writers. The range of geographic loci and imaginative spaces covered by these poets, after all, is enormous: from the historical and contemporary Japans of Kyoto, Kyushu, Takehara, Sendal, Hiroshima (as viewed by an inveterate expatriate westerner) to Edmonton, Alberta. Canada (after jetlag, four languages, four countries and much cultural baggage); to the England of 1945 and tranquility of the rural Pacific northwest; to Doukhobor huts, Mars-Domes, Holograph Woods, and Matter/Antimatter mirrors of the rarefied air of future mindscapes in the imaginations of five talented speculative and mythopoeic poets.

Inge Israel's collection, *Raking Zen Furrows*, offers a perceptive sequence of spare lyric pieces that combine the best of the western Imagist and Objectivist traditions with Japanese haiku and senryu technique. Only occasionally does the poet allow a rhetorical trope or flourish or abstract pronouncement to creep into her work:

> Night has swallowed the horizon.
> The terrace is the edge of the universe
> and space, a void crammed with meaning.
> —"Omizutori"

Even when she does, the ground is carefully seeded beforehand, and the result is a delicate whimsy or playful ironic grace note that sends the reader back for a second reading. More typically, Ms. Israel engages the reader with a dispassionate humility and wit; her poems, like the zen gardens referred to in the title, rely on precise juxtaposition, a carefully orchestrated observance of particular detail:

> Yoin*
> Under the Peace Bell
> a small boy hears the silence
> deep inside the sound.
>
> Behind closed eyelids
> white clouds drift across the sky
> without horizons.
> HIROSHIMA

The reader may get the sense of the peripatetic tourist picking up glass bottle shards (even, quite literally, a thumb tack in the middle of a zen garden in "Kan"), and absent-mindedly turning them over in her mind, but the lines and images are as artfully organized as the age-old patterns the Japanese gardeners rake in the sand. There is no dross here.

Harold Enrico is a very fine poet as well. Readers may be familiar with his two earlier collections, *Now, A Thousand Years From Now* (1975) and *Rip Current* (1986), both from Sono Nis Press, though I suspect he has a much smaller readership than he deserves.

The hallmarks of Mr. Enrico's style, the tone and rhythm of the great European masters and the stark, bold imagery of the Pacific Northwest, make Enrico a poet to reckon with. On the one hand, he is writing in the tradition of erudite formalists such as Elizabeth Bishop and David Wagoner; on the other hand, he can strike the familiar affable chords of a loping vernacular line a la Richard Hugo, or perfect the terse understated eloquence of Carlos Drummond de Andrade or Mark Strand. And, if that weren't enough, his work has a keening lyricism that is all too rare these days and places him in the forefront of his contemporaries.

Enrico's work is not only accessible, it's marvellously sensual and moving. Subtle perhaps, but not rarefied and intellectual by any means. Witness these lines from "The Fires of Lent":

> Now I understand
> the strength of trees
> digging nourishment
> out of stone with ease.
>
> Through the leafless orchard
> the long-legged runners race.
> knee-deep in darkness,
> torch light staining hands and face.

Measured restraint, interlocking vowels and consonants, impeccable craft: Enrico maintains a sure hand throughout this collection.

The multi-dimensional mythic structure that editor J. Michael Yates sees in the work of the five poets included in

Light Like a Summons allows for a weave akin to that found in single-authored volumes. Rather than merely adjudicate individual performances and collate the various poems and biographical appendices according to some arbitrary or preconceived notion such as theme or alphabetical order, Yates has carefully arranged the poems to play off each other, so the sum is more impressive than the parts.

Still, each poet, at her best, has something individual to offer. Eileen Kernaghan, a veteran fantasy fiction writer, brings a knowledge of technology and scientific diction to an essentially romantic vision. (Her "Tales From The Holograph Woods" is acerbically witty and well-honed.) Mary Choo fuses fantastic imagery with deft oriental simplicity (I particularly liked "Incarnate"). Margaret Fridel brings a kind of landscape abbreviation and a finely chiselled rhetoric to big sky emotions — a gift of understatement, sharp focus imagery, and fine mouth music (particularly evident in "Alberta: Aunt Mary's Farm"). Sue Nevill, likewise, offers the gifts of understatement, strong closure, emphatic rhythms, political conviction ("Ha Eretz II' and "Kahane" will, doubtless find their way into several anthologies). Laurel Wade has a strong cinematic sense, an eye for telling detail, a strong sense of rhythm and economy of line ("Clay Bottle" and "The Doukhobor Hut / Memoir of a Prison Guard" are very fine).

Seven voices, three books then: all from a new Vancouver publisher that, in less than five years, has weathered a few bumps to become a welcome and prescient force in Canadian small press publishing.

RICHARD STEVENSON

NEWLY FELT

MARY HOWES, *Vanity Shades.* Red Deer College Press, $8.95.

LESLEY-ANNE BOURNE, *The Story of Pears.* Penumbra, $9.95.

A TERRIFIC INSOMNIAC energy drives Mary Howes' poems into the forms they take — nightmare, hallucination, dark meditation, black jokes on sex, death, and disease. Their speaking voices never cower or euphemize; they call an asshole an "asshole" (in this case, the speaker addresses a noctural prowler) and sing the operatic dimensions of sex with a recent ex-con who also has TB and a knife in his Frye boot. The good opinion of the therapeutically correct is not solicited by these poems. They burst to cracking-point and then, often enough, laughter or a chill, silencing image holds the poem in freeze-frame, as in the last line of "Easy Street" about the prowler mentioned earlier:

hey lady he says coming up to the railing
putting his hands on it
don't i know you from someplace
he's wearing gloves

Mary Howes performs some of these poems with a band called Guerilla Welfare, and they're the next best thing to the Velvet Underground we have in this country. With or without the band, Howes' physical voice is resonant and affecting. Manifested in the poems, this voice is sometimes harsh, but it is never cold or alienated. The mortal being in them, and in us, responds as it must, viscerally and without pretension. Here is the body naked, in need, diseased, dying, or dead — the young female cancer patient brutalized by treatments and surviving against all odds, the dying patient kept from his death one more night by a judicious measuring of the morphine in the syringe. Howes, a registered nurse, is familiar with the territories of suffering and pain, and her poems never flinch from the gruesome facts or the terrible ironies. There is no high-minded jargon or worked-up "compassion" in this book; rather, a complex, experienced, trustworthy human voice.

The sensibility of *Vanity Shades* is cinematic and colloquial. Frame by film-noirish frame we follow the narrator's point of view. We spend a drunken night with a lover or a morning watching a red silk kimono dry on the line, or are lifted by a truck driver into his cab, the narrator having run out of cigarettes on the 401. Chancing upon the semi-trailer, she approaches the cab:

> way up high the cab door swings open
> & he hauls you up in one sweet motion
> the tarp covering his cargo drops down
> to reveal 10,000 cartons of cigarettes
> jeez i hope you got my brand you say
>   laughing
> jeez you got long legs he says dead serious

The cinematic quality of this verse is also its music: Howes' sense of the rhythms of the vernacular extends to images as well as speech. In a wonderful poem called "seven sinners" Marlene Dietrich, sitting on a steamer trunk somewhere in the South Pacific sings "i kent giff you ennyzing but luff baby" while male admirers "swoon slack-jawed all over the dock." Because of her "mysterious past" Marlene is stranded, ticking off all the islands she can't go back to:: "sumatra out / java out / boni komba out / i'm runnink out uff islenz boyz." A considerable wit informs much of Howes' work, as well as a piercing honesty tempered at times with wryness and tenderness, at other times untempered by anything but the poet's own sense of extremity. In a deeply moving poem called "midnight conversation: clara birmingham, 93, talks to her nurse" Howes records in slow, wondering lines the dying woman's words as she confuses the nurse with her own mother: "you belong to me now / it's all different now / i'm the only person who can find you." Howes' willingness to push at the limits of experience in poetry, as well as her musicality, her deft, rhythmic lines and the brightness of her imagery, take us readers to places newly felt and newly respected.

Lesley-Anne Bourne's first book, *The Story of Pears*, introduces a fine poetic mind (and ear) into the company of Canadian poetry. Despite some slightnesses of realization and the sentimental artwork that adorns and distracts from the text (because Bourne's poems are stronger, and tougher, than their illustrations), the book is a pleasure to read. This is a clear and intelligent voice whose economy and immediacy of imagery is not minimalist but, rather, efficient, like the movements of ballet dancers when they need to make an emotional point. "I scoop night into the orange canoe," and "The rain last night, loosening / all that silence like soil" and "When my mother talks / our pastel hotel room / changes. The walls are the city / you wear glasses in" are some wonderful opening lines and images that go on to maintain their particular tension throughout the duration of the poem. These poems don't lag, but neither do they rush. They are not out to prove anything or fix anything, and in this way stand out from many current first books. The title, however, is unfortunate. The book has little to do with either stories or fruit. A dominating thematic link throughout the book, however, is the imagery of hands — hands, fingers, touches, caresses, gloves, holding, and so on. "The man in bed / unfolds you like a map," she writes in "That Other World." "His hand was enough" in another poem; in another "His construction hands" and on the next page, "Hand-sewn sequins & pearls" and flowers which can "redden hands." Two pages earlier, "I offered my hand" and then a girl "skipped by familiar / as your hand." In a charming poem called

"Ranchman" Bourne writes, "When I meet you at the bar / I remember your hands — how soon / they soothed my arm." Later, she remembers the way he "shuffled my head that night." The poem ends with the image of a red pick-up truck "shined" the day before — not shining, but "shined," that work of the hands. Taken as a whole, however, the poems are not particularly tactile in their sense of the world, but the frequent references to touch do invite a sort of intimacy. And there are enough felicities in these poems to suggest that Bourne's is a voice we'll be hearing more of, with pleasure.

SHARON THESEN

THEORY & PRACTICE

Telling it: Women and Language Across Cultures. The Telling It Book Collective, $14.95.

PARVEEN ADAMS & ELIZABETH COWIE, *The Woman in Question: m/f.* MIT, $25 U.S.

TWO TRANSFORMATIONS from one genre to another, in an attempt to disseminate and further feminist discussion: a conference and a journal each take on book form, but here their similarities end. *Telling it* is grass-roots feminism in practice: a local publication that attempts to validate and communicate across differences among women. *The Woman in Question* is a collection of highly theoretical texts which criticize feminism from within.

Telling it: Women and Language Across Cultures is the partial proceedings of a conference held in 1988 at Simon Fraser University on Native, Asian-Canadian, and lesbian women. It is introduced by Daphne Marlatt, and features writers such as Jeanette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, Joy Kogawa, Sky Lee and Betsy Warland. The first part of the book, "Voices from the conference," includes papers on cultural differences and the role of the writer in her community. Each topic is divided into "theoretical" and "creative" presentations and is followed by transcripts of the audience discussion. The second part, "Voice(s)-Over" offers discussions of the conference by the three members of the editorial collective (Maracle, Lee and Warland).

Telling it is an emotionally powerful and therapeutic effort to speak honestly and openly, to define and bridge differences, and to attempt to form alliances in the women's movement. It is feminists learning to listen to other feminists. It attacks the levelling effect of liberal humanism by focussing on material differences and discussing differing access to languages and to power. It questions how to balance community activism and writing; and in it, the writers question their privileged positions within their own communities.

The conference focusses on identities. Warland states: "I must have a name because it is who I am." Kogawa speaks of different identities as constrictive carapaces, and of shedding one for another. Dorothy Livesay brings up the "grey areas" around identity groups, that is, bisexual women in (or around) the lesbian community. What is striking is the volatile emotional ties to these identities. For example, there is a great deal of anger and frustration expressed by some white women who feel excluded, as their WASP identity is constructed as the enemy, or who feel a need to distance themselves from this label. And when one speaker questions the existence of a lesbian cultural identity, a furor erupts that focusses much of the subsequent discussion.

"We accept in theory that we are culturally different, yet, in practice we lash out if the actual interaction is not up to our expectations." Maracle's comment on the anger that permeates this questioning of identities signals a central problem of the *Telling it* endeavor. One of the dangers of identity politics is that it presupposes much of the same ideology that it struggles against.

Telling it recognizes many of its shortcomings: the fact that the conference was organized by white women; that both lesbian speakers were white; that the editing of the transcripts necessarily involved censorship; and that the limit of Asian-Canadian, Native and lesbian women was an artificial, but practical line to draw.

What the book fails to question in its exploration of the problematics of identity is the notion of identity itself. It acknowledges and defends its deletion of the "etc" (the one that should follow "Asian-Canadian, Native, lesbian" in a conference on "Women and Language across Cultures"), but in doing so also deletes the supplemental nature of that "etc," that, as feminist theorists such as Judith Butler have noted (*Gender Trouble*), signals the impossibility of ever encompassing or defining any identity, be it individual or communal, but which may offer other political impetus. The structure of identity politics is predicated on exclusion. It may permit alliances, but more often seems to lead to the silencing and denial of others.

m/f, a journal of feminist theory in publication from 1978-1986, rose out of frustration with Marxist feminism and the essentialism of radical feminism. Although it remained within the socialist feminist current, it opposed popular notions of a "capitalist patriarchy" which sought to establish a link between capitalism and women's oppression. And ironically more radical than the radicals, it also opposed the essentialism of any pre-supposed unity of "woman" or "women" suffering from oppression. The journal's objective was to study the construction and subordination of the category of "woman." It presupposed no unity of oppression, and offered no unified theory.

The Woman in Question collects the editors' choice of articles and editorials from *m/f*, and offers new introductions and a postscript that relate the articles to contemporary feminist issues. *m/f* attempted to work between what it termed psychic and social discourses, that is, between psychoanalytic theory and a Foucaultian-type analysis of the discursive production of women. This journal established and tried to resist an opposition between these terms, and to unsettle the assumptions of other arguments that relied on unexamined notions of individual or social identity.

Each of these books contributes to contemporary issues of feminist theory and practice. To the extent that the two (theory and practice, that is) cannot be separated, each critiques the other.

DAWN THOMPSON

ROMANTICS & US

GENE W. RUOFF, ed., *The Romantics and Us: Essays on Literature and Culture.* Rutgers, $38.00 U.S.

JEAN-PIERRE MILEUR, *The Critical Romance: The Critic as Reader, Writer, Hero.* Wisconsin, $39.50 U.S.

IF *The Romantics and Us* accurately reflects the state of the study of Romanticism, it looks as if a diversity of critical approaches are at work on a small number of core texts taken to constitute Romantic literature. Few of the essays in this collection challenge the Romantic canon; instead, most investigate how this literary period relates to subsequent literature, culminating in the "Us" of the title.

Gene Ruoff has loosely organized the essays into three sections. In the first, "Testimony," three contemporary American poets discuss the influence of the Romantics on their own poetry. Diane Wakoski and John Matthias reveal their debt to Wordsworth, while Alicia Ostriker offers a critical yet sympathetic reading of William Blake and traces the influence of his visionary experience in three of her poems. "Continuity" contains five essays all dealing with the relation between Romanticism and subsequent literary periods. As Ruoff writes in his introduction, these essays argue for a "continuum" between Romantic, Modern, and contemporary poetry. The essays by Robert Pinsky and John Hollander examine the progress of specific poetic forms through the Romantic period, while George Bornstein identifies the concern with place in the poetry of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens as a romantic concern that stands in opposition to the cosmopolitanism generally attributed to modernism. Charles Altieri examines the effect of the poetic model offered by Wordsworth on post-modern American poetics, concluding that the Romantic ideal of personal eloquence continues to have relevance. Louis Simpson's essay, which opens this section with a call for a return to a sort of hagiography of Romantic genius ("... one surrenders to the writer's vision of things."), is probably the clearest example of the problem that recurs in the first two sections of *The Romantics and Us*: a conventional, standardized conception of the period, canon, and aesthetic of Romanticism is taken for granted.

"Culture," the final section, contains essays which destabilize preconceptions and look at the relationship between the Romantics and us from less conventional perspectives. Thus Karl Kroeber traces the disappearance of narrative in painting from the Romantic era to cubism. James Chandler examines the structure of D. W. Griffiths' *Birth of a Nation* in terms of its narrative similarities to the historical novels of Walter Scott. To Anne Mellor, the Romantic poets embody a "self-indulgent egotism" that demands a response from feminist literary theory, and she points to the writing of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley as early examples of this response.

While the essays in *The Romantics and Us* treat Romanticism as an historical period, Jean-Pierre Mileur concentrates on the Romantic as a genre, as a group of literary practices and strategies that are not limited to a particular historical moment and are therefore available to the literature of any period. In *The Critical Romance*, Mileur uses Romanticism as a metaphor to explain the strategies of structuralism and post-structuralism. The book is partially an analysis of the Romantic aesthetic, and partially an explanation of certain key texts of post-structuralism. Reading texts by critics such as Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Harold Bloom, de Man, Derrida and others as manifestations of the same strategies used by Romantic writers, Mileur shows how the discovery of textual gaps and fissures in the inevitable result of the tropes these critics use; the rhetoric of a frustrated quest narrative or an unsuccessful search for identity critics find in Romanticism, he argues, is identical to the rhetoric they use in writing about such texts. By exploring the ways in which a number of essays by the above critics embody the Romantic ideal of the "questing self," he shows how this strategy enables the paradoxes post-structuralism finds in identity, authorship and communication to come into existence. Mileur provides some very stimulating observations; the analogy developed between criticism and Romanticism provides a fresh approach to some of the claims of post-structuralism.

The book ranges far beyond this analogy, however. According to Mileur, the identification of the critic with the Romantic hero is complete to the point where "... the critic, far from being the detached observer of the literary tradition, is its chief incarnation in our own time, much more so than the poet or novelist or playwright or philosopher." One might ask Mileur: what *do* contemporary poets, novelists, playwrights and philosophers incarnate, if the literary tradition is more or less in the realm of the critics? More importantly, how much of this identification is retroactive, or to what extent does it depend upon a version of Romanticism created by the critics? Still, Mileur demonstrates that, at its best, the latter can be genuinely creative in a manner normally reserved for the former.

DAVID THOMSON

PHILOSOPHERS & FILMMAKERS

DAVID CLANDFIELD, *Canadian Film*. Oxford, $9.95.

WYNDHAM LEWIS, *The Art of Being Ruled*, ed. Reed Way Dasenbrock. US$25.00; pa. $15.00.

SERGEI EISENSTEIN, *Nonindifferent Nature*, tr. Herbert Marshall. Cambridge, n.p.

R. BRUCE ELDER, *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture*. Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press in collaboration with the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television, $39.95.

THE VISUAL IMAGE is again at the centre of the Canadian literary community's attention, with Linda Hutcheon and others stirring up our interest in paintings and photographs, films and video, and so reminding us of the McLuhan of three or four decades ago. The books under brief review here either reinforce or remind us of our interest in the interplay of art forms in Canada, especially in the past half-century. David Clandfield and Bruce Elder provide us with new overviews and analyses of Canadian film and culture; the books of Wyndham Lewis and Sergei Eisenstein remind us of the roles these two European figures have played in Canadian intellectual history and artistic practice, and also renew the presence of these two writers in our midst.

David Clandfield's pithy little book, *Canadian Film*, is a guide to our cinema from the start (nearly 100 years ago) to the present. In six sections, it neatly splits itself along the English/French language divide, and at the same time places near its centre one figure: John Grierson. Grierson's presence reminds readers not only of the pre-eminence of documentary traditions and conventions in Canadian film, but also of what Dorothy Livesay and others have for a long time felt was a series of parallel traditions and conventions in Canadian literature.

Clandfield's book resembles an extended entry in a thorough and largely reliable encyclopedia, with entries on individual directors and regional groups, and extended descriptions of the many impressive developments in institutional (for example, NFB's Unit B, NFB's Studio D, the NFB's first wave of French films from 1941 to 1951) and other (for example, Quebec's New Wave, Regional Filmmaking in English Canada, Children's Films in Quebec) movements. Throughout, Clandfield helpfully reveals past links between filmmakers who are well known today but whose apprenticeships with others may not be apparent. The book is particularly rich in exploring socio-political roots and cultural contexts for cinema in Quebec, though a terse statement of Canadian government relations with Hollywood summarizes some of the forces operating within and behind English-Canadian cinema. In its critical response to individual works, the book is sometimes a little too wispy around the edges. And for some reason, director Allan Kroeker (who has adapted W. D. Valgardson's and Rudy Wiebe's short stories, as well as a script co-written by Margaret Atwood) is renamed Arthur Kroeker (thus accidentally but not inappropriately bringing to mind another cultural critic in Canada in the lineage of McLuhan: Arthur Kroker, editor of a series of works on postmodern society and its texts).

But before McLuhan there was Wyndham Lewis (just as Eisenstein preceded Grierson). Lewis's *The Art of Being Ruled* is a corrected re-issue of the 1926 edition first published in England and the United States. With its superb new introduction, its notes on and reproductions of thirteen of Lewis's drawings and paintings that have been selected for the present text, its thirty pages of detailed explanatory notes of Lewis's references and other editorial apparatus, it is another outstanding volume in the growing series (now at about twenty volumes) of magnificently and meticulously produced scholarly editions of Lewis's work being issued by Black Sparrow Press in California. Lewis's stinging analysis of contemporary art and culture — for example, his assessment of the "white man's" failure in his use of the technology of modern media and mass communications within the global village or, as he calls it, "large mud-ball," or his assessment of the political vulnerability of a "cause" such as "feminism," or of the "sex war" as a means of liberating not just women but also men — provides provocative reading in this analysis of the debasement of politics, revolution, and the intellect. McLuhan began to read Lewis in the mid-1930s and developed a close personal association with him in Canada and the United States in the 1940s; this association prompted much of McLuhan's later direction in his thinking about literary, visual, and cultural texts.

Eisenstein's influence was felt in Canada partly through the moving into Canada in 1939 not only of British documentary filmmakers prominent in England after 1929, by which time they had become affected by the films, writings, and lectures of Eisenstein and some of his contemporaries, but also of Malcolm Lowry. *Nonindifferent Nature*, part of the Cambridge Studies in Film series, make available portions of Eisenstein's work hitherto largely unknown to English-language readers, and written in the last two decades of his life, after 1928, when he was mainly lecturing and teaching in the Soviet Union. Here Eisenstein (valiantly translated by Herbert Marshall) provides a complex discussion of an organic or integrated cinema which is a synthesis of the other arts (such as, for example, drama, music, sculpture, painting, and literature) and of other disciplines from the natural sciences to the social sciences. For example, his work is peppered with references even to English-language writers, from Chaucer to Joyce, Faulkner, Lawrence, and Stein, from Shakespeare to Chesterton, Priestly and Shaw, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Whitman, Melville and Conrad, from Sterne to Dickens, Thackeray, and Conan Doyle. In particular, Eisenstein demonstrates his interest in creating a cinema that arouses and interweaves itself with the psychic depths of each member of the audience. He elaborates in detail on his interest in vertical montage and polyphonic cinematic structures, much as he had begun to outline these in his well-known text, *The Film Sense*. Eisenstein's expression of interest in 1945 in polyphonic montage brings to mind Malcolm Lowry's arguments which he made in Canada in 1949-50, when he defended his cinematic style in his 455-page filmscript, a de/reconstruction of Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*, an edition of which was published for the first time in 1990.

Eisenstein makes brief appearances in Bruce Elder's *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film and Culture*, particularly in discussions of Grierson's attitude to the camera as an apparently trustworthy recorder of appearances of everyday reality (an argument which

Lewis — who makes only a brief appearance here, as a reviewer of A. Y. Jackson's paintings — steadfastly opposed).

Elder's book, an intellectual history of Canada, explores in three parts connections between Canadian philosophy and the history of Canadian art and culture, especially film. It is in Part Three that Elder identifies and analyzes a small selection of films the struggles and achievements of which hint at the character of a peculiarly Canadian aesthetic. First, though, he offers an analysis of the importation into Canada of nineteenth-century Common Sense philosophy (with its adversarial dualism between mind and matter, mind always dominating matter, or nature) and Idealist philosophy which, still stressing mind or subjectivity, need not exclude from that subjectivity the reality of matter/nature. Rooting his analysis in the early experiences of Europeans here, Elder argues that in Canada strong experiential and intellectual impulses led toward a Hegelian reconciliation of dualistic opposites (as in the work of Canadian philosopher George Blewett, 1873-1912).

Pursuing his argument of a Canadian desire to overcome the sense of nature as 'other,' and the urge to incorporate or know nature, Elder explores the abiding Canadian interest in representational or documentary art, and inevitably centres on the impact of the photograph as a mediating technique in this regard. The photograph, simultaneously literal-minded and mysterious, helps us bring together subjective mind and material nature; its impact is manifest everywhere in our films, in not only documentary but also feature work, as he shows in Part Two. Here he provides a setting for Grierson, whose documentary strategies he sees less as a fresh start in Canadian art than as an inevitable extension of an approach already in place. For Elder, Canadians' relatively uncritical or unselfconscious commitment to the documentary image or photographic realism in past decades reveals an important achievement in our films, but it also enforced an aesthetic weakness or limitation, for it was too limiting in its understanding of film as an artistic medium, too "empirically determined." Elder argues that our favouring of representational imagery — based in photographic realism — happened to lead in Canada to a relative ignoring of modernism in literature and other artistic practices; even in film it led to our ignoring the influences of European and American experimental and avant-garde models since the 1920s. At the same time, while partly by-passing modernism, Canadians were more than prepared to embrace postmodern ironies and paradoxes, as Elder shows by wading deeply into what he regards as our strongest (however small, or relatively unknown) cinematic practice in Canada: the avant-garde. Elder considers, for example, the playful absorption of the unaltered photograph in the 1960s in the films of Jack Chambers and Michael Snow. The work of these two filmmakers in particular — but also David Rimmer, Joyce Wieland, and others — is examined in great detail, especially with regard to their postmodern "Canadianness," their selfconsciousness concerning the nature of photography.

Elder, himself a philosopher and a filmmaker, in attempting to construct for himself a "usable tradition," aligns himself more with the massive personal projects of Lewis and Eisenstein than the "objective survey" of Clandfield. Elder's work, combining a provocative thesis, a national and international philosophic and artistic context, and a thorough analysis of selected Canadian postmodern works, is a stimulus and a challenge to anyone interested in Canadian art and culture.

PAUL TIESSEN

CONTEMPLATION

JOAN BARFOOT, *Family News*. Macmillan, $19.95.

JOAN BARFOOT'S *Family News* stands on the border-line between journalistic writing and literature. Each chapter opens with a sensational and often morbid event which is a clipping from some newspaper or magazine. Susannah, an observer of and participant in the world, has a rare fascination with the unusual — be it the eccentricities of elderly sisters, violence in war, in sex or in the home. All that leaves the "taste of tears" in one's mouth somehow captures her imagination, helping her to re-define herself and to assess the impact of such events on others. Barfoot aptly describes her protagonist's mood. emphasizing how unsure Susannah is of her own experiences and their meaning.

Barfoot suggests that there are sharp divisions between men and women. Teddy is an artist, he loves his daughter Lizzie and works for the cause of peace, but he also shares men's weaknesses:

> He always seems to have hope, although he does not necessarily know what it's for, beyond the next face, the next breast. Certainly it's not for permanence, he has no faith in that ... Adaptability, it seems to him, is the great trick of the century, and he's been fortunate to have the nimbleness required to survive.

However, "bone-deep loneliness and "this hunger to be comforted" make man and woman enter into matrimony. Susannah briefly surveys many families including Teddy's and finally concentrates on her own. She is summoned home when her father dies. Completely unprepared to receive such a news, she says "Careless of him to have died," reminding one of Sylvia Plath's mood in "Daddy." Susannah attempts to relocate herself:

> In families, it seems that somebody pays, or everybody does. It may not be nice, and it is probably not often fair, but at least, she supposes, it might as well be carried through to its end.

Perhaps, what Susannah gets from the 'shock' and 'surprise' of her life is a contemplative pleasure. What the reader gets is the delight of knowing what she knows already.

MANORAMA TRIKHA

COLD WAR

KRISTJANA GUNNARS, *The Prowler*. Red Deer College, $19.95; pa. $9.95.

WRITTEN BY AN Icelandic immigrant, *The Prowler* contains numerous allusions to the environment of Iceland. On the one hand, this is the story of a girl growing up in Iceland, Denmark and North America. On the other, this is a book about theories of literature and storytelling. Kristjana Gunnars has created a protagonist, a nameless girl, a homeless subject trying to live out the literature she has inherited. She devours books in incomprehensible languages, letter for letter; though (or because?) the words have no meaning for her they are filled with magic, fun, and fulfillment.

The girl's story is also fused with the story of the Icelandic nation and of western history; the identity crisis of a cold war Icelander is embodied in this girl of Icelandic and Danish descent, but also the identity crisis of the contemporary individual in a world where *the different* is repressed and rejected to the point where conflict results in silence. The beyond is a world without language, without the power of tyranny of names: "Only that which is named is able to live in language"; it is also a world in which language is the distributor of identity: "I imagine a story of emptied containers [...] To come to your destination with nothing in hand. To come to no destination at all." Life and literature are two facets of the same, "the protagonist is a reader, who is therefore also the author." Prowling in the field of literature is prowling within one's self, the holy grail is within; the agent and the object of the search is man himself, and at man's centre of being we find a man desiring something which is himself, Narcissus and Sisyphus in one:

> I conceived of another sort of self-portrait; the painter paints her own image, but paints it directly on the mirror. The viewer sees not the image of the artist, but his own face through the lines of oil paint. The face looking back at the viewer will have an expression of helpless concern.

The story of the growing girl is thus the story of stories, a metastory, and turns out to be akin to a literary history intermingling fairy tales, children's stories along with new versions of them, the medical history of the protagonist as well as of the Icelandic nation, news items, historiography, local and environmental descriptions and the political history of Iceland. For the Icelandic reader, this facet of *The Prowler* proves both interesting and educational; as he tries to identify with the text and its cultural descriptions he finds a new country. He recognizes a number of signs, the homogeneous society, the contempt towards the colonizes (the Danes), the dietary self-destructiveness present in starvation in the face of an ocean full of plenty. Yet, the linguistic content loses its attraction when placed in other containers; Icelandic culture becomes flat and even stale when rendered in the English language. The loss, however, turns into gain as the reader gains a new vantage point from which to view his life and heritage.

Gunnars' obsession with the cold war may seem odd at a time when the Soviet Union has dissolved and the landscape in international politics is undergoing earthquake upon earthquake; even at the time of publication of *The Prowler* — April 1989 — these changes were expected by many. But the novel's "cold war" is related to international politics at an unexpected level: this cold war has an affiliation with Michel Foucault's "epistéme." His concept (rendered in the English title of his book, *The Order of Things*) might be translated as a system of thought whose governing and determining power nobody can escape. *The Prowler*'s cold war is internalized censorship, displaying the individual as a censor of him-/herself, as a distributor of power and guilt, safety and doubt.

GARDAR BALDVINSSON

INSTALLATIONS

NICOLE BROSSARD, *Installations.* Ecrits des Forges and Le Castor astral, $8.00.

JUAN GARCIA, *Corps de gloire.* L'Hexagone, $19.95.

IT IS PARADOXICAL but stimulating to read these two books together. The authors seem to share little either as poets or individuals, with the exception of Montreal (and while Brossard is a long-time Montrealer, Garcia lived there only from 1957 to 1967, although he has continued to publish there since). And although metaphysical preoccupations are present in some of Brossard's large body of work, they are not nearly as religiously-oriented as in Garcia's poems, where references to a monotheistic religion and mystical elements often clearly related to Christianity are thematically predominant. Stylistically also, the two books diverge so markedly as to signify profound ideological differences.

While Nicole Brossard's work is well-known among Anglophone Canadian literature aficionados, Juan Garcia's probably is not. Some English-Canadian readers will be intrigued to know how this immigrant writer from Morocco achieved such prestige in Quebec as to have this retrospective and quasi-complete collection of his work (1963-1988) published by one of Montreal's leading publishers. While it would be tempting to answer "the quality of his poetry," that answer would fall short. Garcia's work shows certain characteristics — its religious preoccupations, the stylistic conservatism of many (though not all) pieces — which have ensured its acceptance by influential members of the Quebec literary establishment. More important still has been the way Garcia's poetry and life have fitted in with the myth of the "poète maudit à la québécoise." His publisher, Editions de l'Hexagone, has exploited and reinforced this mythical status, by emphasizing that Garcia not only stayed in a monastery but also has spent a good deal of time in a psychiatric hospital where he wrote "la plupart de ses poèmes qui seront publiés dans des revues québécoises." Garcia has thus been able to appear as a new Nelligan in terms both of certain thematic and stylistic features (religion, the personal past, death; innumerable aquatic images, extensive use of rhyme and of regular line length, especially the *alexandrin*), and of his biography (the shared psychiatric hospital experience). Garcia's status as "poète maudit à la québécoise" is further reinforced by certain thematic similarities with the work of Saint-Denys Garneau, notably the theme of metaphysical uncertainty and resulting anguish, and also the theme of dichotomy and opposition between flesh and soul, the former being perceived, in much of Garcia's work as in much of Saint Denys Garneau's, as thwarting the poet's spiritual quest.

But while there are some fine poems in this volume, especially those of *Alchimie du corps* (1967) so warmly and rightly praised in Jacques Brault's moving and beautiful essay, "Juan Garcia, voyageur de nuit" (1971), many are weak (and some of them make quite superfluous the publisher's emphasis that these texts were written by a mentally distressed individual; such persons can write admirable poetry, and some of Garcia's post-1967 poems are excellent, but many others are slight indeed). It would have been fairer to Garcia to publish a less complete, more selective, edition of his poetry — and to let the poems speak for themselves.

Installations is excellent Brossard. The general tone of the volume is set by the epigraph from Clarice Lispector: "Je suis douce mais ma fonction de vivre est féroce." Less ferocious, however, than energetic, as suggested in this marvellous line from "Acte sexuel": "un oui à l'infini qui va son énergie." As the title of this poem suggests, Lispector's "fonction de vivre" often takes the form, in *Installations*, of eroticism; this book makes use of Lispector's "douce," too, for the subject persona knows how to be gentle with/to herself, as in a hotel where, she says, "je m'étends et prépare de longs touchers." Writing, language, the body and various facets of feminism, always major themes in Brossard, are not neglected here and are inter-related, as in "Réplique," where the "e muet mutant" of Brossard's justly celebrated 1975 essay becomes, when "tu étires la voix / au fond de la gorge une syllable / calme et somptueusement valable." Or again, as in "Installation": desire, the female body, mobility and the semiotic,

je m'installe dans mon corps
de manière à pouvoir bouger
quand une femme me fait signe.

Feminism goes hand in hand with linguistic transgression in "Chapitre," in which the masculine noun "ventre" is followed by the feminine adjective "*réelle*" (Brossard's italics), thus emphasizing the central importance of the female "ventre" in Brossard's universe, a feminine and feminist one. What is most interesting is the tone of euphoric contemplation (as in "calme et somptueusement") with which these themes are treated. "Contemplation" does not contradict the energy that animates this volume, for *Installations* is radiant with a sort of dynamic serenity. Some sad moments do surface, particularly in the poem "Pays" which, far from celebrating Québec as did so many "poèmes du pays" of the sixties, observes that

> au québec [...]
> mourrir est bien facile, très souvent
> on retrouve une femme blessée
> au niveau du bonheur.

"Mourir" can be tragically "facile" in Quebec as elsewhere: all a woman needs do is go to an engineering school or for a jog. Whence, no doubt, the androphobia of "Partie des fesses," although Brossard does here specify that she is attacking a collective "homme," which allows one to hypothesize that she may be able to view some individual men positively. But the main theme of *Installations* is happiness, that of a female subject settling into happiness who well might be talking about herself when she describes a woman who is "insatiable / heureuse et infiniment amazone."

These short, carefully constructed poems are jewels. *Installations* is a joy.

NEIL B. BISHOP

WOMEN & LOVE

SYLVIA HARKSTARK MYERS, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England.* Oxford/Clarendon, $96.50.

PETER WARD, *Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century English Canada.* McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, $24.95.

IN 1813, the opening paragraph of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* proclaimed the "universally acknowledged" truth that "a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

Austen's satire brought a smile or a grimace to the faces of her readers because of its complex relationship to the truth. The ability of women to have a say in the formation of their domestic arrangements was not entirely a laughing matter, nor was the idea that marriage should be based on compatibility and a harmony of spirit, as in Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice.*

Both Sylvia Harkstark Myers and Peter Ward explore the evolution of friendships and conjugal relationships, examining women's domestic and social roles as reflected in written records. Such records document the real, day-to-day lives of those who have not been immortalized by fiction but who may provide a different kind of insight into the changing dynamics between men and women, and into the way in which the domestic framework shaped and represented a changing social fabric.

Peter Ward's *Courtship, Love, and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Canada* is primarily historical in its scope and focus. Those who approach it as they would a text of literature or literary criticism will be disappointed. Instead, the book provides a cultural and social background of "Victorian Canada." Ward divides his discussion into several categories as he investigates the complex web of contexts in which men and women formed relationships at that place and time; these contexts include the Christian, legal, demographic, ritualistic, familial, and personal settings in which couples met, loved, courted, and married in nineteenth-century Canada. His thesis is that although "society preserved great influence," now "marriage came to be founded on romantic love and personal preference."

Ward begins his study with a series of excepts from the diary of George Jones, a young clerk in Quebec city who meets the lovely and seemingly unattainable Honorine Tanswell. Threatened by financial inequality, George and Honorine's courtship is fraught with difficulties and seemingly doomed. The "story" of these star-crossed lovers, which Ward rather ambitiously claims is the "stuff of Victorian fiction," resurfaces in each chapter as a unifying device; the reader may question whether this was the best way to unify a book whose scope is as broad as Ward's.

Despite its broad scope, Ward's analysis suffers at times from its narrow cultural focus. Native Canadian culture is relegated to one parenthetical reference. In failing to elaborate on aboriginal customs in relation to Victorian ones, Ward raises the disturbing implication that those customs were only significant in that they parallelled European ones.

Even more disturbing is Ward's tendency, to romanticize excessively the problematic institution of marriage. He speaks of the honeymoon as a time of "erotic discovery," although in an earlier chapter he has pointed out that it is estimated that "a significant proportion of women were pregnant when they were married." Here, he dismisses the available statistics as "impressionistic," yet elsewhere in his discussion (as in his remarks on white as the colour of choice for wedding dresses) he makes generalizations based on an apparently limited sample. At other times, his argument lacks contextualization; for example, his discussion of Roman Catholic guidelines for marriage fails to point out that many of these remain unchanged over a century later. Finally, the reader cannot help but raise an eyebrow at Ward's optimistic conclusion that

> still, whatever the trials of a bourgeoning romance, many couples learned the great joy which comes from a growing sense of oneness with a beloved other, for romantic love lay at the very heart of nineteenth-century courtship and marriage. This was true at all times, in all places, and in all social ranks.

No such idealism exists in *The Bluestocking Circle: Women and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England.* In this work, Sylvia Harkstark Myers focuses on the growing autonomy of women in the domains of life and letters in eighteenth-century Britain. Because this work situates itself in the context of both literary and social analyses, it is as valuable to the student of literature as it is to the student of history.

Myers begins her discussion in light of works by Lawrence Stone, Gerda Lerner, Janet Todd, and others who have focused on the functions, accomplishments, and limitations of women in the context of a changing society. The women who established the well-known "bluestocking" salon, Myers argues, challenged the idea of female inferiority while moving towards a genuine sense of women's autonomy. This "story" of the bluestockings thus begins in an atmosphere of educational exclusion" as women discovered their own need for rational entertainment. In this endeavour to broaden their horizons, women such as Elizabeth Carter, Jemima Campbell, Heather Mulso, and Catherine Talbot forged friendships with both men and women who shared their literary, social, and historical interests; in spite of some romantic and philosophical complications, these friendships enabled them to develop a "life of the mind" in an atmosphere of mutual support.

Myers discusses the term "bluestocking" (coined to describe one man who wore working-class blue instead of white stockings) as one which evolved from an initial connotation of ridicule, but interestingly, Myers is not receptive to claims that these women broke a different taboo: she resists the notion of lesbianism, perhaps assuming that such an interpretation might diminish the value of the connection between women. Instead, she steadfastly maintains that the relationship of Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter was "not an erotic attachment *but* an effort to create stable, supportive relationships among women" (emphasis mine). Myers' discussion is also limited in its social scope, although it does seem reasonable to assume that lower-class women (and men) had little opportunity to discover "the life of the mind."

The strength of both works is in the skillful handling of documents as anecdotal material; both authors breathe life into work which was never intended as a source of public entertainment, such as parish records, newspaper articles and diaries.

DEBORAH BLENKHORN

CHANGELINGS & DUMPLINGS

S. L. SPARLING, *Nest Egg.* Macmillan, $19.95.

TOM MARSHALL, *Changelings.* Macmillan, $19.95.

RAISED BY THEIR fundamentalist mother and their drunken and abusive father, twins Allen Laird and Elaine Lenore Carter cope by developing multiple personalities. In other words, they fragment themselves in order to act out all the behaviours proscribed and all the trauma inflicted at home. Naturally these personalities are distorted and alomst caricatures. Thus Allen Laird is constituted by, to name just a few, Al, a savage rapist; Laird, a suave, happy-go-lucky womanizer; and Allen, exactly the decent, hardworking upright citizen with an uptight wife whom his mother would have wanted him to be.

Marshall ensnares the reader in Allen Laird's complex web of personalities by allowing these personalities to speak in their own voices, gradually revealing not only themselves and how and why they formed, but also how much, if anything, they know about one another. The negotiations and manipulations which take place in this house divided make for dramatic and interesting reading, but Marshall's eagerness to *explain* occasionally gets in the way of the fiction. At these times he waxes a touch pedantic, sapping the Allen Laird segments of the novel of vitality and probability. For instance, when psychiatrist Herb Delaney is called in to observe Allen Laird, in jail for a rape he cannot recall committing, the various personalities reveal themselves altogether too quickly to the good doctor.

On the other hand, the segments devoted to Elaine Lenore are dealt with much more cleverly. The prose is richer and more descriptive. She has fewer personalities and the tone in which they are delineated is not quite as journalistic. It is, in fact, chilling in parts because Elaine Lenore hears voices and is haunted by the spectre of one of her other selves. Seeking the help of a medium, she becomes one herself, beginning the reader's education in esoteric science and history, which includes a cameo ex-prime minister Mr. King, whose patronage assures Elaine's reputation and her success in the business. However, though King is generally lampooned for his esoteric proclivities, Marshall makes clear that Elaine is no charlatan. The spirit world in *Changelings* is a viable alternative explanation for human behaviour and a viable alternative for healing the human mind. Elaine's personalities, for instance, are integrated by Arlen, her friend on the other side.

But unfortunately, the disparate psychoanalytic and esoteric worlds are linked only tenuously, by two devices: that Allen Laird and Elaine Lenore are twins (though they have almost no contact throughout the time span of the novel) and that Dr. Delaney's wife is a client of Elaine's.

S. L. Sparling's *Nest Egg* is an entirely different novel. Its main character, Greer, also comes from a dysfunctional family; her incompetent and hostile mother, for instance, unintentionally scalded her, leaving her with extensive scars and an eating disorder, with which Greer, who functions as narrator, is quite preoccupied: Greer's mother hooked her on sweets by administering her medication with spoonfuls of sugar. The only other similarity between these two novels is that Greer also has a twin, Leslie, who is as preoccupied with sex as Greer is with pastries and through whom the reader is treated to numerous naughty moments including one in which she seduces the love of Greer's life.

But Sparling's touch is much lighter than Marshall's. Hers is more the style of Davies or Richler, a family drama which partakes of the tragic, but is comic and indulgent. Thus Greer's family is as quirky as it is irascible. Her father is a benignly drunk video junkie, her mother a virago, and her sister a gold digging nympho. Greer is closest to her grandfather, Constantine, a somewhat cantankerous rogue who skirts and often breaks laws in his numerous art deals and manages to amass a collection of Fabergé eggs. Yet he has a heart of gold and becomes a refuge from Greer's troubled home life and a tutor in art during Greer's visits to his rambling mansion stuffed with treasures in transit.

Nest Egg does have a small inconsistency, namely a murder mystery which appears unexpectedly at the end and is neatly resolved in less than fifty pages — too neatly. Thus, a few things seem a touch improbable in *Nest Egg*, but the plot is always carried forward by the momentum of its humorous prose.

THORSTEN EWALD

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NEW WOMEN

JOHN THURSTON, ed., *Voyages: Short Narratives of Susanna Moodie*. Univ. of Ottawa, $14.95.

SANDRA CAMPBELL & LORRAINE MCMULLEN, eds., *New Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women, 1900-1920*. Univ. of Ottawa, $14.95.

THE CANADIAN SHORT STORY LIBRARY has begun its second series with two books that aim to restore a women's literary tradition in Canada. *Voyages: Short Narratives of Susanna Moodie* is a collection of sketches and tales which have been unavailable in print since the nineteenth century. As such, it is an important book for readers interested in Susanna Moodie's literary preoccupations and fictional techniques. It is disturbing, however, that the undervaluation of Moodie's work exemplified in previous critical neglect of her short fiction is perpetuated rather than corrected in John Thurston's Introduction.

Thurston proposes that we read much of Moodie's writing biographically, as if in some straightforward and unproblematic way the fictions grant us access to her life. In fact, he states that he has deliberately chosen for the collection those stories which retrace the "significant events" of Moodie's life, events which, Thurston claims, "haunt her writing." He justifiably draws readers' attention to her use of motifs of financial reversal, resulting loss of class status, and the necessity of emigration. Unfortunately, Thurston's biographical approach is neither sophisticated nor subtle; he seeks and finds simple correspondences between people in Moodie's life and characters in her fiction. The approach constitutes an implied apology for the work: unworthy of attention in themselves, the stories usefully provide a reflection of this interesting woman's life. That such an approach stems from an unconscious gender bias is suggested when Thurston condescends to judge Moodie's life for her, arguing that her stories reveal what she could not admit to herself: "that the decisions she was forced to make in her late twenties may have been the wrong ones." Unable to deal with Susanna Moodie as writer of fiction, Thurston creates a tragic heroine writing her troubled life.

If we seek the essence of Susanna Moodie's subjectivity in her stories, what we find is a precarious, shifting self-hood that is often ironically aware of the multiple identities/disguises which language necessitates. Many of the stories ultimately refuse the fictional conventions they consciously employ. In "The Pope's Promise," the emphasis on the vagaries of desire undermines the moral lesson the story purports to convey. "Old Hannah" escapes the form it sets itself (the sketch) through the intrusion of the first-person narrator/observer who competes with her subject for control of the narrative. "The Sailor's Return" again problematizes the position of the narrator by introducing her voyeurism as an uncomfortable intrusion, suggesting the relationship between knowledge and the desire to dominate and control. The self-conscious irony of the story's ending manages both to question romance conventions and to undercut the truth value of the events which have made up the tale. "Rachel Wilde" critiques the Wordsworthian model of the development of the artist, examining how the construction of Rachel's gender identity ensures that she will ultimately abandon her art.

Any reading of Moodie cannot escape the elements of racism and classism, and even misogyny, in her work. These cannot be 'justified' by any appeal to history or circumstances, but again I hesitate to ascribe them to the author as aspects of her 'character.' Even within individual stories, the meanings of race and class inequalities are often fractured and self-contradictory, indicative of a site of struggle for understanding rather than a unified viewpoint. Ultimately, I see the stories as fertile ground for a post-structuralist examination of the shattering of identity and thematic coherence. Susanna Moodie's obvious concern for the craft of fiction deserves a modern re-evaluation.

New Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women is a collection of short fiction of the early twentieth century. The editors argue for the years 1900-1920 as an important period in Canadian women's literary ancestry, a period until now neglected by anthologies of short fiction. The editors provide a valuable social and historical context for the fiction in their Introduction, emphasizing the changing position of women in Canadian society. They see the stories as "rooted in historical realities" and not surprisingly emphasize that their "most striking characteristic . . . is the way in which many of them reflect shifts in Canadian society and women's roles, especially vis-a-vis men." This exploration of gender relations is striking for its diversity, from the sunny optimism of L. M. Montgomery ("The Quarantine at Alexander Abraham's"), whose faith in the essential goodness of human nature ensures that an old misogynist will reform, to the brutal disillusionment of Mazo de la Roche ("Canadian Ida and English Nell"), whose unsparing portrait of marital passion founded upon violence is deeply disturbing.

The stories often explore gender in the context of ethnicity and race. Edith Eaton (Siu Sin Far) writes of how the clash between Chinese and American values nearly destroys marital relations in "Mrs. Spring Fragrance," a conflict granted a precarious happy ending. The one feature of the collection which I dislike, is the editor's determination to fit all of the women writers into the mould of the 'New Woman' they construct in their Introduction, even if this means ignoring the way that some of the stories support patriarchal values.

The stories are chronologically arranged according to publication date, and what makes reading through the collection such an interesting experience is the way in which the stories build in intensity and feminist commitment, particularly with the advent of the war and women's subsequent mass movement into the work force. Mary Lowry Ross' "An Adventure in Youth" explores with irony the impact of the war, particularly notions of heroism and women's roles, on two women, one young and one old. J. G. Sime's "Munitions!" documents the feelings of one woman turned loose from the cage of domestic service; the image of the mass of women on the train to the munitions factory, their sudden sense of freedom and possibility even amidst the drudgery of hard physical labour, points to the gathering revolution.

JANICE FIAMENGO

TEXTS & SUBTEXTS

JOAN BUCHANAN, *Taking Care of My Cold.* Illustr. by Katherine Helmer. Black Moss, $4.95.

RUDYARD KIPLING, *The Elephant's Child.* Illustr. by Jan Mogensen. Breakwater, $11.95.

ROBIN MULLER, *The Magic Paintbrush.* Doubleday Canada, $14.95.

PERHAPS I'M READING too much deconstructive criticism these days, or it may be that one simply becomes more crotchety in middle age. Whatever the cause, I found that each of the three books I agreed to review with the assistance of my nine-year-old daughter invited a rather probing critique.

Taking Care of My Cold, a cute story to be read to preschoolers or by beginning readers, describes how Megan — who seems about five — learns by trial and error that colds are better taken care of with bedrest and juice than with cookies and ice cream. Somewhat troubling, however, is its rather insidious subtext: my resident young reader discerned rather quickly that the reason Megan gets into difficulty is that her mother, who should be taking care of her ailing daughter, chooses to disappear into her office instead. Punishment for this delinquency is duly meted by the child, who dresses up in her mother's favourite dress before going outdoors to mess around in the muddy garden. *Books in Canada* (Oct. 1991) recently reported that several schools in Lloydminster have withdrawn *Thomas's Snowsuit* because it undermines the authority of principals — an action which, in my view, ignores the way Robert Munsch's uproarious book, in the long-standing tradition of Falstaffian jest temporarily subverts authority in order to diffuse discontent. *Taking Care of My Cold,* in contrast, is not a joke, and simply reinforces the guilt known by every working mother with a sick child.

Breakwater's reprint of *The Elephant's Child* likewise invites a revisionist reading. Its watercolour illustrations, by Jan Mogensen, are a real treat (and the source of my initial attraction to the book); the text, however, creaks so alarmingly that one questions the wisdom of its selection. The humour of Kipling's malapropisms is several generations distant from today's children, to whom "'satiable curiosity" will have to be explained; moreover, in my experience, children hate to be laughed at for their language errors. More disconcerting is the way the text inadvertently illustrates a major shift in childrearing practice since Kipling's day. One loses track of the number of times the inquisitive Elephant's Child is spanked by adults simply for asking the kinds of questions that children are now encouraged to ask; Kipling's description of the way the young elephant's newly acquired trunk serves as a retaliatory weapon shows an understanding of the recursiveness of family violence. Perhaps my response will be viewed as an over-reaction akin to that of the teachers in Lloydminster; however, I could not comfortably read *The Elephant's Child* as a bedtime story to a small child. This classic tale may be no more brutal than standard cartoon fare, but I abhor that, too.

John Muller's *The Magic Paintbrush* shows the extent to which immasculation remains characteristic of our culture. This gorgeously illustrated story, drawn from a Chinese folktale but set in vaguely Victorian times, is a parable about the power of art made from the heart. A wizard rewards a heroic street urchin named Nib with the ability to paint pictures that come to life. His gift has its limitations, however, and when captured by the evil king, Nib turns the tables on his oppressor, relinquishing his magic paintbrush in the process. If Nib were the only child in the story, it might be possible to accept this boy as the generic child/artist. But there is also the little watercress girl, Sara, whose presence sets up a gendered dualism. In true Victorian fashion, she serves as a passive foil for Nib's heroism when his magic paintbrush restores her to health, and then as his model. But she never gets a paintbrush of her own.

Children's stories indoctrinate while they entertain. While we may select children's books for the beauty of their illustrations, we need to think closely about the values enshrined in their texts.

CAROLE GERSON

PIONEERING WOMEN

MISAO DEAN, *A Different Point of View: Sara Jeannette Duncan.* McGill-Queen's, $34.95.

ELIZABETH THOMPSON, *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type.* McGill-Queen's, $34.95.

THE SHIFTING reputation of Sara Jeannette Duncan would make a fascinating study in relation to current interest in reception and canonicity. Although *The Imperialist* was an early New Canadian Library reprint (1961), it remained virtually invisible until the late 1970s, when Duncan was discovered by a new generation of nationalist and feminist critics. Over the last fifteen years, Sara Jeannette Duncan has been reconstructed as a major Canadian cultural figure, the subject of many articles and three books, of which Misao Dean's is easily the best.

Dean presents us with a self-conscious Duncan, keenly aware of the many changing currents of late nineteenth-century culture and society with regard to nationalism, imperialism, feminism, and literary innovation, and wrestling with the contradictions and multiple marginalizations of being a white female writer inhabiting the differing colonial spaces of Canada and India. In the photo on the dust-jacket, Duncan's face looks directly at the camera, with self-assurance and intelligence. It is a familiar picture, cut from a larger portrait. Usually we see the body and are distracted by the elegant dress; the reduction tells us that this is a book about the mind of a woman writer, a woman with "a different point of view." That point of view can be most succinctly described as a kind of feminist "pink toryism"; in Dean's words, "Duncan's novels and her journalism present a political exposition and critique of the dominant ideologies of imperialism, unrestrained capitalism, bourgeois democracy, and a program for social reform."

This is an ambitious thesis, which Dean supports firstly through her analysis of Duncan's ironical rendering of imperial/colonial relations. Occasionally, Dean could take her arguments a little further. For example, with "A Mother in India," she could extend her discussion of family dynamics to the empire at large (as she usually does in her analysis of marriages in Duncan's fiction), in that Cecily's determination to remain with her mother bespeaks the imperial centre's desire to control its free-wheeling colonies. The following chapter, on Duncan's literary criticism and theory, presents her as a thinker very much in tune with the issues of her day, developing her notions of realism and idealism in relation to those of Carlyle, Arnold, Howells, and Henry James. One of Dean's best chapters, that on literary feminism, places Duncan properly within the context of the woman question and the new woman novel, a corrective to the way Duncan has scarcely been noticed by British and American scholars working in this area (*A Daughter of Today* receives passing acknowledgement in Ann Ardis's recent *New Women, New Novels*). Subsequent chapters on Duncan's vision vis-à-vis opposing political systems (democracy and monarchy), movements (nationalism and imperialism), and states (Britain, Canada, India, the US) appropriately situate her within current events and issues as a consistent idealist, attempting to bridge the chasms between extremes in a mode that Dean identifies as feminine, maybe even feminist. The historical breadth of Dean's discussion allows her to treat Duncan's plays, usually dismissed as a weak conclusion to declining career, as wartime work, similar in intention to the propaganda fiction produced by many literary figures of the period (see Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*). Dean concludes with an intelligent discussion of Duncan's ideas in relation to Edward Said's post-colonial criticism, noting how Duncan both appropriated and resisted the norms of British imperialism.

It is unfortunate that Elizabeth Thompson, author of *The Pioneer Woman*, did not have the opportunity to read *A Different Point of View*. But then, her bibliography indicates that she read very little that was published after 1980, and virtually nothing after 1985. Everything about this book feels a good ten years out of date; its stylistic clumsiness and critical naiveté suggest an MA thesis with the dust still on it.

Thompson's thesis is that, beginning with Catharine Parr Traill's non-fiction and fiction, the courageous, adaptable pioneer woman became an enduring "Canadian archetype" in Canadian literature. After Traill, Thompson's major focal points are *The Imperialist*, Ralph Connor, and Margaret Laurence. Indeed, there are many strong women in English-language Canadian fiction, and Thompson has read many obscure books to demonstrate this point (although Traill should have been contextualized in relation to nineteenth-century Canadian periodical fiction as well). As Traill is usually overshadowed by her more problematic sister, Susanna Moodie, it is refreshing to see her receive due attention; yet Thompson consistently disparages Traill's fiction for not meeting modernist standards of narrative unity, and in her discussion of *Canadian Crusoes* utterly ignores the central role of Indiana, the Mohawk girl who teaches basic survival skills to the lost white children. It is also salutory to read *The Imperialist* through Mrs. Murchison, whose presence is usually subordinated to the stories of her children. But to regard her domestic capability solely as a pioneer virtue (a quality attributed also to Marilla Cuthbert) is to ignore the dozens of capable urban and farm women who populate British domestic fiction through the nineteenth century, in novels by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, as well as in less canonical works.

Thompson's lack of international context is one source of this book's naiveté. While she does not state outright that the pioneer woman is a uniquely Canadian figure, her failure to refer to comparable British, Commonwealth, and American authors (Caroline Kirkwood, Louisa May Alcott, Willa Cather, Laura Ingalls Wilder) implies that the qualities she attributes to the Canadian pioneer woman exist nowhere else. Another problem is the shifting definition of "pioneer." What begins as a concrete, historical position with Traill (situated on a geographical frontier) is progressively abstracted (and connected with an unusually limited interpretation of "maternal feminism"), so that any female character successfully meeting a social, moral, spiritual, or psychological challenge is designated a pioneer — even when dealing with "internal, personal problems, often created by the pioneer herself." While Thompson takes this directive from Margaret Laurence's own specific references to historical pioneers in her fiction and from Laurence's commentary about her concern with survival, Thompson's application is comparatively shallow. In short, there is very little in this book that has not already been better said.

CAROLE GERSON

FAMILY HISTORY

JAMES ROBB & ELLEN ROBB, *The Letters of James and Ellen Robb*, ed. Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey, Acadiensis Press, $24.95.

DAVID MACFARLANE, *The Danger Tree: Memory, War, and the Search for a Family's Past.* Macfarlane Walter & Ross, $26.95.

THE SUBTITLE OF David Macfarlane's splendid book *The Danger Tree: Memory, War, and the Search for a Family's Past* might also be applied to *The Letters of James and Ellen Robb*, edited by Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey. Each volume offers compelling insights into the history of a particular family, Bailey's focusing on the letters of James Robb and his wife, Ellen, written between 1837 and 1864 — for the most part, to members of the Robb family in Scotland — and Macfarlane's centering on the history of the Goodyear family, reaching back into the nineteenth century but dealing, in the main, with events after 1900. Both books are essentially concerned with the Maritimes; the Robbs lived in Fredericton, where James taught scientific subjects at the then newly-established King's College, and the Goodyears became prominent in Newfoundland after their move from Ladle Cove to Grand Falls. Memories — of loved ones dead or separated by miles of turbulent water — strike with power and poignancy, and wars threaten in both cases: the 1837 rebellion and boundary disputes with the United States impinged on Robb's existence, and the hideous carnage of World War One robbed the Goodyears of three brothers. And both books serve to illuminate a past that is *not* best forgotten, for in the midst of disease, financial stringency, hardship, and simple frailty there are overwhelming moments of joy and the persistence of spiritual and physical courage which provide an enduring lesson and comfort.

The Robb Papers, now in the University of New Brunswick's Archives, contain the letters which form the basis for Bailey's collection. His editorial principles are entirely sound, and he has added, beyond a brief explanatory Preface, a short introduction entitled "A Scottish Intellectual in Early Fredericton," which offers a context for the correspondence of the young Scottish doctor and scientist and his wife (the daughter of an Anglican Archdeacon) whom he met in Fredericton. Appended is Robb's striking Encaenial Address of 1839 to the College (which is a model of clear-headed dedication to his calling), a glossary of proper names, and an index. The prose of the letters, like that of the Address, is enormously appealing: Ellen's writing is a happy match for that of her devoted husband. The subjects of the letters vary, as one would expect, from domestic concerns (family matters, clothes, presents received or lost at sea, and so on) to affairs of state (the Robbs moved in influential circles) and the management and funding of the College. The loss of children to disease or accident (one young son was drowned) strikes like a knife, and high prices and low salaries were ever-present perils. Unlike some collections of letters, this one may seem to some readers as curiously and perhaps frustratingly one-sided, as one is not provided with the replies. And there are gaps in the chronology which imagination might want to fill — even the courting of Ellen is not described. Yet this apparent disadvantage bestows some benefit, namely the reader's ability to focus entirely on matters of concern to the Robbs in Fredericton; the situation of the relatives *at home* is related indirectly, through James' and Ellen's remarks, questions, and entreaties.

No such *lacunae* figure in Macfarlane's reflective and touching account of the Goodyears. And while the concern is with the lives and pursuits of members of one family, the book is also something of a social and political history of Newfoundland in its move from colony to Canadian province: for this reason alone — for the insights and perceptions which it offers — readers across the country ought to take the book seriously. Too little is understood in this land about the difficulty of life in the youngest member of Confederation — the hardships in the outports, the amount of red ink in financial reports year after year, the blood spilled in the service of the Empire (particularly by the Newfoundland Regiment), the well-founded reservation toward joining Canada and turning away from Imperial connections, and the very real pride (which has *not* died) in being a Newfoundlander. The narrative touches all these issues naturally as it moves between past and present, successively drawing together a series of linked portraits of the members of an inspiring and often gallant group. The digressions are always linked, they are always relevant, and they are always important for themselves and, in the end, for the light they throw on the life of one character or another. And so, in the process, the reader comes to know the Goodyears and to meet, if briefly, Lord Northcliffe, E. J. Pratt, Joey Smallwood, and others. The book takes its title from the name Newfoundland soldiers gave to an apple tree which had survived the hail of shellfire and marked the start of No Man's Land near Beaumont Hamel in 1916. It signifies struggle and futility and horror and sacrifice, but it also signifies courage and endurance. This is a commanding book — something of a saga, something of a romance — vibrant, forceful, and immensely touching.

BRYAN N. S. GOOCH

ISSUING

PAMELA L. CAUGHIE, *Virginia Woolf & Postmodernism: Literature in Quest and Question of Itself*. Univ. of Illinois Press, $39.95; pa. $15.95.

BEFORE "*TAKING ISSUE*" in the introduction to her book on Woolf, Pamela Caughie quotes Wittgenstein: "*Essence* is expressed by grammar" (*Philosophical Investigations*). An essential characteristic of Caughie's grammar is the sentence that contains two propositions, the first negative, the second positive, linked by an adversative conjunction: "the novelist's concern is not with what truth is but with how truth is posited"; "The point is not to dismiss the implications of such generalizations but to consider the consequences of such thinking." A common variation is the positive negation followed by an adversative affirmation: "I take issue not with feminist criticism but with particular instances of feminist criticism." If we abstract the paradigm (perhaps a little unfairly), the essence of Caughie's critical method is revealed: "While I do not deny that . . . I do deny that. . . ."

This method of taking issue is, as Caughie herself insists, postmodernist; it derives, in part, from Derrida who supplies one of her prefatory epigraphs: "This may not answer the question, but one way of dealing with these problems . . . is to try to do both things at the same time, to occupy two places, both places . . . and both are true!" ("Women in the Beehive.") Thus, Caughie can state, "My purpose is *not* to claim Virginia Woolf as a postmodern writer," and simultaneously affirm that Woolf's "writings, like much postmodern fiction, call attention to their narrative strategies and social contexts, they self-consciously reveal the way narrative conventions both respond to and engender certain kinds of social practices." Similarly, though she dismisses as futile the "search among [her writings] for the 'essential Woolf'" and sadly notes that some critics "nonetheless continue to seek out *the* Virginia Woolf," Caughie presents us with her own version (vision?) of Woolf, a woman who uncannily resembles Caughie herself: happy to take issue but too wise (theoretically) to take sides — except in siding, more or less consistently, with those who refuse to take sides or make choices ("the refusal to choose can become the right choice").

Like all postmodernist story-tellers and critics, Caughie exhibits a high degree of anxiety in the face of her own *aporia* ("We seem to be caught in a contradiction"); and she works hard to anticipate, and so fend off, objections which many readers might make to her argument. "Since postmodern writing contains within it the very practices and assumptions it seeks to challenge, a postmodern reading [of Woolf's writings are *not* postmodernist] must must in [Linda] Hutcheon's words 'call attention to both what is being contested and what is being offered as a critical response to that, and to do so in a self-aware way that admits its own provisionality.'" Very self-aware, Caughie concedes that Susan Squier is "perhaps the only academic besides me to give *Flush* any sustained attention"; nevertheless, she cannot resist every temptation to choose between alternatives. She has, after all, chosen a postmodernist rather than a New Historicist approach to Woolf (such choices are "the *ineluctable* ones." She may begin by declaring that the answer to the question of how to resist authority and change tradition, in literature and society, "without establishing a new (alternative, oppositional, counter) tradition, which can become just as restrictive, repressive, authoritative," is not to be found "in reconciling, balancing or choosing between two positions"; but, by Chapter Two, it takes her only a paragraph to prove that "the problem [of an apparent contradiction] is capable of resolution."

Notwithstanding all of which reservations, I must happily admit that Dr. Caughie's examination of Woolf in the light of postmodernist literary theories is the most enjoyable and stimulating (as distinct from exasperating) book on Woolf I have read since Elizabeth Abel's *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis.* Both these books confirm Caughie's allusive opening sentence: "In or about December, 1985, Virginia Woolf criticism changed" — for the better, we might add. Caughie's method actively encourages the reader to take issue with what she has to say on "The Artist Figure in Woolf's Writings," on "Characters and Narrators," "Narrative Structure and Strategies," "Woolf's Nonfictional Prose," "*Flush* and the Literary Canon" and "Virginia Woolf as Critic." Yet, on rereading, I find that the margins of my copy contain more checks (registered agreement) than exclamation points (objections). Particularly good, and lots of fun, is her reading of *Flush* as "an allegory of canon formation and canonical value." Less adventurous and more limited, her exploration of Woolf's nonfictional prose discourse "*as Aesthetic Phenomenon and Social Product*" is still much more open-minded, and therefore illuminating, than Susan Squier's interpretation of the same essays in *The London Scene*. And despite her disclaimers ("I do not intend to offer the right reading of Woolf") and avowals (that she is "not arguing for any one position but . . . testing out the implications of many"), Caughie certainly persuades me of the rigidity of Squier's readings and the flexibility of Caughie's own positions.

Poachers make the best game-keepers, they say; also, it takes one to know one. A professed feminist, Caughie takes on, takes issue with, and takes seriously to task the Feminist Establishment (and yes, alas, it *has* become just that). Though she aplauds "much of what early feminist criticism has done for Woolf criticism," through historical research and manuscript studies, Caughie repeatedly exposes (by deconstructing) the straitness and narrowness of partisan approaches to Woolf taken by critics like Squier, Jane, Marcus, Sandra Gilbert, Jane Lilienfield, *et* (not quite) *al.* (Caughie responds positively to the work of Jane Gallop, Peggy Kamuf and Rachel Bowlby). She will almost certainly draw fire from the big guns (Caughie points out Marcus' "militaristic language"); she may even be ostracized, what we currently call "marginalized" or "decentered." She may, ironically, be rejected by the Feminist Establishment and forced into the role of *outsider* — thus instantly becoming eligible to join Woolf's "society." But not the Outsiders Society (see *Three Guineas*) sanctioned by Marcus, even though the very name ("Outsiders Society") is an oxymoron and therefore confutes the choices forced upon us by those whose partiality results in an either/or philosophy. The Society I am referring to is the subject of Woolf's 1920 (?) story: "So we made ourselves into a society for asking questions" ("A Society"). As the sub-title of Caughie's book implies (also "Issuing," the title of her non-conclusion), Caughie, like Woolf, is an inveterate questioner. She has what Woolf might have called a Russian turn of mind; she leaves us with "the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on after the story is over" ("Modern Fiction").

JOHN F. HULCOOP

RETICENCE & EXTRAVAGANCE

WILLIAM ROBERTSON, *Adult Language Warning*. Brick Books, $9.95.

DON GUTTERIDGE, *Love in the Wintertime*. Oberon, $12.95.

RONN SILVERSTEIN, *Diary of a Glass Blower in Solitude*. Cormorant, $9.95.

FOR THE SAKE of comparison, these three books of poetry can be set on a scale ranging from reticence to extravagance. While William Robertson does not employ a minimalist style, he does write in a wry, subdued manner that is preoccupied with domesticity and the sequence of daily irritations that add up to a haphazard destiny:

> and he says to himself, well
> this is life, this next
> in a series of compromises

His title, *Adult Language Warning*, seems oddly inappropriate, since his words are mild, his voice is reserved and reflective. The minutiæ of family life provide a background from which he launches forays of the imagination backward to his childhood in Japan, or outward into a world that either threatens or beckons or both. The poem which I just quoted, "Weasels in my Lawn," is a good example. The weasel is the rodent of doubt, apprehension or self-recrimination that gnaws its way into Robertson's, or his characters', thoughts:

and each one of them deserves the Dad
they need most to have
and because they can't
he sits up nights
with his weasel mind
that scrabbles after friendships
chews them to pieces
and leaves them twitching

"Twitching" is a good verb to describe the attitude expressed in many poems, which begin placidly, but grow irritated. What the poet sees when he looks out or back are signs of social unease, time, ageing and death. Winter scenes predominate. Often there is an implied calculation at work, as Robertson measures himself against what he was, what he had hoped for, or what his children have to face. At the limit of his thoughts are flashes of insight that carry him "panting at the edge / of more than one world." These flashes are conveyed through images that arise literally or figuratively from the scene: the northern lights, Yukon stone, angels. These are hints of transcendence, but the poem dedicated to Gwendolyn MacEwan reminds us how modest are Robertson's longings in contrast to a poet who loved tumult. Robertson is far more repressed:

I write a poem, a story, I write
the very godhead onto paper
and my family waves me quiet
from the TV
so I go to the kitchen to create . . .

The danger of Robertson's style is that it will be too bland, and there are some dull patches, but he usually guards against this fault through a sure touch conveyed by a striking or musical phrase: "gatling," "diddle," "chalcedony," "turbid bedtime," "tortoise noises."

Don Gutteridge is the best-known of this trio, and in *Love in the Wintertime* he proves himself an accomplished poet. Accomplishment in various senses dominates the style and matter of this volume. His verse is wonderfully assured, suggesting a writer confident of his resources, which permit a style so polished that he is poised even in the midst of perplexity. The chief perplexity is love, the dizzying ceremony that sets need against regret, choice against instinct, freedom against bondage. Gutteridge is also accomplished in the sense of being old enough to review and to savour the ripeness of his life. The second section, "Family Resemblance: An Album," presents portraits in which a grandfatherly poet is exhilarated by the vitality of his expanding family. The real figure of accomplishment in this section, however, is the grandmother, whose arms have cradled generations. There is a strong lyrical impulse in these poems, which recall Dylan Thomas in their love of the sonorous phrase and of verbal mischief —

She's the
womb of man —
woman — the sea-
sons reproduce

Circe, you mean
who sang for her supper
(cutlets I think)
on her poisoned littoral

— and in their celebration of a vitality that is rough yet lovely: "grace in the nub of violence." Like Thomas, Gutteridge focuses on sources of energy: love, grief, joy and above all, innocence. Innocence and purity are endowed with energy in a way that reminds me of Northrop Frye's remarkable account (in *The Secular*

Scripture) of virginity as an idealized power securing human integrity in a disruptive world. Gutteridge evokes the tradition of romance by treating this energy as female, fertile and redemptive; by associating it with birds, angels and music; and by invoking his Muse in "The Loretta Lynn Suite." Lynn is a supremely accomplished artist whose singing permits us to accomplish ourselves, that is, to surmise the full scope of our being:

> The innocence I hear is
> dark with the knowledge
> of what has been lost /
> forgotten / surrendered
> to sentiment or art,
>
> but oh, your voice
> carries its terrible news
> high and sweet and tender
> into the uncompromising sky
> our secret hearts
> reach out to . . .

At the extravagant end of the spectrum is Ronn Silverstein, whose poetry continually strains for effect, although the straining is surely a deliberate part of the performance: "To read Mishima / is to lick the anus of disaster." Such poetry appeals to quite a different taste than the reticence of Robertson or the eloquence of Gutteridge. It appeals to a dark romanticism that celebrates perversity rather than chastity, although the effect of both is to release the imaginative spirit. Gutteridge would probably agree with Silverstein that poetry speaks in the "syntax of angels," and argues "beyond the logic of any finite probability" as it "follows that *plundering whirpool* [sic] *to its source.*" But for Silverstein the source of power is far from chaste. It is more likely to be corrupt and to summon its transgressive energy through defilement:

> Because my corrupt one, in Tarumba's abyss,
> into which you came invisibly seething,
> there is now a large hole,
> a space created especially for you

For inspiration, he looks to Mishima, Breton and the Latin American fabulists (whereas Robertson looked to Yeats, and Gutteridge to Blake and Thomas), and José Alvarez Baragaño supplies one epigraph for this collection: "I have an appointed rendezvous with death / yet beautiful are the days remaining." The "rendezvous" is one way of describing these poems' intent. They seek a fatal concurrence of circumstance, desire and language. The long, first sequence, "The Angelo / Blaank Letters" comprises a series of impassioned letters, sent from "the loathsome pit" to a respondent who does not respond and who, his name hints, probably does not exist. Ramon Angelo's ordeal *de profundis* provides the model for subsequent poems, which study the rendezvous of love, death and words. Anus, abyss and pit often provide the imaginative locus, and while Silverstein may not always encourage me to share his view, he does convince me that he has a savage, poetic mission.

JON KERTZER

TEST OF TIME

DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS, *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace.* McClelland & Stewart, $24.95.

IAN ADAMS, *Becoming Tania.* McClelland & Stewart, $26.95.

NOT FOR ONE minute longer am I going to accept the old professorial dodge that submits judgements about literature to the test of time. In some cases, at least, it is possible to tell straight away which books will establish themselves as important and which will be numbered among the perishables of history. David Adams Richards's *Evening Snow Will Bring Such Peace* falls into the former category; Ian Adams's *Becoming Tania* unmistakably belongs to the latter. The chief difference between the two has little to do with originality, or with the authors' ability to synthesize and record the concerns of a cultural moment; it has everything to do with simple intellectual clarity.

Richards' most recent novel is clear to the point of austerity. Like his previous works, it is set in the Miramichi valley, a region far richer in salmon, timber, and quiet desperation than in opportunities to embrace either the world, the flesh, or the devil. Indeed, the novel has scarcely any plot. Ivan Basterache and his wife of twenty months have a quarrel about money. They separate. Cindi, who is pregnant, epileptic, and a magnet for the attentions of meddlers and toadies, finds her life reinterpreted for her as a case history of victimization, a *locus classicus* in other people's wrongheaded accounts of the gender wars. By the same token, though he is able to regard his transformation with some detachment, Ivan figures in the local gossip as a stereotypical brutish husband, a man of whom nothing too heinous might be whispered or believed. As these fictitious versions of the pair grow more substantial in popular legend, their true identities reassert themselves. They shrug; they are reunited; they decide to move to Sudbury; then Ivan dies. Out of these extraordinarily simple events, Richards is nevertheless able to construct a novel that is nearly Sophoclean in its subtlety and impact.

The explanation lies in the combination of two qualities, neither of which, fortunately, is particularly literary. The first is inevitability. Twenty years before, as one of the characters observes, three quarters of the traffic on the river had had to do with work. Now, the fishing boats, scows, and pulp boats have been replaced by inboard motor boats and sailboats. The clash of values and expectations that results from this change is morally devastating: the protagonists, without ceasing to be ordinary human beings, find themselves at the centre of economic transformation on a grand scale. The second essential quality can only be compared to the process by which a stone, dropped in a pool of water, will create an endless chain of minute effects upon its surroundings. Each carelessly malicious thought or remark can thus be traced through a series of incremental adjustments in the perceptions of a whole community — reactivating, as it makes its way through the network, old prejudices, anxieties, and defenses. The forest fire in which Ivan is killed is a direct consequence of these two lines of development, the focus at which they converge. Not surprisingly, the novel's climax has many of the characteristics of Calvary and Armageddon.

Becoming Tania, though superficially the more entertaining of the two novels, has none of this compelling starkness. Nicolás, a handsome, wealthy Argentinian with psychic powers is fascinated to discover that he can infiltrate and share the memories of people he meets. Luckily, he meets some interesting people with interesting memories. Uuluckily, some of them want to torture him for what they mistakenly believe he knows about the obscure death of Ché Guevara ten years earlier in the Bolivian jungle. His ally (or perhaps his foe) is Tania, a beautiful young woman who is (or perhaps only wishes to be) the reincarnation of Tamara Bunke, Guevara's comrade-in-arms, the *femme fatale* suspected of betraying him when the guerilla cause appeared to be lost. Interwoven with these encounters — some violent, some sexual, and some sexually violent — is the story of Lara. Lara is a present-day revolutionary who has paid for her commitment to the socialist cause by being disappeared. She too is beautiful. By a coincidence no less striking, the key to her whereabouts is held by the chief of Nicolás's torturers. In a series of swift and confusing manoeuvers, Nicolás outwits his enemies, finds Lara, dies a hero's death, and is then reincarnated with his psychic powers intact.

Not only is *Becoming Tania* arbitrary in narrative structure; it is also replete with the most muddled of male fantasies and stereotypes. Women's power over men derives from their sexual allure. Once they have discovered their power, they exploit it. They are not to be trusted. A man's power by contrast is intellectual. He defeats his enemies by cunning, a cunning which consists primarily in preventing his weaknesses from becoming known. Even a thriller, however gratifying to one's fantasy life, has an obligation to be clear. Ian Adams encounters problems about the nature of the self and its relationship with others that he cannot solve — except by pointing vaguely to the stylized images of masculinity and femininity embedded in the popular imagination.

HILARY TURNER

REHABILITATING REALISM?

DAVID LODGE, *After Bakhtin: Essays On Fiction And Criticism.* Routledge, $17.95.

RAYMOND TALLIS, *In Defense of Realism.* Edward Arnold, $32.50; pa. $14.95.

RAYMOND WILLIAMS, *What I Came Here To Say.* Hutchinson Radius, n.p.

CRITICS HAVE BEEN predicting the death of the realist novel for so long that one would expect the form to have all but disappeared by now. But of course it hasn't. In fact, realism continues to be the dominant method of representation not only in popular but in much serious fiction, and in television and film as well. In recent years, however, its reputation has suffered by surrealism, magic realism, and most recently by metafiction.

The charges against the realist novel are varied and longstanding. Since the early part of this century, writers as diverse as T. S. Eliot, Philip Roth, and John Barth have argued that realism has been made obsolete by the increasingly "unreal" character of the contemporary world. According to this line of thinking, contemporary life has become so complex and so fantastic it can no longer be contained within the frame of reference provided by realism. More recently, structuralist critics have argued that since language itself is non-representational, it would be a misnomer to refer to any fiction as "realistic." As Roland Barthes once observed, realism is an "effect" of language and not a reflection of pre-linguistic reality. Finally, in recent years, radical post-structuralist critics like Colin MacCabe and Catherine Belsey have used Barthes' observations on the relation of language to reality to mount an attack on realism on political grounds, claiming that while the realist novel can reflect a dominant ideology it cannot consciously criticize it. As Belsey has argued, because it cannot foreground contradiction, the classic realist novel actually performs the work of ideology, representing "a world of consistent subjects who are the origin of meaning, knowledge, and action, ... [while] offering the reader, as the position from which the text is most readily intelligible, the position of subject as the origin both of understanding and of action in accordance with that understanding."

Given the present concern with political correctness, it should come as no surprise to find that it is precisely this view of realism that Raymond Tallis and David Lodge seek to challenge in *In Defense of Realism* (1988) and *After Bakhtin* (1990) respectively. In fact, each of these books could very well have been subtitled "Against *Critical Practice*." What makes them most interesting, however, is the strikingly similar way in which each attempts to rehabilitate the realist novel.

Both Tallis and Lodge reject the claim that realism cannot foreground contradiction, arguing instead that the realist novel can and traditionally has presented conflicting views of reality. As Tallis writes, by dramatizing "genuine conflicts of interest within a supposedly unified social order . . . the realist novel has contributed in no small way to our understanding of the devious ways of ideology and above all its tendency to conceal itself." Similarly, both reject Belsey's claim that "classic realism performs the work of ideology in its representation of consistent subjects who are the origin of meaning, knowledge and action. . . ." Again it is Tallis who addresses this point most directly, using Joyce's *Ulysses* to show that a "realistic representation of persons is not incompatible with a radical revision or questioning of the concept of character." Finally, both Tallis and Lodge reject the claim that a "hierarchy of discourses" in the classic realist novel serves to privilege the subject position of author and reader, putting both in a position of dominance over the characters in the novel and their stories. As Lodge observes, quoting Bakhtin, "One of the essential peculiarities of all prose fiction is the possibility that it allows of using different types of discourse, with their distinctive expressiveness intact, on the plane of a single work, without reduction to a single common denominator" (*After Bakhtin*, p. 49).

Although Tallis and Lodge are able to point out many of the weaknesses in the anti-realist arguments of Belsey, MacCabe, and other post-structuralists, their own arguments have been shaped almost entirely by the post-structuralist critique of realism. As a result, their respective defenses of the realist novel are hindered by an equally short-sighted formalism which is inadequate to address questions of ideology. The most compelling case that either is able to make on behalf of the realist is that its polycentrism prevents us from assigning its political content to the author with any degree of certitude. According to this argument, ambiguity and indeterminacy are signs of virtue, and a novel is regarded as politically correct when only it can be said to "toss the reader from consciousness to consciousness, without adjudication, closure or spurious resolution." Yet it is hard to see how such a position differs from that of the New Critics of the 1940s and '50s, who also cherished texts for their ambiguities, and for much the same purpose. Throughout these books, an ideological question is considered in purely formal terms with no attempt to ground discussion in social or historical analysis. The result is an interpretation of the ideology of the classic realist novel that is every bit as sterile as the one it is meant to supplant.

A more satisfactory defense of realism appears in Raymond Williams' *What I Came Here To Say* (1989), a collection of essays that gathers together material from almost every stage of Williams' long and productive career. Of the various contributors to the recent debate over the politics of realistic representation, Williams alone recognizes that the term realism is a complex and variable term, referring not only to an artistic method but to a way of looking at the world. Conceived in the abstract, it may be regarded as a timeless method open to any particular artist in any particular time. But, as Williams observes, the application of this method must be submitted to social and historical analysis. Thus we see that the kind of realism encountered in the medieval mystery play known as the Play of the Townly Shepherds is quite different in intention and effect than the realism used in Elizabethan drama, which in turn differs from realism of the eighteenth century comedy of manners. Finally, it is his recognition that realism as it has developed since the eighteenth century is capable of being "consciously interpretative in relation to a particular political viewpoint" that makes Williams' defense of realism most valuable. As his analysis of the British labor film *The Big Flame* indicates, realism can do meaningful cultural work by representing a socially engaged interpretation of historical events. While this may seem obvious to some readers, it is significant that it does not occur to David Lodge or Raymond Tallis, or for that matter to Catherine Belsey.

PAUL TYNDALL

OLD, NEW, BORROWED, BLUE

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Shadows in the Grass.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

LOUIS DUDEK, *Continuation II.* Vehicule Press, $9.95.

DON MCKAY, *Night Field.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

RICARDO STERNBERG, *The Invention of Honey.* Véhicule Press, $8.95.

CHARLOTTE HUSSEY, *Rue Sainte Famille.* Véhicule Press, n.p.

ANNE MICHAELS, *Miner's Pond.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

JEFFERY DONALDSON, *Once Out of Nature.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

FRANK DAVEY, *Popular Narratives.* Talonbooks, $9.95.

GERRY GILBERT, *Azure Blues.* Talonbooks, $11.95.

FIRST, THE RESPECT due experience. Ralph Gustafson was born in 1909 and Louis Dudek, that youngster, in 1918. Both have been writing poetry much of their lives. *Shadows in the Grass,* Gustafson's twenty-eighth collection, ranges between intimate meditations inspired by his Eastern Townships homescape and bouts of enthusiastic European tourism. An opulent diffidence has always been a Gustafson trademark. When confronted by the glories of, say, Renaissance Italy, he turns to guidebook gush tempered by running commentary on the frets of travel. Yet this tone becomes highly effective when curbed by the limits of the love or nature lyric. For all his veiled querulousness, Gustafson has never been afraid to praise. In "Moon and Snow" he notes that

> Sometimes it is just as political
> To look up and find
> Happiness in locations
>
> Neither first nor last
> In the world, such as
> Trees and fences

Dudek's *Continuation II* continues *Continuation I* — to be continued, one assumes. Dudek, who may be pursuing that chimera, a poem without closures, in this instalment ambles across the minefield of mass culture and philistinism, dropping quotations and citations like gum wrappers. Umbrage is his umbrella against a rain of familiar evils. "Literature is in a bad way," he tells us. Cranky doubts about posterity augment the dystopia:

> Poor old Charles Sangster
>   spent thirty years revising his poetry
> but the U of T reprinted his work
>   in '72
> ignoring his revisions
>
> Are there flaws in the poem?
>   and should I die with instructions
> that some pages be destroyed?

Having published seven previous books, Don McKay in *Night Fields* is not exactly new, but his poems bring a refreshing plunge into immediacy. Moreover, McKay's eye is unafraid to see, recording unlikely-seeming but uncannily accurate data. "Burning thirty years of paper" in the title poem he thinks of the sky-borne flecks as "Junk food for bats." Although McKay sometimes rounds his poems off a trifle too tidily, he is wonderfully alive to the changes around and within himself. No wonder he likes bats. In "Night Skating on the Little Paddle River":

> Skinny music: needle
> in its empty groove.
> Our cattail torches make dark
> darker but more interested in us,
> gathered in velvet fists around each
> halo of light. Slow
> flits; we circulate as cautious
> ceremonious bats.

Ricardo Sternberg's *The Invention of Honey* and Charlotte Hussey's *Rue Sainte Famille* are very different first books. Sternberg deals with transformation myths and synaesthetically possible worlds; Hussey's mannequins, masks, dolls, and fetishes are insecure emblems of selfhood. Sternberg is careful, even plodding; Hussey tense and edgy.

A Brazil resident until he was 15, Sternberg carries some Latin American magic realist baggage, though he unpacks it sparingly. Occasionally, as in "Crooked Sonnets," he even lapses into dull particularities of a love affair. At his ablest, as in the title poem, Sternberg adds glowing images to legend, fable and myth:

> The bee is to me
> as I must seem to her:
> a complete mystery.
>
> *small engines running on honey*
>
> *striped angels who fell for sweetness*
>
> *stars shooting into the corolla of a petalled*
> *sun*

Hussey's tenanted objects are subject to the violent haunting of memory. Oscillating between Maine and Montreal, the poet is possessed by the patriarchal past, a round in which she is a rushing or shuffling female figure. In "Woodland Dance"

> Their breath streaming behind them in the
> growing chill,
> unable to rest, regrouping
> in twos and threes, they dip in mothlike
> trappings
> in and out of the pointed branches

In varied ways, Anne Michaels, Jeffery Donaldson, and Frank Davey are borrowers. Michaels and Donaldson rely on other lives, Davey on other texts.

Michaels in *Miner's Pond* portrays the writers Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam, Akhmatova, Alfred Doeblin and Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen; the painters Renoir, Paula Becker, and Lunia Czechowska; the astronomer Kepler; and in the title poem, her brothers. Although her flowing rhythms and dramatic monologues offer no great advance from *The Weight of Oranges* — her impressive debut — a fine painterly touch is present. The last line of the book tells us "the moon's blood is the sea."

Once Out of Nature carries blurbs by Edward Hirsch and Robert Pinsky, and a foreword by Richard Howard, who rightly praises the poet's expert enjambments and paronomasias. In "Rented Space" a field stretches "to make ends meet"; spring must be "in the right place at the right time." Donaldson appears to agree with Mahler, a favourite subject (five poems), in believing "that articulate art is greater than inarticulate nature." Less painter than cabinet-maker, Donaldson is all solid craftsmanship and smooth joinery. Like Michaels, he leans towards Makers of the Modern Era: besides Mahler, his picks include Turner, Monet, Heidegger, and Mandelstam.

A borrower of a different type, Frank Davey in *Modern Narratives* does not so much interpret as interrogate disciplines and media. At its best, this post-modernist potpourri can produce "In Love with Cindy Jones," an amiably wry blend of memoir, 1950s sociology, and deconstructionist aesthetics. At its scattered worst, enquiry turns into a hectoring dogmatism whose decodings seem no more privileged — or less duplicitous — than the most orotund Victorian statement. Somewhere in the middle is "Postcard Translations," short take-offs (with glosses) launched by the assumption that "The picture postcard has nothing to do with communications and nothing to do with art: it is merely an inexpensive way to allow the traveller a large role in the packaging of nature."

Gerry Gilbert is *Blue Azure*. Victor Coleman's blurb calls it "Alphabet scoop." With its added loop and goop, the book invites floccinaucinihilipilification. Passages like

> thoing?
>
> where the day
> out
> night int
> o

or

> why don't they make bran muffins in the
> shape of turds
> shit
> that's the idea

do not merit lofty valuation. But there *is* a little more than meets the eye. And taken for what it is, oral poetry, there may be a lot more. Even without the pace, cadence, and gesture of public delivery, there are aphoristic successes:

> money's a copy of what you haven't got
> the more money the more you haven't got

And, when he isn't suffering from the terminal cutes ("Nidlight Munch"), Gilbert has a gift for titles. Two for hoarding: "The First Squirrel of Spring Thinks in Seeds" and "Canada's a Nice Place to Read but I Wouldn't Wanna Write There."

FRASER SUTHERLAND

DREAMS & VISIONS

ROBERT ZEND, *Daymares*. *Cacanadadada*, $12.95.

PER BRASK & GEORGE SZANTO, *Duets*. Coteau, $8.95.

THE AUTHORS OF *Duets* and *Daymares* share an interest in dreams, visions, uncanny intimations, and other psychic disruptions which transform the quotidian real into the surreal. For me, such writing stands or falls not on the basis of its "far-out-ness," but derives its merits from the authors' handling of the relation between the real and the surreal.

The back-cover blurb on *Duets* proclaims it "a collaboration that really works." But what kind of collaboration is this? And *how* does it really work? Brask and Szanto offer eight pairs of stories, each pair incorporating six themes or motifs that the authors agreed on and that they derived from the preceding pair of stories. This collaboration by mathematical formula produces some interesting fugue effects, as themes and motifs carry over from one pair of stories to the next. However, because each story is composed entirely independently, the Brask-Szanto "collaboration" involves no intricate interweaving of authorial voices, no sustained, symbiotic interaction between two imaginations. Hence, *Duets* might more aptly be called "Alternating Solo Recitals on Agreed-upon Themes."

Unfortunately, as one advances through the book, Brask's recitals sound more and more like interludes between Szanto's more accomplished and varied performances. Szanto commands an array of different narrative techniques and prose styles, from the lofty, anti-climactic mock-epic in "On Cheemy Pond," to the tough-colloquial dramatic monologue in "Sense," to the subtle stream-of-consciousness passages in "Skull," and the film-script scenarios of "Lint-Reader." Parodic and satirical twists give point to Szanto's extravagant fabulations, while the surrealistic elements in his more realistic pieces issue from the psychology of the characters and the larger social and political ramifications of their experience.

My personal favourite in *Duets* is "The Year the Leaves Were Smaller" in which Szanto concerns himself with ecological as well as psychological change. When a ten-year-old boy and his aunt make a fishing trip to a beloved, once-pristine lake, the boy emerges from a childhood's secure permanencies into an adult world of insidious, irreversible change. Through descriptions of land- and water-scapes which reflect his characters' emotional terrains, Szanto evokes the complex bond uniting the boy with his aunt. As the story moves along on its undercurrents which intimate the boy's vague feelings of unease, we see that the boy is absorbing his aunt's unhappiness without understanding it or being able to articulate it.

Robert Zend's *Daymares: Selected Fictions on Dreams and Time*, a posthumous collection of short stories, fragments, poems, and illustrations, has some of the same shortcomings as Brask's work. Plot and character remain undeveloped, and the language is often wooden. But the volume is redeemed to some extent by Zend's originality of vision, his willingness to experiment, and his ability to engage his audience intellectually.

The volume opens with Zend's consideration of dreams:

> Someone says: "I dreamt about you . . ." Why do your eyes light up, why do you so eagerly want to know about that dream? . . . Why do you relate other people's dreams to your own iron reality?

Zend's answer is that dreams are intrinsically fascinating because the land of dreams "is a common land where we all meet each other." Not having mastered the art of reading in my sleep, I often found myself excluded from this "common land," which is to say that Zend's dream-stories seem at times self-indulgent and irrelevant to my own "iron reality."

Zend proposes that "laughter is the only language of communication" between the Underworld of dreams and the Upperworld of coherent waking consciousness. But humour itself often fails to translate between cultures. Turning invariably on logical and metaphysical contradictions rather than human foibles or quirks, Zend's jokes have an abstract, mechanistic quality which for me limits their appeal. He, at any rate, enjoys his own jokes, if the number of times he repeats them in "Antihistory" and "The End of the World" is any gauge.

Although Zend's publishers promote him as a Canadian counterpart of Jorge Luis Borges, the predominant flavour of Zend's work is Central European. In a number of pieces in the *Daymares* collection, Zend's interest in dreams and fabulation remains anchored, albeit obliquely, to historical realities. "1956" alludes to Russia's suppression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the same year Zend left Hungary to come to Canada. "Taviella," "Armour," and "Now" also offer glimpses of the grim historical circumstances behind the perceptual and emotional dislocations Zend finds so fascinating.

PENNY VAN TOORN

BAKHTINIAN IDEAS

ROBERT STAM, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film.* Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, $28.50.

KEN HIRSCHKOP, KEN & DAVID SHEPHERD, eds., *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory.* Manchester Univ. Press, n.p.

"TO PROPOSE THE 'circulation' of Bakhtinian concepts," writes Graham Pechey, "is not to propose anything that is foreign to their mode of being: movement or *migration* is inherent in them from the beginning." Hirschkop and Shepherd's *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* and Robert Stam's *Subversive Pleasures* both conduct Bakhtinian theories into new dialogising contexts, new cultural, semiotic, historical, and geopolitical fields unexamined by Bakhtin. The two volumes differ, however, in political orientation and in the rigour with which they interrogate Bakhtin's ideas.

Stam employs Bakhtinian concepts to "deprovincialise" film criticism which, he contends, has been too long confined by mimetic theories and reading practices derived from nineteenth century literary realism. Addressing a readership assumed to have little prior knowledge of Bakhtin, Stam begins by defining various Bakhtinian terms and concepts, which he integrates into a critique of Christian Metz's theory of film as a form of language.

Stam's analogy between film and language analogy remains problematic throughout. Concerned as he primarily is with film, and with similarities between filmic and written discourse, Stam pays scant attention to certain complexities of verbal semiosis which might otherwise have enriched his application of Bakhtin to film. Stam seems at times oblivious to the potential ambivalence of the written word. Nor does his analysis of the construction and rejection of subject positions explore differences in the politics of reading that pertain in the medium of film as compared to literature.

Stam's reading of Bakhtin remains too often mechanical and superficial. His practice of breaking down Bakhtin's ideas into lists of component elements — the thirteen elements of carnival, the fourteen characteristics of the Menippea — which he then connects with film-making practices, creates an overly-neat "zipper effect." Because Stam *applies* Bakhtin to film without allowing the films to "talk back," his study creates fewer occasions than might be expected for critical reappraisal of Bakhtinian theory. *Subversive Pleasures* is also marred by scholarly and editorial flaws, the most glaring of which are Stam's references throughout to *The Dialogic Imagination* as *The Dialogical Imagination*.

Despite these problems, Stam's study is an engaging one, and his adaptations of Bakhtin lead in some very promising directions. As a lay reader of films, I found his discussion of the possibilities of ironic contextualisation opened up by the "multi-track" nature of film particularly illuminating. Bakhtin is also used to good effect in Stam's analysis of Woody Allen's *Zelig*, and his readings of American televisions news and political electioneering. Stam's special area of expertise is the Brazilian film industry, where his knowledge of concrete social, economic, and historical circumstances brings him to the brink of a critical testing of certain Bakhtinian concepts and values.

While Stam offers a largely uncritical view of Bakhtin, Hirschkop and Shepherd's *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* mounts eight precisely-focussed challenges to Bakhtinian theory from British Leftist and feminist perspectives, together with a glossary of translation variants, a useful bibliographical essay by Ken Hirschkop, and an alphabetical list of English language writings on Bakhtin. At once radical and scholarly, *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (like Graham Pechey's essays "On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogisation, Decolonisation" from which I borrow the following quotation) begins the process of "rescuing Bakhtin from the cold storage of intellectual history and from the politically compromised liberal academy."

Ken Hirschkop's introductory essay frames the question to which all the papers in the volume reply: What are the nature of the connections between Bakhtin's ideal of dialogism and its possible manifestations in historical actuality? Hirschkop traces the evolution of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, paying particular attention to the tension between Bakhtin's social, linguistic and philosophical concerns, and to the resulting political ambivalence of dialogism. This ambivalence, Hirschkop contends, is what allows Bakhtin to be embraced enthusiastically by the Left, and yet be "liberal pluralism's best friend."

Graham Pechey's "On the Borders of

Bakhtin" complements Hirschkop's essay by refusing to privilege an ordinary or master-context in which Bakhtin's ideas are manifest in their purest (or unmasked) form. Pechey proposes a mobilisation of Bakhtinian ideas across three varieties of borderline: between academic disciplines, geopolitical territories, and semiotic fields.

All the essays in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* place particular weight on the need to test Bakhtin's theories in specific historical circumstances. In "Upsetting the Public: Carnival, Hysteria and Women's Texts," one of the most subtle and searching essays in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory,* Clair Wills stresses that one should not look to individual texts by women to alter literary norms without also attending to the need to control their contexts of reception. Dialogism, Wills suggests, is not intrinsic to particular texts but resides in the historically- and institutionally-determined eye (or ear) of the beholder (interlocutor). Situating the discourse of the hysteric ("a victim of the bourgeois home who is not generally considered to be politically progressive") beside writing by the radical contemporary Irish poet Medbh McGuckian, Wills finds that both articulate the repressed past of patriarchal history. Wills discusses the function of mimicry as a way around the problem that hysteria can become "a spectacle for the master."

The most disturbing essay in the volume is Terry Eagleton's "Bakhtin, Schopenhauer, Kundera." Through a reading of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being,* which sees "an intolerable lightness and frailty in anything unique," Eagleton challenges Bakhtin's (alleged) notion of history as constant becoming, a succession of unrepeatable, unprecedented moments. Baktin's dissolution of history into pure difference, Eagleton argues, serves the needs of totalitarian states which depend on expunging history from memory, an eradication accomplished far more easily if "anything that happens only once might as well not have happened at all." "What imbues persons and events with unique value . . . is precisely what renders them insubtantial." Eagleton challenges not only Bakhtin but ourselves as institutionalised custodians of his legacy. He strongly suspects that the concept of carnival may be "little more than the intellectual's dues to the populace." "What is truly unseemly," he adds wryly, ". . . is the apparent eagerness of deans, chaired professors and presidents of learned societies to tumble from their offices into the streets, monstrous papier maché phalluses fixed in place."

PENNY VAN TOORN

DIALECTICAL TENNIS

SAM SOLECKI, JOHN METCALF, & W. J. KEITH, *Volleys.* Porcupine's Quill, $9.95.

JOAN MASON HURLEY, *Four Canadian One-act Plays.* Room of One's Own, $9.95.

Volleys PROVIDES an arena for Sam Solecki, John Metcalf, and W. J. Keith to play an adroit, gentlemanly game of dialectical tennis. Play opens with Solecki's "Some Kicks Against the Prick," which takes issue with remarks made previously by Metcalf in *Kicking Against the Pricks* and "The Curate's Egg." Metcalf's response, "Dear Sam," clarifies and defends his previous position, while W. J. Keith's concluding essay, "A Dream of Lacoon," draws play to a close by reconciling and synthesising some of the opposing views articulated by the other two players.

The standard of play is exemplary within the limits of the ground rules operating in this volume. The nature of these rules may be gleaned from the statement of aims offered by J. R. Struthers, the editor of the "Critical Directions" series, which *Volleys* inaugurates:

> The volumes chosen for this series explore directions through which criticism can uphold its most urgent responsibilities: to the honouring of literature and language, to the cultivation of art and life, and to the building of a more enlightened society.

John Metcalf also lays down certain ground-rules. His opening — "DEAR SAM: This essay or 'discourse,' as I understand you lot call bits of writing these days. . . ." — indicates that he will tolerate none of that new-fangled post-structuralist talk. Nor, as Solecki's quotations from Metcalf's previous writing indicate, does Metcalf want to hear from "regionalists," "revisionists," "intense young women," supporters of "special interest presses," or any of the other parties responsible for "splintering" Canadian literature. Metcalf longs nostalgically for a standardised, monologic critical terminology which would correct imprecision and abolish misunderstanding (especially the deliberate variety). His wit and verbal dexterity, intriguing though they may be, work often to disqualify writers and critics who choose not to speak Metcalf's language nor play the critical game according to his rules. To move beyond the old new-critical controversies and outside the old new-critical lexicon is to move, in Metcalf's view, "out of bounds."

Perhaps this explains why Solecki's essay seems uncharacteristically Metcalf-like, different in style and focus from much of his previously published work. Solecki argues with Metcalf in a manner which implicitly pays "homage or *hommage*" to his opponent, and he confines himself to the narrow, formalistic frame of reference Metcalf sets in place.

W. J. Keith, by comparison, seems freer and more at home in the arena demarcated by Metcalf. Keith's defence of Rudy Wiebe proceeds with wit, critical sensitivity, and scholarly acumen. Refuting Metcalf's complaints against Wiebe's "tin ear" and his failure to realise the artistic potential of the semi-colon, Keith points to the virtues of innovative, risk-taking writers like D. H. Lawrence, writers who strive continually to reach beyond their grasp. Keith argues convincingly that Wiebe's novels, despite their occasional gaffes, have greater artistic merit than the technically perfect, over-polished products of the Andrea del Sartos of the literary world.

All in all, *Volleys* offers three clever, stimulating performances. Unfortunately, all the players belong essentially to the same team, and the terms of the debate remain largely confined within formalistic lines. Entertaining as it is, the argument proceeds as though there were nothing more at stake than who scores the greatest number of points on the day. Questions concerning the socio-political process of constructing notions of artistic truth and merit remain largely outside the purview of *Volleys*. Perhaps future publications in the "Critical Directions" series will uphold criticism's "most urgent responsibilities" by addressing some of these urgent broader questions.

Turning from critical to dramatic performance, Joan Mason Hurley's collection, *Four Canadian One-act Plays*, shows how much can be accomplished within the narrowest confines of the Aristotelian unities. With admirable dramatic succinctness, this collection — Hurley's fifth —confronts big, universal questions, questions that often prove most difficult to articulate without lapsing into verbosity and/or cliche. Hurley uses women's voices and women's experiences not to explore so-called "women's issues," but to dramatise from women's perspectives some of the fears, aspirations, and problems that assail every human being.

A diversity of women's voices can be heard in *Four Canadian One-act Plays*. Older women speak in *Passacaglia*, set in a retirement home where women from very different social backgrounds must cope in public with loneliness, deteriorating health, and death — the great leveller of all. *Fugue for Female Voices* consists of seven dramatic monologues, which may be performed by one or seven women. The setting this time is a bus station — again, an intersection point — where a society woman, a grandmother, a secretary, a Native Indian, a battered wife, a nag, and a cockney each speak in turn from a bench in the waiting area. *Inukshuk* situates the action in the home of an Innuit family living on the shores of the Beaufort Sea. This play offers an easy yet totally plausible resolution to some of the tensions between Innuit and White, women and men, the young, middle-aged, and old. The final play, *Death Seat* is set in the Sunset Bar, where three strangers come together in the presence of death in the guise of a sinister bartender. Sombre, expressionistic, and blackly humorous, *Death Seat* is at once the shortest and the most intense of the four plays.

Hurley's texts leave plenty of room for actors, directors, readers, and theatre audiences to realise their own interpretations of the plays. This elicits active rather than passive modes of response and understanding. Instead of attempting to impose a single authorised interpretation on her work, Hurley invites us to join her as co-authors in a creative alliance. In so doing, she diversifies the range of possible actualisations of her plays, both on the stage and in the minds of readers.

PENNY VAN TOORN

ATONEMENT

LOUIS HÉMON, *Nouvelles londoniennes*. Le Castor Astral, n.p.

LOUIS HÉMON'S place in Canadian literature, albeit problematic, is an important one. Most of us know Hémon by only one novel, his "récit du Canada français," which happens also to be the all-time best seller in French fiction. Knowing his other works is a matter of real interest, whichever way you approach him, and this edition of his London stories is very welcome. Some of the pieces in it have been unpublished until now ("Celui-qui-voit-les-dieux," "Père inconnu"), while others were practically inaccessible ("Le dernier soir"). This is the first time they have all been brought together in one volume as the author intended.

The reader in search of insights into *Maria Chapdelaine* will not be disappointed. Like Hémon's best novel, these stories are marked by a strong sense of place, in which the characters are trapped in a lethal mixture of social determinism and artistic irony. Like Maria, the young women of Hémon's London are the pathetic victims of a brutal social order and of their own passiveness; the place is different, and they are more callously exploited. The impassive narrator makes the same seamless fusions of contemporary society and archetypal tale, while the author's social criticism remains implicit, and his art concealed. But these are all shorter sketches than *Maria Chapdelaine*, so both the irony and the composition of the stories are more obvious. The portrait of Father Flanagan, plying his trade in the London docks, is harsher than that of the *curé de Saint-Henri*, but they are visibly by the same sardonic hand.

The type of fiction in which the author retains such absolute control has, in our own time, raised another level of ideological question. In objective fiction, the gods die and the bourgeois are ignorant dolts, but there remains the hidden archpriest of the social order, the artist. For as Louis Hémon gently consigns Lizzie Blakeston to the black waters of the Thames, or weeps an exquisite tear into Sal's last gin, he gathers unto himself all the powers of atonement and administers a truly divine justice, in the image of the

French bourgeoisie he has run away from. These stories are fine examples of turn-of-the-century realism, good reading as well as rewarding objects of literary study, and handsomely presented by their Montreal editor, Chantal Bouchard.

JACK WARWICK

SECRETS

HERB CURTIS, *The Americans Are Coming.* Gooselane, $14.95.

FRANÇOIS GRAVEL, *Benito.* Lester & Orpen Dennys, $12.95.

ROGER BURFORD MASON, *Telling the Bees and Other Stories.* Hounslow, $14.95.

ALL THREE OF these books expose the flaws in our notions of progress and sophistication and in the modern tendency to mine people's and the past's knowledge and secrets for personal profit. All three also use the notion of secrets, specfically — what is dug up and how it is handled — as a gauge of modern values. *Benito* and *Telling the Bees* uphold the virtue of innocence in the face of this tendency, and uphold the value of personal history and social cohesion in the face of modern ahistoricism and isolation.

Benito is a brilliant combination of gentle magic and biting satire that, in order to expose the folly and despair of modern life, uses the point-of-view of an innocent dreamer whose gaze into people's eyes magically causes them to "discharge the contents of their souls." Benito unwittingly, and above all unwillingly, profits by offering this service; in a surprise ending, his gift ultimately profits the world, as it brings about a disarmament treaty between the United States and the U.S.S.R. Through Benito's benign wisdom, the narrator parodies the causes and effects of the modern need for psychotherapy and confession. Benito learns that people accumulate and conceal dirty secrets and "tons of problems," but he "couldn't really understand people's propensity for opening their mouths to spew out banalities," and would rather spend his time in the reverie of his internal 'image machine': "as soon as his guests [leave], he would tell himself that everything was far too complicated and there was no point trying to understand. So he might as well open the great book of dreams. Wise Benito."

This impractical innocent has no desire for money or admiration. However, when his friend Nancy comes to live in his house with her daughter, Benito becomes a counsellor as a means for the three of them to live. Nancy had discovered in her former profession as the owner of a brothel that people *want* to pay for the services of a confidant. But Benito's talent is not used opportunistically: his clients pay only what they can afford, and with whatever they have to offer — renovating skills, baking, knitting, bird-houses, and (if they insist), money. The knowledge he gains they use only for the purposes of greater social good, and to give Nancy's daughter a better life than they had had as children.

The title *Telling the Bees* directly points to people's need to unburden. The "Author's Note" is worth quoting in full:

> Until quite recent times, many centuries-old folk customs survived in rural England. For example, country people often unburdened their anger, elation or grief by finding a private place — the hedgerow or the bottom of the garden — and speaking aloud their emotions. They called this 'telling the bees.' Happily, progress has made the custom redundant and we can now simply join a phone-in program, call up a social worker or attend a group therapy session. *Deus Laus.*

The stories in *Telling the Bees*, which often strike the same perfect note of tragic irony underline that the result of losing and forgetting certain customs and knowledge results in social disfunction and poverty of experience. The book's dominant ethical premise is that 'family history and tradition are riches,' and that history "is woven into our lives ... [and] belongs to us all." All the stories deal in some way with the past intruding on, or being momentarily resurrected in, the present, and with the ways in which these moments of their intrusion or resurrection are handled by those rooted in the present, who are more often than not ill-equipped to recognize and preserve their value.

There is a moment in each story when a character must decide what to do with a nugget of knowledge from the past, or with the piece of history — a material object like a letter ("Dear Man"), a photograph ("Up at the Big House"), or a book (four different stories). Those who consciously use the nugget for personal gain violate something sacred. "Up at the Big House" and "Narrative Camera," show the opportunist violation of relics. In "Narrative Camera," which could also be called "Making Pseudo-History," a man takes his daughter to the site of an abandoned stone tower and old cemetery, and arranges arty, "stylish soft-focus" photographs out of the setting, cruelly evoking certain emotions in his daughter that would add to the photograph's impact.

We are told directly and repeatedly, in *The Americans Are Coming*, that "nothing is ever kept secret in Brennan Siding," but the concept of secrets and of local knowledge, their value to individual and collective history, and the way in which such riches are handled is barely addressed. History and secrets are manifest in collective myth and in mean-minded local gossip here. In tracing the birth and development of local myth (particularly that of The Whooper and Nutbeam), Curtis sensitively handles small New Brunswick community mannerisms and sensibilities. He seems to assert, however, that these culturally marginalized people are driven by a lack of opportunity and education to generate myths and perpetuate secrets.

To portray culturally marginalized people as mere victims is to create a ghetto: the novel foregrounds naturalistic details like bodily functions, gossip, daily domestic rituals, and presents the locals as victims of others and of their own spiritual impoverishment. The whole is rather clumsily constructed and repetitive; it unfolds the lives of the natives of this small New Brunswick community in a string of episodes with little sense of development of story and resonance of experience.

DIANE WATSON

POINTED OBSCURATIONS

SAMUEL SELVON, *Those Who Eat the Cascadura*. Tsar, $9.95.

VEN BEGAMUDRE, *A Planet of Eccentrics*. Oolichan, $10.95.

ROBERT SKELTON, *Hanky-Panky*. Sono Nis, $9.95.

BY THE TIME the writer of *Those Who Eat The Cascadura* comes right out and lets so-called civilized people have it, he has drawn us into his narrative so entirely that we feel we well deserve it. He describes our habit of mind:

> The hesitation, the procrastination, the weaving in and out, the wrestling and the bewilderment, the loss of direction and the tentative uncertain groping in whirlpools of thought as the mind staggers to come to a decision, are all products of a civilized society to which Garry and Roger were prey.

Doubt, the antithesis of faith, is shown as a product of Western consciousness. The sliver of shrapnel lodged in Garry's head acts as a metaphor for this doubt, which is generated through the propensity to problem-solve by 'thinking through.' White Western perspective is represented mainly through Garry, the British visitor to his friend Roger's cacao plantation in Trinidad, run mostly by Trinidadian West Indians. The sliver in Garry's head can also be seen as a metaphor for the colonial legacy lodged deeply in Trinidad and manifest still in the relations between Roger and the blacks; and like the sliver of shrapnel, colonial mentality may seem now dormant, but can become deadly with slight shifts. But like Manko, an obeahman and one of the two black people on the plantation, the novel provides no 'answers' to the questions its plot throws up. Its strength lies in its slow build towards the formation of important questions.

Selvon, in a consistently polished and understated narrative voice, depicts faith and love, (the antidotes to doubt and to master-slave relations), as pre-verbal, and Trinidad is sensuously described as a place that can nurture both within those who are receptive. The language of love, for Garry and Sarojini, is not only pre-verbal, it is also prevented from being verbalized, for, unlike some 'civilized' intellects who believe love is created through words, Sarojini believes that 'words mangle love.' In the same way, Manko's black magic is untranslatable: as he and the book point out, one is ultimately thrown back on what one believes or does not believe, what one chooses to understand or not understand.

In the stories of *A Planet of Eccentrics*, we meet worldly and educated East Indians, those who, it is noted, are marked 'desirable' by Canadian Immigration. The Indian and Canadian characters are identified less with place — some live in Canada, some in India, some are on the move — than with immediate family dynamics, expectations, and rituals. The best stories are those that highlight the difference between having knowledge, which is a qualification for status, and having understanding, which some grope for armed only with 'book-knowledge.' In "Samsara," the most developed of all the stories, the Canadian wife of an East Indian educated in Canada, finds that it is not her graduate studies in Indian theology and myth that forge her attachment to India, once they move there. It is not enough to know that Saraswati is "the goddess of all creative arts . . . and is also identified with the goddess of speech"; as Sara discovers, one must build a shrine to her, and allow that through belief in and understanding of her things happen. Saraswati is mentioned in at least three of the stories as the goddess who 'enables one to realize what he or she conceives.' Ironically, the book is packed with 'book-knowledge' on Indian history, geography, and theology.

The narrative of *A Planet of Eccentrics*, though it takes on a different point-of-view for each story, is curiously consistent, so that one misses a distinction of voice between, for example, a third-person omniscient narrator telling of the visit of Garuda, king of birds, to Vishnu the God and Protector ("Vishnu's Navel"), a first-person male Indian retired professor musing on his son's Canadian family ("Honestly, As In the Day"), and a young first-person female Indian narrator ("Gardens Apart") trying to sort through her family myths. Begamudre is strong on female perspective, and his pithiest figurations come from women's mouths or are observations of their natures; "Give me time," says Amma, insisting on her right to pace her planting, "I am experimenting. I want the romance of flowers before I must face the reality of vegetables. Perhaps it is like the difference between loving a man and marrying him" ("Gardens Apart." In reading these stories, one wades through much detail, not all of it of consequence, only to stumble across such pointed observations.

Where the perspectives of the two previous books are grounded in worlds in which words are sacred, and shaping speech is an art, the reader of the stories of *Hanky-Panky* is presented with a narrator that hangs out at the Horseman Hotel at Happy Hour, mocks writerly images and "innimmitable stile," and depicts writers self-consciously looking for stories as if they were surreptitiously combing sidewalks for good cigarette butts, but seem shocked if they come across good ones. What drives the perspective in these stories is a pixilated imagination, one prone to taking shots at pretentions, particularly of people whose trade is words such as academics, publishers, librarians. They are mostly tales of consciousness becoming haunted and dominated by objects (which are given names and identities by their owners): a vacuum cleaner ("Going Modern"), a VCR ("Hanky-Panky"), a suit ("Making the Difference"), a bicycle ("Clara"). Skelton's world is peopled by bumblers, as not only objects get out of hand, but even white pet rabbits and pranks ("Who Said Beatrix Potter?"; "Sic"; "The Cariboo Oyster"). These stories are often presented as tales told to the narrator, whose wry, charming, conversational voice dominates the stories, and renders them light, and silly, and totally engaging.

DIANE WATSON

INUIT STORIES

AMANDA LOVERSEED, *Tikkatoo's Journey: An Inuit Folktale*. Vanwell, n.p.

MISCHA DAMJAN, *Atuk*. North-South Books, n.p.

A WEALTH OF tales lies hidden in the frozen North, whether they be tales projected by our imagination onto the eternal ice or whether they be stories told by the inhabitants of that forbidding region themselves. Loverseed credits the Inuit with her tale, and since Damjan does not do likewise, we must assume that he invented his. Both books are delightful, but for different reasons.

Atuk is the story of an Inuit boy who has his beloved husky Taruk killed by a wolf. Atuk swears revenge, but has to wait until he grows up to be a hunter. When he finally has killed the wolf, he does not experience the expected joy but is even sadder than he was efore: "Nothing had changed. He had killed the wolf, but Taruk had not come back to him." In a surprise ending, Atuk befriends a flower whom he promises to protect.

The surprise ending is probably explained by the date of the original German version, which is 1964, the time of the "flower-children." The message of the book against violence and for true friendship is of course as valid today at it was then, but Atuk's choice of a friend within the vegetable world seems rather curious, especially since he lives in a country where the flora is very shortlived.

The slight flaw in the ending of the tale, however, is amply compensated for by the superb winterscapes drawn by Jozef Wilkon. The animals running away from the hunter Atuk could have been drawn by the Inuit themselves. Most haunting is the picture in which the father tells Atuk that Taruk has been killed; the scene is dwarfed by the head of the wolf about whom the father speaks, but who also seems to listen in with apprehension.

The drawings in *Tikkatoo's Journey*, on the other hand, are not nearly as masterful. Both human and animals in this book seem slightly grotesque, puffy or elongated. The pictures are more colourful than in *Atuk*, but do not manage to capture the mood of ice and snow as well. In *Tikkatoo's Journey* it is the story that holds one's attention. Tikkatoo's grandfather had become ill; the entire village suffered, since the grandfather was "the wisest and oldest man in the village." They had not caught any animals, and they were all hungry. Someone had to go to the Sun and get some of her heat to melt the ice spirit that had entered grandfather's heart. None of the bravest, strongest and tallest hunters wanted to go, but Tikkatoo volunteered. Amid the sneers of the hunters, Tikkatoo set out on his mythical voyage which took him to an iceberg, to the bottom of the sea, to the Moon, and finally to the Sun herself. There he obtains a flame and can cure his grandfather.

Various strands of both myth and fairy-tale are interwoven here to create a literally heart-warming story: in a variation on the "youngest son" motif, it is the grandson who sets out to bring what the strongest and bravest hunters cannot bring; like Odysseus, Tikkatoo travels into the underworld (here the bottom of the sea); he has to overcome his own cold self (symbolized by the iceberg, the sea, and the moon) before he can obtain the object of his quest, which he undertook not for himself but for someone else. It is clear, too, that young Tikkatoo is going to take on his grandfather's mantle of becoming the wisest man in the village. Lest I create a false impression: the tale is not told with heavy-handed symbolism or with weighty asides to Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Its language is entirely appropriate to a children's story. And that is part of the appeal of *Tikkatoo's Journey* that such a multi-faceted tale can be told in such simple words.

GERNOT WIELAND

BRAIN OVER BRAWN

TOM HARPUR, *The Terrible Finn MacCoul*, illustr. by Linda Hendry. Oxford, $14.95.

PHOEBE GILMAN, *Grandma and the Pirates*. North Winds Press, n.p.

GRAEME BASE, *The Eleventh Hour: A Curious Mystery*. Stoddart, $19.95.

THREE DELIGHTFUL BOOKS! The first an Irish folk-tale, dating back to the third century, the second a deliberately anachronistic story, set, judging by the design of the ship, in the 17th or 18th century but clearly appealing to the 20th century reader with its references to peanut butter and pizza, and the third, though peopled with animals, grounded firmly in the contemporary astronaut and punk period.

What's so terrible about Finn MacCoul? Though he is a giant, he doesn't like to fight, and he hates the idea of hurting anyone — or getting hurt. But when another giant, the fierce Fergus, comes calling, it looks as though Finn will have to either submit or get a terrible thrashing. Finn, however, has one strength that even Fergus can't overcome, and that is his wife Sara, who is not only the prettiest, but also the "cleverest woman in the land." Harpur's retelling of this pre-feminist tale humorously and vividly depicts the weakness of male brawn when opposed by female brain. Hendry's illustrations with their domestic details (such as a cat snuggling up in Finn's lap) magnificently and imaginatively complement the story. Anyone who has ever suffered at the hands of a schoolyard bully can take comfort, and counsel, from this book.

Grandma and the Pirates is also a book which pits the weak against the strong, and in which brain triumphs over brawn. This story, too, is a subtle feminist tract because the protagonists on the good side, grandma and Melissa, are female and the protagonists on the bad side, the three pirates, are male. It's grandma's cooking that gets her and Melissa into trouble. Attracted by the enticing smell of grandma's delicious noodle pudding, three pirates come ashore and rob everything edible they can find in her cupboard, and for good measure they take grandma along as well. Melissa attempts to rescue grandma, but is caught and forced to work as "cabin *boy*." The rest of the tale deals with their repeated attempts to escape, the last of which is successful and which leaves the pirates in an awful lurch. The illustrations, which weave intricate nautical designs into the frames, capture and imitate the light-hearted tone of the story proper.

At the center of *The Eleventh Hour* is a game of wits as well, but here it's not a question of the weak outwitting the strong. Rather, the author creates a mystery but leaves enough clues for the astute reader to solve it; the game of wits is between reader and writer. Horace, an elephant, invites eleven guests to his eleventh birthday party; he has prepared a sumptuous meal, but before his guests can enjoy it, they have to play eleven games. The time for the banquet is set for eleven o'clock, but when they arrive, they find that someone has already gobbled up all the food. Who's done it? A "Note for Detectives" seems to provide the clue, but it is written in code, and the reader must know (or guess) the culprit's name before he/she can decipher the note. Other clues occur on every page: anagrams, half-hidden clocks, circled numbers, mirror-writing, even miniature shapes of the culprit. Here is a book that delights several times over: the basic story is told in smooth verse, and though the eleven games are such as can be found at any eleven-year-old's birthday party, the ending of the story with a question is unusual. Once alerted to the fact that clues are hidden on every page, my eight-year-old daughter Alexandra picked up the book again and again, and giggled for joy when she found yet another one. In a "Top Secret" sealed section at the end of the book, the author reveals all, including an explanation on the various architectural models for his drawings. Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* probably provides the closest parallel from the world of adult literature to this children's book. Both are mysteries; both demand the active participation of the reader, and both are crammed with clues that are both misleading and informative.

Neither the feminism nor the critical theory inherent in these books overwhelms their humour, their light-heartedness, or their imagination. These books, in Alexandra's words, "are fun." A measure of their high quality can also be found in the fact that asked which book should be read for bed-time, Alexandra has no difficulty picking these three out of a pile, but that she has considerable trouble in deciding which of the three should be the one.

GERNOT WIELAND (with
ALEXANDRA WIELAND)

PICTURE BOOKS

NORMA M. CHARLES, *See You Later, Alligator*, illustr. by Yvonne Cathcart. Scholastic, $4.50.

JOHN F. GREEN, *Alice and The Birthday Giant*, illustr. by Maryann Kovalski. Scholastic, $4.95.

CATHRYN CLINTON HOELLWARTH, *The Underbed*, illustr. by Sibyl Graber Gerig. Good Books, $12.95.

NANCY WILCOX RICHARDS, *Farmer Joe Goes to The City*, illustr. by Werner Zimmermann. Scholastic, $4.95.

C. J. TAYLOR, *How Two-Feather Was Saved from Loneliness.* Tundra, $12.95.

VLASTA VAN KAMPEN, *Orchestranimals*, illustr. by Irene C. Eugen. Scholastic, $4.95.

PICTURE BOOKS are fascinating for young and older readers alike. Fortunately there is now a huge variety of picture books being released every year in Canada, and while some are mediocre or even poor, most are excellent.

The picture books listed above are well worth the investment. All share that essential combination of good story and excellent art work, though both the stories and the art are very different in each. *See You Later, Alligator* is a charming book, illustrated with large, boldly-coloured pictures, which tells the story of the friendship of a crocodile and an alligator, until the alligator gets a pair of shoes. From that point on, envy and one-upmanship spoil their relationship until they both see the silliness of their actions. The story is simple but engaging, and the "message" is evident but not preachy. For very young children, this picture book is excellent.

Alice and The Birthday Giant is a lot of fun. Large colourful pictures also fill this book, but there is more text. The pictures expand the action, and the story, about a little girl who wishes a huge, one-eyed giant right into her bedroom by mistake then has to figure out how to return him to where he belongs, is a fantastic romp that every child who has ever longed for the unusual will be able to relate to.

The Underbed, illustrated with large, bold pictures which are quite realistically drawn, is a very reassuring book for younger readers. It explores night fears and suggests a simple but loving and effective cure for them, making it wonderful bedtime reading. *Farmer Joe Goes to The City*, on the other hand, is a totally fantastic story about a farmer who goes to the city in search of the perfect present for his wife. Many children will share much of the awe the farmer feels in seeing the huge city with its traffic and shops, and will enjoy watching him travelling from store to store with his entourage of cow, pig and four chickens. The illustrations of the animals are not particularly good, but the humans, particularly the farmer, are strong; the large colourful pictures are full of action and charm.

The only native legend in the group, *Hwo Two-Feather was Saved from Loneliness*, is a wonderful retelling of an Abenaki Indian legend. It combines the discovery of fire, corn and community all in one story, and is captivating as it is retold by C. J. Taylor. Here the more representational art supports the text well, yet is colourful and eye-catching. But in *Orchestranimals*, a book geared to very young readers, the superb illustrations make the book. The story concerns a group of animals rehearsing for a concert; the strength of the story lies in introducing both the various animals and musical instruments. Furthermore, the puzzles and surprises on each page make this book quite fascinating.

LYNN WYTENBROEK

CHILD READER

BRENDA BELLINGHAM, *Princesses Don't Wear Jeans*. Scholastic, $3.50.

SYLVIA GUNNERY, *Taking Sides*. Scholastic, $4.50.

BERNICE THURMAN HUNTER, *A Place for Margaret*, *Margaret in The Middle*, *Margaret on Her Way*. Scholastic, $4.50 each.

PAUL KROPP, *Fast Times with Fred*. Scholastic, $3.95.

NORAH MCCLINTOCK, *The Stepfather Game*. Scholastic, $3.95.

AMONGST RECENT chapter books and novels for children, there are some interesting items. For the young reader, the chapter book *Princesses Don't Wear Jeans* is fun. It is the tale of a young girl who refuses to conform to the values and expectations of those around her, and the boy who admires her imagination and courage, but is afraid of being rejected by the other children if he becomes her friend. He realizes, however, that her friendship is worth far more than that of the boring young conformists around him. In a very simple, short book, Bellingham creates two fascinating characters and embodies her central theme in a charming story, though the style is a little irritating in places.

Fast Times with Fred is another endearing book for young readers, this time for the eight to eleven age-group. Fred is a reformed "juvenile delinquent" who leads his two charges into outrageous adventures as he tries to escape from the ubiquitous and persistent Beefy who wishes to rearrange his face because of some past mishap. The overprotective mother and the uncertain but determined father keep this amusing and well-written adventure grounded in reality, while Fred's character brings in elements of pure fantasy, a combination which works surprisingly well.

Unlike the above two novels, two "problem" books have also recently been released by Scholastic. Problem books are frequently enough so poorly written and "preachy" that they have a bad reputation as a genre. One of these books, the badly mistitled *The Stepfather Game* fulfills the stereotype. Little better than a soap opera, the book centres on three teenage stepsisters from a highly dysfunctional family, who are all having boy-problems. However one of the girls is half-Chinese so faces problems with discrimination while also running from the law after her no good would-be boyfriend beats up an old Chinese restaurateur. The oldest girl holds the family together and studies hard to gain a scholarship so she can get out of the trap of poverty the family is in, while fending off her best friend's ex-boyfriend out of loyalty to her undeserving friend despite her great attraction to him. The youngest has a weight problem and begins to starve herself.... *ad nauseam.* The book is an interesting read, but its overblown emotionalism and some poor writing, as well as the number of problems packed into one short novel make the book laughably unrealistic.

Sylvia Gunnery's *Taking Sides*, on the other hand, is a strong, well-written story about a girl whose friendship with a girl of a different racial background leads to unexpected explosions of violence and racial hatred around her, while she tries to steer a middle course, preserving her friendship yet realistically facing issues of racial hostility. Because the characters are so well-drawn and the story so fast-paced and cleverly developed, this novel is a delight to read, and does not immediately strike one as a "problem" novel at all.

But the best books of all in this group are the "Margaret" books by Bernice Hunter: *A Place for Margaret, Margaret in The Middle* and *Margaret on Her Way*. Historical novels set in the 1920s, these novels evoke both the rural Ontario and Toronto of that period faithfully. However, the characters of Margaret, Aunt Marg and Uncle Herb are so well-portrayed, and Margaret's escapades so captivating that, even for the real hater of historical fiction, these novels come alive and hold a fascination rare in any genre. There is no doubt that Hunter is one of Canada's best writers for young people, and the "Margaret" books confirm once more her tremendous talent in writing exciting books about young people who seem so real they might step right off the pages at any time.

LYNN WYTENBROEK

MAILLET

ANTONINE MAILLET, *L'Oursiade*. Leméac & Diffusion Prologue, n.p.

NOS RAPPORTS avec la nature doivent changer. Depuis toujours la gent humaine, se croyant au centre du monde, a entretenu un sentiment de supériorité à l'endroit de la nature. Ce sentiment, qui

donna les résultats que nous connaissons, ne peut plus être ignoré. Il met en jeu en effet non seulement la survie de maintes espèces animales en voie de disparition, mais bien celle de la planète tout entière. Conquise, pacifiée, dominée et encadrée à la mesure de nos rêves et de notre rapacité, la nature agonise actuellement sous nos yeux. Serons-nous en mesure de la sauver, et par ricochet, de nous sauver nous-mêmes? Telle est la question primordiale qui s'installe au coeur même de *L'Oursiade*, le dernier roman d'Antonine Maillet.

Sous la plume à la fois tendre, critique et humoristique de cette auteure féconde, l'opposition nature/culture est décrite comme ayant amputé, bêtes et êtres, de leur toute première filiation; celle qui, dans un passé antédiluvien, les unissait à la Grande Mère: la terre. Comment retrouver le souvenir de cette Mère commune enfoui au plus profond de notre mémoire collective? Comment renouer les liens avec un passé que nous ne savons pas avoir? Comment ressusciter le respect de l'autre qu'incarne à nos yeux l'animal? Comment "converser" avec ces symboles de la continuité perdue que sont "les ancêtres qui se cachent quelque part dans le temps"? À travers une galérie de personnages attachants, Antonine Maillet nous souffle le nom du chemin que nous devons emprunter si nous voulons qu'un jour "les animaux comme les autres, sauront sourire" (135).

Dans *L'Oursiade*, la notion même d'une distinction entre l'être et la nature est mise en cause. En effet, l'auteure crée un univers dans lequel les ours, les hommes et les femmes font, à titre égal, preuve d'émotions et le sentiments dits "humains." La colère, l'amour filial, l'amitié, le respect des aîné-e-s, la hantise de la mort, le désir de survie, le défaut d'intelligence ainsi que la capacité de réflexion, entre autres, caractérisent aussi bien ceux et celles qui appartiennent "à la tribu des ours noirs du pays de l'Atlantique" que les êtres humains.

À la manière de Colette, Maillet jette ici un regard anthropomorphique sur les bêtes. Inutile de s'étonner dès lors du fait que les principaux protagonistes qu'elle anime possèdent tous un homologue animal. À titre d'exemples, Ozite, une centenaire, a pour sosie l'Oursagénaire, ourse âgée de vingt-six ans. Au portrait de Simon le Métis — homme courageux et intègre que l'on dit avoir été "nourri au lait d'ours" — se juxtapose celui de Revenant-Noir, chef de la tribu des ours. Son fils Nounours, lui, a pour double Titoume, l'enfant adoptif d'Ozite et de Simon le Métis. De plus, les humains et les ours occupent une place comparable dans le déroulement même de l'intrigue.

En brossant le tableau de ces deux mondes, mondes à la fois distincts et analogues, Maillet suscite en nous deux principaux sentiments: le malaise et l'espoir. Le malaise naît du fait que nous sommes, au même titre que ces chasseurs qui n'aiment "que le trou de [leur] carabine," coupables d'un flagrant manque de respect à l'endroit de la nature. L'espoir, lui, plonge ses racines dans le fait que Titoume, symbole d'une nouvelle génération de jeunes, a compris que tout sur cette terre est intimement lié et que si nous voulons assurer sa survie, nous devons d'abord laisser "les autres [les animaux] vivre comme ils l'entendent."

L'idéologie écologique qui se dégage de *L'Oursiade*, et qui lui confère une portée universelle, rappelle celle qui sous-tend *L'homme qui plantait des arbres* de Jean Giono; texte porté à l'écran par Frédérick Beck. En effet, dans le roman comme dans le film, il est question de reboisement de nos forêts ravagées soit par nos industries voraces soit par le feu. Par ailleurs, Antonine Maillet semble croire, et ceci au même titre que Jean Giono, que la solution au problème de la destruction de l'environnement, problème qui menace toutes formes de vie, ne peut venir que d'actions désintéressées et individuelles.

Notons que ce roman révèle le double héritage littéraire d'Antonine Maillet: français et canadien. D'une part, *L'Oursiade* évoque la *Franciade* (1572), poème épique de Ronsard dans lequel il est aussi question de converser avec les ancêtres. De l'autre, il nous fait songer à *The Bear (1976)* de Marian Engel; texte tout entier axé sur la relation amoureuse entre un ours et une femme. Et, si le titre de ce roman témoigne de l'intérêt que Maillet porte au siècle de Rabelais, le sujet dont elle traite — la relation entre les ours et la gent humaine — la suite au coeur même de la modernité.

Roman d'initiation à la vie, *L'Oursiade* est aussi la voix de la relève que rêve d'un monde délivré de sa soif du sang, d'un monde où les humains acceptent enfin de vivre en harmonie avec la nature. Et, tout comme Ronsard dans sa vibrante élégie, *Contre les bûcherons de la forêt de Gastine* (1584), Maillet nous lance l'avertissement suivant: si nous nous obstinons à faire preuve d'un manque de respect à l'endroit de la nature, "Tout deviendra muet." Ainsi *L'Oursiade*, roman dans lequel la comédie se marie à la tragédie et la fantasmagorie au réalisme, constitue une oeuvre qui ne cessera pas de sitôt de nous hanter.

ANNE BROWN

AWAY FROM ZERO

KRISTJANA GUNNARS, *Zero Hour*. Red Deer College Press, pa. 9.95.

(13) "AY, MADAM, it is common." Thus Hamlet, responding to the admonitions of his mother and stepfather concerning the "common theme" of the "death of fathers." The weight of Hamlet's irony lies in his acknowledgement that what he feels is indeed "common," while he himself is far from common. His grief is "particular," and its particularity is in no way lessened by its "common theme." All of us have to come to terms with the death of parents; it is a theme so common that nothing new or original, it might seem, could ever be said about it. Yet for each of us it is absolutely particular, and for that reason too it seems impossible to write about. How can an emotion so private, so unique, ever be shared?

(12) "It is surprisingly difficult," writes Kristjana Gunnars, "to tell how you are feeling. . . . I find there is a laundering of emotions going around. Certain human experiences are made to come out sentimental. Birth and death are sweetened." Gunnars is writing about this common theme, the death of her father, and she is on her guard against any sentimentality. To do this, she searches for a style so clean, so pure, so ascetic that it will exclude any hint of sweetness. An emotion so utterly personal can only be expressed in a style of blank impersonality.

(11) One model for this style would be her father's own love for mathematics, for the pure symbols of relation, plus and minus. Zero. Trying to decide which course of medical treatment should be followed, she is satisfied only when all the possibilities can be laid out mathematically: "On the paper I wrote numbers. The numbers went as high as twelve and came in percentages of a hundred. Soon I had a graph."

(10) Another model is literary and theoretical. "I have heard of *ground zero* writing," she writes. "There are no assumptions to draw on. Nothing is understood. Culture has vanished."

Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953):

> . . . to create a colourless writing, freed from all bondage to a preordained state of language. . . . we know that some linguists establish between the two terms of a polar opposition (such as singular-plural, preterite-present) the existence of a third term, called a neutral term or zero element: thus between

> the subjunctive and the imperative moods, the indicative is according to them an amo- the indicative is according to them an amodal form. Proportionately speaking, writing at the zero degree is basically in the indicative mood, or if you like, amodal.... The new neutral writing takes its place in the midst of all those ejaculations and judgment, without becoming involved in any of them; it consists precisely in their absence. But this absence is complete, it implies no refuge, no secret; one cannot therefore say that it is an impassive mode of writing; rather, that it is innocent.

(9) The opening words of Gunnars' book: "To write you this I." Zero degree.

(8) One of Barthes' examples of "writing at the zero degree" is Camus' *L'Etranger.* The protagonist of this book is condemned precisely because of the neutral style he displays. He is a son who appears not to mourn adequately for his mother. In *Zero Hours*, a daughter mourns her father. She writes in a style which is not impassive, but which aspires towards innocence. Towards zero.

(7) Everything in *Zero Hour* falls towards zero. A car's odometer goes crazy: "The numbers rolled around on the meter at breakneck speed. I punched it back to zero and it rolled forward again equally fast. I punched it back to zero again and again." Bank accounts reach zero; parking meters reach zero; you start a new life from Mile Zero. On a mathematics exam, the writer scores "a round zero"; the target for the bomb is Ground Zero. Exits from a highway count down as you drive south: 255, 254, 253. "Perhaps we should paginate our books this way. Begin with the last page and count down to the end."

(6) After her father's death, the writer retreats to a city designated only as "the Gateway to the West." Here she finds an empty room, "A blessedly empty and private place." The emptiness of the room will echo and repeat the emptiness of the style. Furniture degree zero.

But of course, this emptiness is impossible to maintain. "As I suspected, items began to float into the second floor window.... A kettle.... A white plate, a black saucer, a white cup...."

Thus also, Roland Barthes:

> Unfortunately, nothing is more fickle than a colourless writing; mechanical habits are developed in the very place where freedom existed, a network of set forms hem in more and more the pristine freshness of discourse, a mode of writing appears afresh in lieu of an indefinite language. The writer, taking his place as a 'classic,' becomes the slavish imitator of his original creation, society demotes his writing to a mere manner, and returns him a prisoner to his own formal myths.

(5) "a network of set forms...." Kritjana Gunnars' previous book, *The Prowler*, carried the subtitle "A Novel." Much of the debate and fascination of that book revolved around its equivocal status between fiction and non-fiction. Was it truly a novel? Was it autobiography?

Zero Hour has no sub-title, no classification. At zero degree, Gunnars writes, "You are left with a story that is not a story. A novel that is not a novel, a poem no longer a poem." And, you will have noticed, a review that is not a review.

(4) So of course there is no such thing as a completely pure style, an absolute zero of writing. Gunnars may avoid the more obvious flourishes of simile and metaphor, and may strive for the amodal indicative, but one thing that she cannot avoid (and does not try to avoid) is intertextuality.

"*Literature itself*," Roland Barthes wrote, "*is never anything but a single text.*" Thus Gunnars, in her own text, quotes Barthes on the inevitability of quotation. Barthes, in fact, is quoted on four separate occasions; there are also direct quotations from Lermontov and Elizabeth Smart. Her father's decline and fall is explicitly paralleled with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall.* And in that description of the empty room as "a private place," don't you hear Hemingway? Marvell?

(3) The writer gets lost. On two occasions, in two different cities, she is forced to make detours. Climbing a mountain, she loses the hiking trail and ends up on a goat path. Straying from her father, she is attacked by an Arctic tern. Coming out of a forest, she is shot at by hunters. On Vancouver Island, "I did not know where we were . . . in that West which is rain forest and mist," though she has another writer with her as a guide.

Lost in a dark wood, with a writer as a guide.... Intertextual. Virgil Valgardson.

(2) *"There is no zero on the clock.* To get to zero, you have to step outside of time." Is death, then, the escape from language? Early in the book, the writer observes a Cree ceremony in which a woman who has lost her father performs a ceremonial dance in which she dances away her grief. "It struck me," she writes: "*they were not talking.* It was pure loss. Loss without commentary." There may not have been words, but there was, surely, a kind of language at work here. The woman's dance is described as being very simple: "She stepped in rhythm to the drums, placing each foot on the ground twice." Dancing degree zero. But the very form of the ritual, as ritual, places it within language, within commentary. For the living, there is no pure loss.

Thus writing, always, moves us away from zero.

(1) I this you write to.

(0)

STEPHEN SCOBIE

MESURE & DEMESURE

FRANCINE DERY, *Les territoires de l'excès.* Editions du Noroît, n.p.

FRANCE LACHAINE, *Desiderata.* Editions du Noroît, n.p.

JOCELYNE LEVESQUE, *Le temps mutilé.* Editions du Noroît, n.p.

MICHEL LEMAIRE, *Le goût de l'eau.* Editions du Noroît, n.p.

CLAUDE BEAUSOLEIL, *Une certaine fin de siècle,* t.II. Editions du Noroît/Castor astral, n.p.

ON A SOUVENT DIT des poètes que ce sont des *voix.* Prêtons l'oreille à cinq de ces voix, qui se font entendre à travers des recueils qui ont tous été publiés aux Editions du Noroît au Québec. Parmi celles-ci, deux se présentent sans vergogne sous le signe de l'excessif: *Desiderata* de France Lachine et *Les territoires de l'excès* de Francine Déry. Celle des deux qui se fait entendre avec la plus grande insistance, c'est sans doute Francine Déry. Elle se révèle pleinement à la fois dans le titre et la préface de Denis Vanier, si exceptionnellement en accord avec la tonalité propre à cette auteure.

Les trois parties du recueil donnent accès à trois *zones,* où l'on peut déceler en filigrane l'ébauche d'un récit autobiographique morcelé et épisodique. La voix qui nous parle appartient à un personnage de sexe féminin, "*l'excessive.*" Ce personnage apparaît dans le texte comme enfant, comme femme et parfois même comme "louve affamée." On nous mène vers une exploration de la région de "la cité trifluve" ainsi que des terres et des temps ancestraux d' outre-mer. Nous sommes également conduits par le libre jeu d'une imagination débridée vers des paysages fantasmatiques peuplés d'être chimériques. Ce voyage de Francine Déry vers ses origines exerce une certaine fascination. La matière dont elle dispose pourrait sûrement être transformée en

vraie poésie. Ici et là dans le texte, des étincelles jaillissent pour le prouver. Le discours poétique "en volutes" de cet "être traversé d'aiguilles" qui "nous pousse aux confins de l'excès," comme le dit Vanier, n'est cependant pas sans faire problème. Certes, la préciosité qui l'accompagne n'est pas dépourvu de qualités, mais les paraphrases et autres embellissements "excessifs" alourdissent le texte, quelquefois sous forme d'assez banales enigmes.

> A mi-chemin entre la vieille ville dite capitale et la cité tentaculaire aux cheminées dragonnes, le grand fleuve s'épanouit en trois rivières affluentes.

La tonalité générale est si virulent que le lecteur a du mal à se mettre au diapason. C'est une poésie qui ne plaira pleinement qu'au cercle restreint de ceux qui sont sur la même longueur d'ondes que "l'excessive," ceux qui sont prêts à "mener à bien une guerilla de l'hystérie totale pour la liberté, l'amour et ce que cela comporte de douleurs non-équivoques." (Denis Vanier).

Dans *Desiderata* de France Lachaine, il n'y a ni la même ampleur de l'écriture, ni le même accord entre le fond et la forme. Toute trace de récit est absente, et l'écriture se réduit à de brèves notations d'une extême concision. Quelquefois l'auteure se limite à nous donner des mots juxtaposés ou des phrases incomplètes qui prennent des allures faussement énigmatiques. L'excessif sous tous les aspects est moins présent que chez Francine Déry. Mais le même dispositif est là, depuis les spectres et les gouffres jusqu'aux corps mutilés, le tout dans un ensemble plein de raccourcis et finalement d'accès plutôt difficile. C'est en fin de compte un genre de poésie qui s'apparente par bien des côtés à celle de Francine Déry, mais avec moins de traces d'une authentique spécificité.

Chez Jocelyne Levesque, le climat est par contre plus paisible: ici il n'y a "aucune folie maléfique"; "aucune cicatrice aux fenêtres." Dans un recueil mince et condensé, écrit en versets ou petits poèmes très espacés et qui porte le titre *Le temps mutilé*, nous rencontrons un poète discret et effacé. Elle nous présente quelques-uns des thèmes les plus classiques de la poésie: enfance, mère, amour. Le tout baigne dans une atmosphère de crise existentielle, sans que son expression poétique soit toujours des plus convaincantes. Les maximes ou "dictons" qui émaillent les pages sont par exemple rarement assez heureuses pour justifier la place qu'elles occupent. Dans d'autres cas, cependant, le travail effectué sur l'agencement des mots et des phrases nous fait dresser l'oreille, car il y a là des notes plus prometteuses.

Du recueil des poèmes en prose de Michel Lemaire intitulé *Le goût de l'eau* —esthétiquement le plus réussi des cinq livres recensés — il émane une douce mélancolie qui est en parfait accord avec les thèmes indiqués. C'est une histoire qui se reproduit pour la nième fois: la rupture avec la femme aimée, la solitude, la vie qui continue si difficilement. La femme disparue fait sa réapparition comme leitmotiv dans les quatre parties dont se compose le recueil. Les réminiscences attachées à tout ce qu'ils ont vécu ensemble n'y peuvent rien. Il faut bien constater l'échec, mais à quoi s'accrocher? Différentes solutions se présentent à l'esprit pour surmonter la crise: expériences de la nature, poésie, art. Mais tout est en vain. Il ne reste que "le goût de l'eau," cette eau qui l'a accompagnée tout au long du parcours et qui tourne maintenant, comme il se doit, au noir. Michel Lemaire exprime avec brio les nuances de la souffrance à ce niveau détaché où il se tient. Tout se résout dans cette prose poétique d'excellente faconde. Le lecteur reste quand même sur sa faim. C'est une poésie qu'on lit avec plaisir, mais pour arriver à vraiment nous toucher, il faudrait prendre de plus grands risques.

Quand on se tourne vers le cinquième membre de notre quintette de poètes, c'est un tout autre son de cloche. Huit ans après la publication du premier tome de son monumental *Une certaine fin de siècle,* Claude Beausoleil fait paraître comme deuxième tome de la série un immense ouvrage de près de 500 pages. (Ce qui, par-dessus le marché, ne constitue qu'une partie de sa production de ces dernières années!) Devant un tel défi au bon sens même des connaisseurs de poésie, on se trouve désemparé. Il met la main sur tous les sujets possible, et en les traitant, il transforme tout en poésie, faisant fi de toutes les règles.

Cet ouragan poétique qui a pris possession de la poésie québécoise pourrait faire siens les mots d'Octavio Paz, pour qui "la grande affaire de la poésie moderne" c'est de "reconquérir le terrain du vécu." Et du vécu, il y en a chez Claude Beausoleil sous toutes ses formes. Ce qui implique bien évidemment l'expression du vécu individuel et quotidien, mais aussi une prise en main de tout ce qui l'entoure. D'abord et surtout la ville de Montréal, à laquelle toute la première partie du livre amoureusement consacrée. Mais ce poète ne s'arrête ni à sa ville natale, ni aux frontières nationales. Des parties entières de son livre sont consacrées à des hauts lieux de la culture internationale comme Paris, Venise et New York.

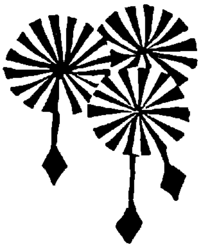
Où qu'il aille, Beausoleil s'exprime en vers aussi facilement qu'il respire; son ambition, c'est la poésie dans tous ses états:

> je veux vivre dans de grands livres
> où l'écriture est une histoire
> sans aucune contrainte
> que l'effluve des mots
> et c'est alors que j'entends
> dans le goût des dèmesures
> la plus secrète des mémoires

Ce genre de poésie ne vise pas la belle densité formelle des faiseurs de sonnets, mais cela n'empêche pas les bonheurs d'expression. Et les cas de remplissage sont plus rares qu'on ne pourrait le craindre. Dans la dernière partie du livre, de multiples interrogations au sujet de la poétique font leur apparition. Le vrai enjeu est ici de caractère universel. Quand, à la dernière page, le poète se demande avec Nelligan "Où vis-je où vais-je," il ajoute: "Si le siècle retient tes bras autour de la planète." C'est à travers la poésie que ce poète d'Amérique essaye d'embrasser le monde dans un mouvement de générosité et d'espoir et ainsi se distancie de cette autre fin de siècle.

Ces cinq recueils — une réussite, chacun de sa façon, du point de vue de la conception graphique et artistique — témoignent de la profonde vitalité de la poésie québécoise.

LEIF TUFTE



opinions and notes

JON WHYTE 1941-1992

JON WHYTE WAS MANY MEN — poet, essayist, naturalist, mountain man, leader in the writing community — but today I remember him as a genial host, a role that falls to the man who feels at home. And Jon was always at home in Banff.

Part of his charm was to make you, too, feel at home. Some years ago, he invited me to Banff to participate in the reading series he had organized. "From Red Deer to Banff," he said, "you should take the Triple C route: Carstairs, Cremona, Cochrane." He loved the play of sound, and he saw his world in terms of such play.

I arrived in the feathery snow of a November evening, and while Jon attended to other obligations, I visited shops on the main drag. On my way back to the gallery, I walked through a darkened parking lot. I saw a huge shape out of the corner of my eye and thought it was a monument or statue. The thing had huge antlers, it must be a moose, but why would people put a moose statue in a back lane? Then the statue moved. The moose was alive. I hurried to the gallery, Jon laughed at my fright. I ask if moose always came to his readings. "Right vowel, wrong species," he said. "That was Bruce, an elk."

Jon was a precise man, particular you might say. He had rules for his readings: you begin right on time, and read for about 90 minutes; then come the questions; then informal discussion and drinks in a local bar. A rigorous and rewarding regimen. (I can hear him guffaw, and run with it: "a peculiar and pleasing plan, a baffling and boisterous brew....")

Jon worked hard to create and deliver an audience. For my reading, most of the Banff writing group, of which Jon was a leader, showed up; others were visitors to Banff who saw the advertising Jon sponsored; some were acquaintances of mine whom Jon had telephoned. He saw no reason why the play of wit and ideas should be kept in the closet. I'm sure he would lasso people on the street if necessary.

He loved big outrageous things: mountains, Canada, big words, long poems, poems with epic intent. Some words from his essay "Cosmos: Order and Turning" echo for me. "Ain't no room for simple language in an epic," he wrote. "If you like your language full, robust, redolent, vibrating, full of echoes in the vault of myth and mind, you'll like the kind of epic I like." I find Jon's long poems, especially *Homage, Henry Kelsey,* to be the kind of epics I like.

Jon Whyte set out to celebrate the entire cosmos, everything from "Big Bang creation physics" to "the charm of quarks" to "mythology." But his enthusiasm was not indiscriminate. In the "Cosmos" essay, Jon gave his religion in a single sentence: "I believe Earth should be capitalized."

Jon Whyte gave himself to us in large measure. His *oeuvre* is such that we have by no means measured him; he continues to measure us. In that sense, he stands before us in our future and lightens the loss we feel in the present.

BIRK SPROXTON

On the cover of Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, $21.00 pa.), an Andean *silletero* carrying a European across the Cordillera on his back aptly delineates the emphases of the book. They are the "contact zone" or colonial frontier; the "anti-conquest" of the colonizer "whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess;" and the "autoethnography" formulated by "colonized subjects . . . to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms." The ideological framework of the book is generally Marxist, complemented by admirably detailed rhetorical analyses (especially impressive in the last chapter, entitled "Imperial Stylistics"). An entire section is devoted to travel writing about South America, with a special focus on Alexander-von-Humboldt. Curiously, Pratt does not dwell on the gender issue as much as she might have (an intriguing one in Humboldt's case), and her women travellers tend to be too idealized for comfort. The writing is often quite awkward, but there are also many zesty passages that indicate how superb a book — very important even as it is — this could have become with an additional revision. Versions of several of the chapters in *Imperial Eyes* have previously appeared elsewhere, most notably in James Clifford's *Writing Culture*, but also in a more recent collection edited by Willie van Peer, *The Taming of the Text: Explorations in Language, Literature and Culture* (Routledge), the general focus of which is difficult to make out: even the author of the cover blurb — anonymous member of a profession whose labours go generally unnoticed — seems to have been stymied by this one: "*Language* . . . is at the core of all texts, and constitutes textual functions" and so on. Volume 4 of "English Literature and the Wider World" covers 1876-1918, a particularly rich period including Hardy, Morris, Kipling, Stevenson, Conrad, Forster, and Wells. *The Ends of the Earth*, ed. Simon Gatrell (Ashfield) costs an appalling $49.95, but there is much thoughtful work to be found in it. As in the previous volumes, the 66-page introduction in particular is very valuable, outlining political developments, travel and travel writing, and the literary response (with a special section on response "region by region"). Even someone who has ploughed through most available criticism on the topic is bound to find something new here: for me, it was the realization that the introduction of the motor-car revived the "network of roads that had been decaying since the development of the railway systems of Europe." Gatrell's distinction between conventional guidebooks such as *Baedeckers* and "guides to the dominions and colonies" is also very valuable. One such book, *The Guide to South Africa for the Use of Tourists, Sportsmen, Invalids and Settlers*, in its 8th edition in 1900-1901, furnishes almost no information on the native population, but projects a tone of "amazing and rapid progress amidst desert land, of fertility of capital investment . . ." In contrast to Gatrell's lively writing Helen Angelomatis-Tsougarakis' *The Eve of the Greek Revival: British Travellers' Perceptions of Early Nineteenth-Century Greece* (Routledge, n.p.) is rather dry fare, and the author spends so much time *correcting* the travellers' perceptions (rather than analyzing the *perceptions*) that one wonders why she bothered with them in the first place. But Angelomatis-Tsougarakis has unearthed some fairly obscure materials, and researchers of the period will be glad to know about them. Another book preoccupied with travel to Greece is Robert Eisner's *Travelers to an Antique Land: The History and Literature of Travel to Greece* (Routledge, $31.95). Anyone looking for a comprehensive survey of the matter will have to turn to this book and its very fine bibliography, which is not to say the book is without flaws. Annoyingly, it cannot make up its mind what it wants to be: an elitist diatribe against modern tourism, a historical work, travel or food writing (of a rather awkward kind: after salivating my way through Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence*, I set demanding standards). Even the illustrations are confusing: a series of historical engravings and sketches is followed by a few gloomy-looking contemporary black-and-white photographs, among them one of "an old door and padlock," chosen because "black-and-white [photography] suits the travel book more than color, for it summons forth the viewer's inventive faculties, whereas color stifles them." On the previous page, Eisner prides himself on spotting eleven clichés in a random sentence from Alistair Maclean's *The Guns of Navarone*. An attentive reader might find even more in this book.

E.-M. K.

Probing Canadian Culture, eds. Peter Easingwood, Konrad Gross, Wolfgang Klooss (AV-Verlag, n.p.) is the first book publication of the German Canadianists' journal *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien*. The essays assembled here are based on papers presented at a 1989 conference in Kiel, Germany, and co-sponsored by the *Deutsche Gesellschafte für Kanada-Studien* and the British Association for Canadian Studies. Contributors include Allan Smith on English-Canadian cultural history, Maria Tippett on the Canada Council, Ian MacLaren on Samuel Hearne, Walter Pache on "Modern Canadian Poetry and the Classical Tradition," Coral Ann Howells on "Feminist Perspectives: Canadian Women's Fiction in English" and many others. Neil Harris's *Cultural Excursions: Marketing*

Appetites and Cultural Tastes in North America (Chicago U.P., $24.95) contains essays ranging from discussions of American World Fairs and the music of John Philip Sousa, to the architecture of shopping malls and the semiotics of halftone photography. The best pieces are carefully researched historical essays, such as the one on Sousa which heaps together useful detail about the patriotic and consumerist contexts of marching band music. Elsewhere the book somewhat suffers from being a compilation of occasional pieces written over a period of 15 years: there are redundancies and abrupt conclusions. Robert C. Allen's *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (North Carolina, $12.95 pa.) is a richly researched account of a popular theatrical entertainment, its performers, audience, and ideological underpinnings. Although the evocation of Mikhail Bakhtin is too predictable by far, the book makes a laudable effort to place the mass of material assembled into a theoretical perspective. Rosalind Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination* (MIT, n.p.) discusses, among other topics, the translation of geological time into subterranean spatial formations, the curious coexistence of underground purgatorial and utopian worlds, and the phenomenology of below-surface structures such as sewerage systems, tunnels, and coal mines. There is much interesting (and alarming) material here, including Thomas Huxley's disdainful description of the Neanderthal skull as belonging to "a congenital idiot or, possibly, a Cossack or 'a powerfully organized Celt' (since it 'somewhat resembl[ed] the skull of a modern Irishman with low mental organization')." Overall, however, the book is thin, probably because there are too many plot summaries of books both famous and obscure. *Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*, volume 5 of *A History of Private Life*, ed. Antoine Prost and Gérard Vincent (Belknap, n.p.) is as beautifully produced and enjoyable as the previous volumes in the series. Particularly illuminating are the essays gathered under the heading "Nations of Families," with pieces on the Swedish, Italian, German, and American families. Here it also becomes apparent that the contributing authors' views are sometimes in conflict. Thus, the essay on Sweden finds the prohibition of war toys in that country "rather silly," whereas the essay on Germany criticizes the continuing sale of such toys as alarming. Canadian readers will find the sections on an emergent multiculturalism in France particularly interesting.

E.-M. K.

A NUMBER OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS undertake to document Vancouver's cultural history, especially its "golden decade," the 1960s. Among these is the *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, ed. Stan Douglas, fastidiously published and copiously illustrated by Talonbooks. A cranky preface by Douglas (describing "the academic model of a two- or three-day conference" as one in which "presenters and their respondents gather for a weekend to exchange ideas and, more likely, schmooze") as well as a pugnacious introduction, also by Douglas, set the tone for the collection which dwells on marginalized aspects of Vancouver's cultural scene. Despite its distrust of academe, however, the work is scholarly without being tedious: no casual writing or footnoting here, but thoughtful, thorough work throughout. Particularly admirable, to me, were Robin Peck's ingenious "Sculpture and The Sculptural in Halifax and Vancouver," which draws its comparison against a broadly sketched juxtaposition of the two cities; Keith Wallace's history of artist-run centres in Vancouver, which gives Intermedia the due it deserves, and Carol Williams' extremely useful "A Working Chronology of Feminist Cultural Activities and Events in Vancouver: 1970-1990." The latter makes for a welcome complement to the chronologies which make the Vancouver Art Gallery's *Vancouver: Art and Artists 1931-83 (1983)* such a valuable resource. *Vancouver Forum 1: Old Powers, New Forces* ed. Max Wyman (Douglas & McIntyre, $19.95 pb.), the first in a prospective series of volumes, also has some good essays. Written from the point of view of a lawyer who is also a writer, Leslie Hall Pinder's documentation of the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en case involving Native land claims hauntingly evokes the clash of western legal and Native epistemologies. It is followed by an angry attack by Métis film-maker Loretta Todd on "progressive artist[s]" whose "work says more about the artist than the culture to which they claim to be paying tribute." Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker describes the dynamic created in Vancouver's art scene by oriental and Native artists, and her essay is complemented by dancer Jay Hirabayashi's memoir. The volume is illustrated by local artists. *Vancouver and Its Region* (UBC Press) has been edited by two eminent UBC geographers, Graeme Wynn and Timothy Oke. Besides essays that will appeal to the specialist, there are also contributions of a more general interest. I particularly enjoyed Wynn's "The Rise of Vancouver" and "Time to Grow Up? From Urban Village to World City, 1966-91" (co-authored by David Ley, Daniel Hiebert, and Geraldine Pratt) which puts such recent debates as the one over the architectural, and cultural changes in the Kerrisdale neighbourhood into a useful larger perspective. My own prejudices towards geographers were dealt a severe blow when I read, with growing delight, Derek Gregory's "Epilogue" which comes peppered with references to Atwood, Raymond Williams, David Harvey, and James Clifford.

E.-M.K.

ONLY THE TITLE is unfortunate in Paul Litt's *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission* (U of T, $19.95 pb), which makes for an important complement to Maria Tippett's *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission* (1990). Litt presents a detailed and lively anatomy of the Commission, its mythic status in Canadian cultural history, the personalities who shaped it, the ideological assumptions that informed it, and its lasting impact. Massey's Arnoldian ambitions to preserve "high" culture in the face of American-inspired mass culture has been alternately criticized as a colonialist anachronism and a logical continuation of the imperialist brand of nationalism which was to find it apogee in George Grant's *Lament for a Nation.* Litt is very good in bringing the members of the Commission to life and in depicting their inter-personal dynamics. I was particularly interested in the contribution of the sole female member, Hilda Neatby, "that lady commissioner who heads a University History Department," and was bemused by Litt's perception of her. His respect (she "had the historical knowledge and intellectual acuity to back them up with convincing arguments" and she "leaned into the harness as things bogged down and pulled the project forwards") is tempered by some old-fashioned gender-stereotyping of which the horse metaphor just quoted is only one. Elsewhere, this intellectual and "puritanical" woman is described as "ripp[ing] apart Surveyer's arguments with methodical hostility," when she encounters opposition to her ideas, but as "only human" when she responds to Lévesque's assurance that her presence is indispensable: "she bowed to the onslaught of cajolery and flattery and agreed to be there." She could be relied upon to ruin the boys' fun, specifically Larry MacKenzie's "down-to-earth bonhomie and boisterous spirit." Sound familiar? Anyone drafted to serve on university committees will also groan at the parallels with to-day's educational (and political) concerns and the apparent lack of progress since the days of the Commission. The Humanities, undervalued and neglected then, remain that way, and the various therapeutic departures from the Commission's Arnoldian ideas that we have witnessed do not seem to have made much of a difference. And yet the Commission heard Harold McKiel, Vice-President of Mount Allison University and an engineer by training, who said, "the only basis on which international understanding can be attained, is an adequate knowledge of your fellow man. And that comes from the humanities and social sciences and not from science . . ." The book comes with extensive appendices of which "That a Spade be Called a Spade," a parody of a Commission meeting, is my favourite.

E.-M. K.

A NUMBER OF RECENT BOOKS attempt to view the literature of the Americas as a coherent entity, possibly to challenge the assumption, widespread among older comparatists, that only the European literatures deserve such a description. Unfortunately, Canadian literature makes only a brief appearance in most of these Pan-American efforts. Thus Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?* (Duke, $19.95 pb) contains numerous essays comparing American and Latin-American authors, but only one involving a Canadian author. Unfortunately, René Pieto's piece on Severo Sarduy and Nicole Brossard lacks any background on Latin-American/Québécois connections and its florid style does not make for easy reading. Brazilianist Richard M. Morse's *New World Soundings: Culture and Ideology in the Americas* (Johns Hopkins, $34.50) is a collection of essays written over several decades. More than other similar works, this book creates connections between the individual pieces by providing an excellent introduction and often successful transitions, and the result is an impressive testimonial to the work of a lifetime. Particularly useful, to a Canadianist and Commonwealth scholar, is the chapter on "Language in America," which, in documenting the impact of indigenous languages to the vernacular of the Americas, includes comparisons with language developments in French Canada and the Caribbean. A comparatist approach also informs the chapter on "Four American Poets," which juxtaposes the modernism of T. S. Eliot and W. C. Williams on the one hand with that of Oswald and Mário de Andrade on the other. Canadianists will be interested in "McLuhanaima: The Solid Gold Hero," Morse's parody of Mário de

Andrade's Ulyssean epic *Macunaima* (1928), the ur-text of Magic Realism. For an overview of Latin-American literature, Gerald Martin's *Journeys Through the Labyrinth: Latin American Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (Verso) is a good place to start. In addition to some 350 pages of discussion, there are a bibliography and lists of translations available for each author. Unfortunately, all quotations are given in translation only, and the writing tends to be rather congested, but this is still a good book to have around for reference. *Compañeros: An Anthology of Writings about Latin America,* eds. Hugh Hazelton and Gary Geddes (Cormorant) contains "poetry, short fiction, and descriptive writing about Latin America" by Canadians, including immigrants from Latin American countries. As usual in an anthology, the pieces range from the excellent to the awful, and there are some very sharp juxtapositions between the touristy effusions of visiting Anglo- and French-Canadians and the political testimonial of exiled Chileans and El Salvadoreans such as Gonzalo Millán, Jorge Etcheverry, and others. The most intolerable exerpt is from Robert Baillie's *Les Voyants,* in which white self-loathing reaches new heights: "And that odour of white man, of white woman. How can anyone bear that sticky scent of rot that comes oozingly out of their bodies' unfathomable depths?" And so on. Also of interest are Anthony Payden's *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination* (Yale, $22.50) with with chapters on "The *Criollo* uses of the Amerindian Past" and "The Languages of Revolution in Spanish America," and Lois Parkinson Zanora's *Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction* (Cambridge) with sections on Márquez, Pynchon, Cortázar, Barth, Percy and Fuentes.

E.-M. K.

ON THE VERGE

*** BARRY M. GOUGH, *The Northwest Coast: British Navigation, Trade, and Discoveries to 1812.* UBC Press, $39.95. Barry Gough has already established a place for himself as a maritime and notably a naval historian of the Pacific Northwest Coast, mainly in the days before it became incorporated in Canada. Without taking an entirely new tack from *Distant Dominions* and *Gunboat Frontier,* Gough's new book brings together all the strains of scientific speculation, commercial rapacity and imperial ambition that combined with naval power to turn the "discoveries" on the Northwest Coast to the benefit of the British Empire and also, in unintended ways, of the American republic. It is good conventional history, but, unlike a really radical work like Ronald Wright's *Stolen Continetts* it evades the great ethical question of "discovery"; what really occurs when technologically advanced peoples happen upon countries that have their own adequate civilizations but insufficient protection. It is true that in another of his books on the Northwest, *Gunboat Frontier,* Gough does touch on the (im)morality of empire, but in a functional rather than a philosophical way. Still, *The Northwest Coast* for all its unanswered questions is a useful addition to the library of anyone interested in imperial or in local Northwest history.

G.W.

***** RONALD WRIGHT, *Stolen Continents: The New World through Indian Eyes since 1492.* Penguin, $29.99. Canada, perhaps because we are daily alive to our great spaces, our vast physical monotonies, has produced very few good travel writers. Ronald Wright is one of them with his three wide-ranging narratives that involved deep immersion in the lives of native groups with strong traditions in various parts of the world. *Cut Stones and Crossroads* concerned his wanderings among Quechua-speaking people in the Andes, *Time Among the Mayas* described his journeys among that ancient and historic people from Belize to Guatemala, the whole area over which they keep their traditions alive, and *On Fijian Islands* was centred on the clan life of the Fijians, whose main problem is a multicultural one — that they are only half their country's population, and communicate with the other Indian half in the language of a third party, their former English conquerors.

These travels, particularly in the Americas, have contributed greatly to Ronald Wright's

Stolen Continents, which has taken the Columbus fifth centenary as the reason for a questioning work of history. Wright questions how there can be a "New World" that is already inhabited by ancient and complex peoples, whose main (if fatal) differences from Europeans were technological. And he pushes aside the family dispute relating to the primacy of Leif Ericsson or Columbus, for how can one have "discovered" a continent already populated by civilized people whose ancestors arrived many millenna ago, after the great Ice Age?

Wright traces the fates of the native civilizations: Inca, Maya, Aztec, Cherokee and Iroquois — the last two of them offering interesting variations on democratic order. He studies them in each of three phases — that of "Invasion" ("the Conquest" and other penetration), that of "Resistance," showing that the ultimate effects of the conquests were as bad on the land as on the people, and "Rebirth," in which he sees the situation stabilizing and native peoples reinforcing their pride and regaining some of their rights. He supports his arguments entirely with native sources, though sometimes at secondhand; the accounts written in Spanish by Aztecs and Incas after they had learnt the conqueror's language, the surviving codices and chronicles, often sustained to this day among the Maya, and white men's accounts of the speeches of Cherokee and Iroquois chiefs and orators, among whom public speaking was a major art.

Stolen Continents is a major statement from an unaccustomed point of view, and its thesis holds well except for a degree of optimism in the section named "Rebirth." I think a great deal more evidence of international interest is needed before native traditions, especially in Latin American countries, are regenerated and transformed so that they can work in a modern world still oriented to Caucasian models and thinking.

G.W.

** RUTH HOLMES WHITEHEAD, *The Old Man Told Us: Excerpts from Micmac History, 1500-1950*. Nimbus Publishing, $17.95. *The Old Man Told Us* did not turn out what its title led me to expect. In this age of oral history I had looked forward to a volume consisting principally of the utterances of elders, recorded no matter how and when, regarding Micmac origins and experiences. In fact, it might more justly be called *The Old Records Told Us*, for it is essentially an archival exercise, almost all its material written out long ago and often published. The one virtue is that the material is contemporary to the period — utterances of the changing times. But it tells us just as much about white men's attitudes as about Micmac attitudes and disappointingly little about what the Micmac had to say of their past before the white men came.

G.W.

**** PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH, *The Secret Ring: Freud's Inner Circle and the Politics of Psychoanalysis*. Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, $26.95. Sigmund Freud's idea of the primal family as he presented it in *Totem and Taboo* and other works may have been anthropologically untenable; he was always a better fantasist than a scientist. But what he did observe was a pattern that occurs frequently where human relations move out of genuine community and become invloved in considerations of power. There is plentiful evidence that in most primeval societies the mother was dominant, but Freud's theory — trimmed of its extravagances, does fit institutions and societies where power and authority begin to dominate, as in governments and in political or quasi-political structures like the Marxist movements and international psychology so far as Freud maintained control.

Phyllis Grosskurth, who gave us such admirable studies of John Addington Symonds and Havelock Ellis, has long been haunting the closely guarded archives of official psychoanalysis. She has written a biography of the heretical child psychologist, Melanie Klein, and now she edges nearer the heart of the movement with an account of how, after the departure of the fallen but once beloved angel, Carl Jung, Freud set up or connived at the setting up of a Secret Committee that would control the international psychoanalytical movement, search out and repel heresy and keep a bodyguard of faithful "sons" around the father figure of "the Professor."

It is a strange group for the ordinary reader to judge. Are they merely, in all their childish squabbling, a group of psychological casualties drawn to mental sickness by their own conditions? Or are we seeing a power struggle between differing personalities, the original-thinking and ultimately irreconcilable Otto Rank, the love-hungering Ferenczi, the power-craving Abraham, the mysterious Eitigon (was he really an NKVD spy?), the odious intriguer Ernest Jones? Phyllis Grosskurth offers no final judgments; that, after all, is not a group biographer's task. She stands like the hooded photographer of the Freudian age, who figures so effectively and so often in the pages of her book with visible evidence of character. But she is laudably ruthless in her penetration of their naive pretences, and compassionate in judgment, and wisely she does not attempt a final verdict of Freud, that great romantic who bound our minds for so long in such fragile chains. More study is clearly needed when the Freudian sources are fully available.

G.W.

*** PHIL JENKINS, with photographs by Ken Ginn, *Fields of Vision*. McClelland & Stewart, $29.95. This is the kind of gimmick-based book that usually fails, but in this case achieves success because of the nature of its over-riding subject, the often mystifying gallantry or obstinacy that keeps so much of Canada's widespread countryside under crops. In such a book there will be an opening gambit — in this case the idea of travelling from the easternmost family farm in Canada (on Newfoundland) to the westernmost (in Yukon Territory) and giving an idea why, in spite of all the factors against them, farmers still do stay in their farms and seek ways to escape the greed of money-crazed bankers. It is not really an inspiringly written work (*cosy* would be the best descriptive adjective), and the illustrations are like the family photographs you see in rather rustic photographers' windows, but the subject matter — the people of Canada's fields and farms — gives its own special life to the book. There was a time — which ended surprisingly recently — when most Canadian prose was fiction about farm life. Then lives were destroyed in the pages of Grove and Ostenso, "conquering" the land; now lives are being destroyed or threatened in the process of defending it from money monsters just as relentless as nature. Some farmers surrender; some resist, with ingenuity as well as dedication, and the stories of their struggles — often self-told in *Fields of Vision* — are as fascinating as they are admirable. Perhaps it is more of a writer's book, for the hints it offers of fresh approaches to lives rendered as fiction, rather than a reader's book, though it will jolt the anti-farmer stereotype that most townspeople sustain.

G.W.

LAST PAGE

DEFINING THE CONTEXT of interpretation continues to figure as a recurrent impulse in contemporary criticism. Consider A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward's edited collection, ***Redefining American Literary History*** (MLA, n.p.). A series of discursive essays, it examines the character of canonicity in American studies — instructively analyzing, in part, the (barely shifting) contents of "standard" American Literature anthologies over the course of the last half-century. It also probes the alternatives: Hispanic, Native, African-American, and Asian-American literature in particular. Shirley Lim, Amy Ling, and Linda Ching Sledge, writing on the last of these subjects, compose one of the most interesting sections of the volume. Elsewhere, the writers also provide helpful information, focusing on orality, trickster stories, and the fluidity of "tradition." Yet, with all the concern for the ***politics*** of literary hierarchies, the writers avoid one of the essential questions that underlies their newly minted categories: how does a critic — of a culture — estimate ***language***? The politics of estimation is one thing, the politics of language another. Behind both sits the question that current criticism is reluctant to address: why is it that some arrangements of language (whether oral or written) are deemed "artistic" and others not? Relying on a simplistic deconstructionist theory — to say that all formulations have equivalent value — will not do. Such a position is both mindless and banal. Plainly, political enlightenment does not do away with the recognition of value; recognizing value, moreover, means drawing distinctions between works of greater and lesser worth. But it surely also means seeking to understand the reason why, for the alternatives are passive and solipsistic. Automatically accepting others' values and automatically preferring one's own biases to a considered justification of an evaluative decision are, alike, dead ends.

In the long run, the bibliography in this work might be its most useful feature, as in Ruoff's other book, ***American Indian Writers*** (MLA, n.p.). An historical and thematic survey — explicatory and summarizing — the latter work ranges inconsistently through its subject. Canadian Native writing is lumped in occasionally, but generally ignored: Pauline Johnson, George Copway, Markoosie, and Thomas King (an odd foursome) make it in, but Basil Johnston, Joan Crate, Daniel David Moses, and Tomson Highway (to pick four others at random) do not. Nor does Ruoff adequately address the way the politics of nationhood (despite romantic notions of *one* continental Native culture) has affected the literary perspectives of different groups of writers in Canada and the United States.

The relations between national politics and cultural development is the open subject of such works as *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominion between the Wars* (Manchester UP/St. Martin's, U.S. $59.95), ed. Stephen Constantine, and Julia Frederikse's *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-racialism in South Africa* (Indiana UP, n.p.). Frederikse's survey of political attempts to construct a *non*-racial society challenges current conventional wisdom about South African history; Constantine's collection emphasizes that emigration was not a neutral act but one tied up with the political desire to solve economic crises at home, the imperial relation between ethnicity and the values of protestantism, and the definition of gender roles through a deliberate marketing of such images as that of "wholesomeness."

The relation between national politics and literary endeavour is taken up in several other books. Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward Said collaborate (by accident of their three separate essays being bound together) in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (U. Minnesota P, $25.00; pa. $9.95), without markedly advancing criticism. One says that nationalism is a contradictory notion, the second that individuals never know all the conditions that affect them, the third that Yeats contributed to decolonization. *Literature and Exile*, ed. David Bevan (Rodopi, U.S. $24.00) — including essays on Nabokov, Rushdie, James, and Quebec writing — argues that exile is "a constant of our common predicament," i.e. a condition of experience. More detailed, and more valuable, are the special issue of *Third Text* (vol. 11, Summer 1990) called "Beyond the Rushdie Affair," and two further books: Mark Orkin's *Drama and the South African State* (Manchester UP/St. Martin's, U.S. $59.95; pa. $16.95), and *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Exoticism, Imperialism* (U. Pennsylvania P, $34.95), ed. Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo. (Rushdie's own essays and reviews — the most interesting being his personal statements of belief and his comments on film — have been collected as *Imaginary Homelands* [Viking, n.p.].)

The contributors to *Third Text* (Ali Mazrui, Gayatri Spivak, Wilson Harris, among others) demonstrate *by their practice* how context affects political and literary judgment, by variously attacking an author's "racism," exposing a culture's "bigotry," and theorizing about counter-discursiveness and the relation between faith and expression. Orkin asks "how the suppressed communicate" in a society where language has been effectively employed to diminish a whole people; his answer is "discursive struggle" — the verbal *forms* of "Contestation, dissent, and dialogue" being used (as in *Sarafina!* and the plays of Mhlophe and Fugard) as ways of combatting the Calvinist politics of various Afrikaner Separation Acts. Arac and Ritvo are more *generally* concerned with the way "political transformations at the level of the state" affect writing; context-minded but document-based, the essays they collect range widely, examining Ahab and the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, Lady Gregory and the idea of National Theatre, "discoverer's authority" in Lewis and Clark, and (in one of the best essays, one called "The Holy Book of Empire") the relation between cultural hierarchies and religious doctrine, as evidenced by the transactions of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Gayl Jones, in *Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature* (Harvard UP, n.p.), examines the question of form in more detail, somewhat mechanically dividing her texts into three genres and then demonstrating how, in each, "dialect" is affected by slang, blues, and jazz, till the language of African American texts can be read as "modality" rather than as "substandard variation." Chantal Zabus, in *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (Rodopi, US $35.00), permits her prose to become clotted with jargon. This is a book about "pidginization," "calquing," "code-switching," and "relexification," beneath which are some useful statistics on shifts in African educational structures (involving the relative status of English in African mother-tongue) and some interesting reflections on the *function* of pidgin and native-language passages in African fiction. To a degree. Zabus demonstrates her subject by her method — using French and Latin in her own English (*volte-face, rustici, illiterati*): *inter alia*, as it were, demonstrating how language variations can sometimes serve as implicit appeals to authenticity and authority.

Two other books question received authority rather differently. Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson's anthology, *Her True-True Name* (Heinemann, $7.95), demonstrates the work of a wide range of Caribbean women writers (Dionne Brand, Grace Nichols, Erna Brodber, Olive Senior, Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, etc.: until recently ignored by most critical generalizations about the area), and demonstrates, too, how the recurrent concern for mother-daughter connections in these works — for the mother's *place* — constitutes (as the anthology title has it) a process of contextualizing self-knowledge and committing oneself to a positive future. Sydney Janet Kaplan's *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (Cornell UP, $29.95; pa. $12.95) — one of the finest books ever published on Mansfield — challenges another canard of literary history: i.e. that women were peripheral to Modernism. By showing how Mansfield learned about the literary coding of sexuality and then honed her craft — the book is full of useful comparative allusions to Wilde, Chekhov, and Woolf — Kaplan demonstrates how questions of genre, gender, technical imitation, and technical innovation overlap, persuasively arguing that the gender-related artifice that Mansfield developed became "central" to the Modernist movement.

One final enterprise reveals both the importance of contextualizing and some of its limitations. Hugh Honour's 2-volume *The Image of Black in Western Art* (Harvard UP, n.p.) is a massive undertaking, full of instructive visual examples (excellently reproduced, many in colour) and lucidly written (if not always apparently conscious of the limits that language, too, imposes on perspective). Start, for example, with the title words "Black" and "Western." The two volumes respectively focus on abolitionist emblems (the "*classic*-izing" of freedom and Empire and the equation between realism and "quaintness") and on the emergence of various tropes (orientalism, savagery, service, entertainment, domesticity) during the period between the American Revolution and World War I. "Black" comes loosely to mean "other" (including the Arab World, in some cases) — according to standard American perceptions of "other." Well, this *is* a study of *images*. But "Western" obviously means "European and American." Not Canadian. Not Australian. (Gauguin's Polynesians are "black," by this definition, but Melanesian culture goes essentially unrepresented.)

While a chapter called "Black Models/White Myths" effectively demonstrates how Western painting *translated* "reality" as it *represented* it — by the very techniques it used, techniques of proportion, colour, and arrangement — there are other occasions when the language of commentary falls short of the intent. Honour makes clear that the "Jim Crow" figures reproduced in this collection are *caricatures*, and he emphasizes the politics of caricature by including an extensive and detailed analysis of the relation between racism and the conventional aesthetics of representing the human body. But, as with many another endeavour, dismissing is easy, praise harder to convey. When Honour interprets a painting by commending its "warmly humane and noble image" or its "frank gaze and engaging smile," he is caught up (against his better judgment, I suspect) in the politics that Arac and Ritvo write about, whereby certain conventions of "order" or "regularity" are (subliminally?) equated with, *and then used generally, to justify*, a particular cultural version of the way the world should be.

W.N.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The XIVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association / Association International de Littérature Comparée (ICLA/AILC) will be held 15-20 August, 1994 on the campus of the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. The theme of the Congress is *Literature and Diversity: Languages, Cultures, Societies / Littérature et Diversité: Langues, Cultures, Sociétés*. Please send us your abstract (preferably word-processed or typewritten) of your presentation not exceeding 300 words. **Your abstract must reach our office by March 31, 1993.** For further inquiries please contact the Office of the Congress (Milan V. Dimić, General Organizer; Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, Executive Secretary) at the Research Institute for Comparative Literature, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, T6G 2E6; Ph. 403 492-4776; Fax 403 492-5662; E-Mail stotosy @vm. ucs. ualberta.ca.

CALL FOR PAPERS & POEMS

Canadian Literature seeks submissions relating to East Asian-Canadian and Hispanic-Canadian authors, texts, and literary questions.

All submissions should reach the Editor by September 1993, and should be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Preliminary letters of enquiry would by welcome.

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We are happy to announce that the IVth **International Conference on the Empirical Study of Literature** will be held at the Institute for Psychology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in Budapest, August 24-27, 1994.

Colleagues interested in participating are invited to send three copies of an abstract of max. 300 words in English to Professor László Halász, **before September 15, 1993** at the Institute for Psychology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, P.O. Box 398, H-1394 Budapest, Hungary; Fax: 36-1- 142-O514. After selection, participants will be notified about the form of their presentation, i.e., lecture- or poster-format presentation, by **March 15, 1994**. It will be required that the accepted papers be sent to the respective chairpersons of the particular topic section where the paper/poster will be presented by the end of **July 1994**. Participants will be notified at the time of acceptance for presentation of the name and address of the chairperson of his/her presentation. Our colleagues are also invited to call attention to this Conference of their colleagues in their various fields of study.

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5) THE NOTION OF LITERATURE IN THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF LITERATURE
6) CULTURAL IDENTITY AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH;
7) THE PROBLEMATICS OF "EMPIRICAL" IN THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF LITERATURE;
8) LITERARY SYSTEMS — A COMPARISON OF THEIR FORMS AND DEVE-LOPMENT IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT.

As in previous conferences, papers addressing questions and problems of the empirical/constructivist study of literature, as well as applications of frameworks and methodologies to literature addressing basic problems and problems relevant for the empirical/constructivist study of literature will be preferred. In other words, the conference's main objectives are the discussion of questions about interventions into research organization and the concentration on efforts in order to improve the status and efficiency of the empirical/constructivist study of literature.