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Summer, 1993



FEMALE SUBJECTS
& MALE PLOTS

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1992

**The Struggle for Social Justice in B.C.:
Helena Gutteridge: The Unknown Reformer
UBC Press**

In a year of diverse biographies dominated by studies of women and political figures, Irene Howard's book about Helena Gutteridge emerges the 1992 winner. Howard reminds readers that significant changes in society occur through the efforts of dedicated individuals who often go unrecognized by their contemporaries and who long remain unknown in later social history. Howard's well-researched book engages the reader not only with a remarkable person but also with her social contexts. Howard documents Gutteridge's activism as a suffragist, her continuation of the fight for woman's suffrage after emigrating from England to Canada in 1911, and her fifty-year fight for justice for women, workers, visible minorities, and the poor.

Other biographies of women deserve notice. *Mark My Words* by Marjorie Nichols reveals an astute rebel making her public way in the male-dominated workplace of journalism, but struggling privately with a difficult family life and a self-destructive lifestyle. Mick Lowe's *One Woman Army* shows Claire Culhane's dramatic efforts on behalf of prisoners to be but the most public of a life-long activist's causes. Three women less in the public eye are subjects of other books. All are connected with "firsts": Dr. Elinor Black, the first woman to head a department at a Canadian medical school; Dr. Charlotte Ross, Quebec's first woman physician; and experimental physicist Harriet Brooks, one of Canada's first researchers in radioactivity.

Political biographies abounded in 1992 — *Sir Oliver Mowat* by A. Margaret Evans, *"Just Call Me Mitch": The Life of Mitchell F. Hepburn* by John T. Saywell, *Grant Notley: The Social Conscience of Alberta* by Howard Leeson, and *Clyde Wells: A Political Biography* by Claire Hoy, but Donald J. Horton's highly readable *André Laurendeau: French Canadian Nationalist 1912-1968* deserves special attention. Particularly fascinating: Horton's discussion of Laurendeau's work as co-chair of the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and of his growing sense that Quebec society was too closed.

J.F.

contents

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Editorial: The Year in 1992

2

ARTICLES

STEPHEN AHERN

"Meat Like You Like It": The Production
of Identity in Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

8

MARLENE GOLDMAN

A Deleuzian Analysis of Aritha van Herk's
No Fixed Address and *Places Far From
Ellesmere*

21

RUTH PANOFSKY

From Complicity to Subversion: The
Female Subject in Adele Wiseman's Novels

41

AJAY HEBLE

"A Foreign Presence in the Stall":
Towards a Poetics of Cultural Hybridity
in Rohinton Mistry's Migration Stories

51

RAY WILTON

"Things Happened": Narrative in Michael
Ondaatje's *the man with seven toes*

63

POEMS

BY ROGER NASH (7), ZOË LANDALE (17),
KATHLEEN WALL (39), JAY RUZESKY (40),
J. MICHAEL YATES (48), T. BERTO (49),
BARRY BUTSON (50), JANE MUNRO (61, 62),
KENNA CREER MANOS (62), JOHN O'NEILL (74)

BOOKS IN REVIEW

BY SHERRILL GRACE (75), DEBORAH
BLENKHORN (77), STEPHANIE BOLSTER (78),
NATHALIE COOKE (80), ALEXANDER M.
FORBES (82, 85), RICHARD G. HODGSON (84),
SUSAN KNUTSON (87, 90), DON MURRAY (92),
MAGGIE DE VRIES (95), BRIAN EDWARDS (96),
JANICE FIAMENGO (98), GRAHAM FORST (100),
GILLIAN HARDING-RUSSELL (102), PAULA RUTH
GILBERT (104), STEFAN HAAG (105), CORAL
ANN HOWELLS (107), PETER KLOVAN (109),
MARTIN KUESTER (110), JILL LEBIHAN (112),
JOSHUA S. MOSTOW (113), CATHERINE
RAINWATER (115), JULIE WALCHLI (117),
CONSTANTINA MITCHELL (118), ANDRÉ
LAMONTAGNE (121), GEORGE WOODCOCK
(123, 126)

OPINIONS AND NOTES

MAXIANNE BERGER

The Calendars of *As For Me And
My House*

124

THE YEAR IN 1992

NO REVIEW OF 1992 publications in Canada can begin without acknowledging Michael Ondaatje's Booker Prize-winning novel *The English Patient*, an absorbing meditation on chaos and adaptation — not “resolution,” mind, but *adaptation*. Set in a ruined European garden, as World War II winds to its messy end, the novel probes the lives of three central characters — all of which have been disrupted by the war. Yet disruption also derives from the way these individuals have had to live their lives up to this point. A nurse has to sort out her own childhood as she looks after a wounded soldier; the wounded, bandaged soldier turns out to be something different from what everyone, including the reader, expects; and an Indian explosives expert has to reconcile his cultural upbringing with the fact that he is taking part, away from home, in a potentially self-destructive occupation. The novel, however, is metatextual as well as, loosely speaking, realistic. Readers are told, at one point, that a novel begins in chaos. Slowly, each reader separately might discover that this novel deals with chaos as well as with war, with recurrent (but predictable) pattern as well as with seeming randomness, and that the three main characters are metonyms for a wounded (but surviving) postwar generation. It may be that these characters — like the reader, perhaps, or like texts of this kind? — are not in control of the chaos around them; but nor can they afford, finally, to despair.

The fact that this large and sensitive book has already attracted a lot of attention is itself worthy of note; but the fact that it thus casts a large shadow should not hide the year's other remarkable accomplishments in Canada. In fiction, for example, of some thirty books I've managed to read — does that include Nick Bantock's delightful, mysterious, romantic *Sabine's Notebook*? it defies classification systems! — I would single out eleven. Sheila Watson's *Deep Hollow Creek* (written in the 1930s, in a stylish, but still pre-*Double Hook* form, and just released for the first time) tells of a teacher whose first encounter with the Cariboo is also her first encounter with the real lives of other people; it's well worth reading in the 1990s — and it's a salutary reminder of the kind of book that was unusual in Canada in the

1930s BUT NOT UNKNOWN. Patrick Lane's *How Do You Spell Beautiful?* and other stories depicts a world of workers' lives (as in "Mill-Cry") where talk is dangerous, not because it can be distracting, but because it opens up the violence that their usual silence permits them to ignore. M. G. Vassanji's *Uhuru Street*, which will likely invite comparison with Mistry's work, though it is quite different in character and kind, records the changes in fortune of a Dar-es-Salaam family, who by the end of the book seek "refugee status" (and all that this term implies). Greg Hollingshead's *White Buick* also crosses cultures to face the unpleasant realities that people find themselves in — and sometimes choose; one story, set on a Spanish island, ends with this cautionary advice: "But you like to suffer, don't you, Canadian?" She put a hand over his mouth. "No. Don't simply say yes. That would be too boring. When you tell me, tell me how much."

Leon Rooke's *Who Do You Love?* examines, among other conditions of being, the comedy of sexual discovery and the therapy of discovering the flexibility of "normal." Brian Fawcett's *Public Eye* (or, "An Investigation into the Disappearance of the World") is a two-tiered text, with a public narrator commenting on fictional texts; in more general terms, the fiction asks its readers how to distinguish public figures from fictional constructs — or to phrase this distinction even more openly politically: how is it that the media in modern Canada have managed to obscure reality from the citizens who are their reader/viewers? Clark Blaise's *Man and His World* (the title an ironic reminder of Expo '67 in Montreal) stylishly probes one of Blaise's recurrent motifs: the connections between a man and his father. Cynthia Flood's *My Father Took a Cake to France* (the title story has Canadian historians all aflutter about what it does or does not reveal about a famous Canadian historian) is another stylish engagement with self-discovery. Steven Heighton's *Flight Paths of the Emperor* collects a series of stories set in Japan, some of them comic. Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Things As They Are?* — the interrogative is this year's objective correlative, I think — reveals that the author's substantial talent continues to grow. Margaret Atwood's delightful, funny, and searingly clever *Good Bones* tells "spare" sketches and tales which devise new angles for old "truths" (Little Red Hen Tells All, Gertrude Talks Back); the phrase "There was once" deconstructs deconstruction here: it's good to see it happening so effectively. And finally, there's John Steffler's *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*: read this book. It's an extraordinary story that faces up to a little-appreciated side of Newfoundland history, and that also works both as a dynamic narrative (how do you put a ghost to rest? you might ask) and as an intricate textual design. This is Steffler's first novel; I look forward to more.

In poetry, I found lines and images to admire in a whole host of books, and perhaps one day it would be interesting to devise a commonplace diary of favourite phrases. I wonder if there will ever be time. For the moment, it's going to have to be enough to point in just a few directions. These books, for example, reward the

reader: Robyn Sarah's *The Touchstone*, Dennis Cooley's *this only home*, Steven McCaffery and bp Nichol's *Rational Geomancy*, Jerry Newman's *Sudden Proclamations*, with its mordant observations of the world: "What Marx left out of the equation / was spite, and despair. There are some / who would rather crack heads / that watch their profits rise." David Donnell's *China Blues* (a collection of poems and stories: angular observations on political and ethical and "logical" truths) likes pleasure and is not afraid to revel in it for awhile. Jesús López-Pacheco's *Poetic Asylum*, containing poems written in Canada between 1968 and 1990, contains some effective critiques of society and bureaucracy. Lorna Crozier's devastating directness of vision in *Inventing the Hawk* is strongly served by her sense of amusement, her often wry observation of animals and family. Gael Turnbull's *While Breath Persist* returns attention to formal matters — clarity, concision, cogency — in which several epigrammatic observations of human idiosyncrasy stand out.

In *Coming to Canada*, Carole Shields tells a personal story, though a nice sense of line rhythm does not always overcome the intellect that seems to have pre-designed an overarching (and sometimes too personal to be accessible) narrative here. Claire Harris's *Drawing Down a Daughter* is an eloquent series of quasi-dialogues with a daughter-to-be; if everyone, these musings ask, is "stranded in the landscape of [one's] time," how do past, self, place, and commitment connect, permitting one to remain faithful to one's origins and experience, and yet provide a living bequest to one's children. George Bowering's *Urban Snow* is another personal statement, though more openly aware of the constructedness of memory; reflections on baseball (a Bowering preoccupation), friends, puns, and pop culture come to a focus in a central, important poem here, one in which the narrating voice reflects on the impact of aging — not in relation to the self so much as in relation to the generation that follows — and reflects, also, on memories of Vancouver in 1958, on an "innocent" and "ignorant" city, and on the poets then for whom language and value still meant something, and mattered.

There were anthologies published during the year, from single authors to multiple enterprises. Brian Trehearne's very fine selection of Irving Layton's poetry, *Fornalutx*, is a fresh and illuminating examination of the strengths of a still-active career. Oberon Press's 92: *Best Canadian Stories* and *Coming Attractions: 92* continue the quality already set in previous volumes in these two series. *Six Canadian Plays* makes readily available a range of works dealing with anti-heroes, absurdity, race relations, and fantasy.

Of several reprints, readers should be aware of new volumes from Tecumseh Press and the University of Toronto: Lily Dougall's *What Necessity Knows*, Nellie McClung's *Purple Springs*, Georgina Sime's *Sister Woman*, a new selection of C. G. D. Roberts' animal stories under the title *The Vagrants of the Barrens*, and the massive two-volume account of religion, potlatch customs, stories, and

other cultural practices (long suppressed before its first release), T. F. McIlwraith's *The Bella Coola Indians*. There were also three re-edited releases from the New Canadian Library: Blais's *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel* (with afterword by Nicole Brossard), Callaghan's *More Joy in Heaven* (afterword by Margaret Avison), and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (afterword by Margaret Atwood).

Critics, too, ranged in subject and method, from the familiar individual study (Genevieve Wiggins's *L. M. Montgomery*, for example — or Elizabeth Rollins Epperley's *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, an analysis of romance in Montgomery) to the huge survey (such as David Ketterer's *Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*, a detailed and intentionally judgmental guide to most Canadian writings in this field, with an emphasis on Ontario and a more limited awareness of activities in Western Canada: the book contains a valuable bibliography, and a wealth of data on persons, subjects, journals, conferences, and other matters). Several writers collected their reviews and essays, usually adding a modicum of new work in the process. Tom Marshall's *Multiple Exposures, Promised Lands*, on poetry, is one such example; others include Warren Tallman's *In the Midst* (papers and sketches from a 40-year career), W. J. Keith's *An Independent Stance*, Bronwen Wallace's posthumous *Arguments with the World* (essays, notes, and interviews, on women as mothers, women in the workplace, and women's rights, edited by Joanne Page), and Hugh Hood's *Unsupported Assertions*. W. H. New's *Inside the Poem* brings together 63 writers, writing poems and writing about poems, reflecting on the character of poetry and on the kinds of critical construction that result from different kinds of "reading." M. Nourbese Philip's *Frontiers* is a powerful collection of essays on racism and culture in Canada, necessary reading for anyone interested in contemporary Canadian society or in strategies of literary resistance. Marlene Kadar's anthology *Essays on Life Writing* (with theoretical comments on genre, poetics, and critical practice, for example) is also well worth reading, especially alongside the three most recent works from ECW's Canadian Biography Series (James Doyle's *Stephen Leacock*, C. S. Ross's *Alice Munro*, and Peter Steven's *Dorothy Livesay*), Carl F. Klinck's *Giving Canada a Literary History* (warmly edited by Sandra Djwa), and Joan Coldwell's edition of the autobiographical writings of Anne Wilkinson, *The Tightrope Walker* (containing poems, diary entries, and a beautifully-written life story). Among critical works designed more as unitary books than as open-form collections, Martin Kuester's *Framing Truths* theorizes a relation between parodic structure and historical subject in Findlay, Bowering, and Atwood primarily; Eva-Marie Kröller, in *George Bowering: Bright Circles of Colour*, differs politically from Kuester, writing a textually-based study more sympathetic to Bowering's sense of irony; Karen E. Smythe's *Figuring Grief* reads Gallant, Munro, and the "poetics of elegy" through the heavy drapery of de Man's, Benjamin's, and Miller's solemn professional vocabulary; and W. J. Keith's *Literary Images of Ontario*, with studies of the

picturesque, the North, the small town, Toronto, and ethnicity, tries to define what is meant by Ontario "regionalism" in literary practice.

As in other years, some of the most interesting *writing* occurs in the category "non-fiction," the catch-all that transcends generic enclosure and often escapes critical consideration. I'm thinking in particular of popular history books, such as Peter Newman's glossy account of National Policy and the fashion of excess a hundred years ago (*Canada 1892: Portrait of a Promised Land*), which could be read as a cautionary account of a contemporary pre-millennial Canada; introductory history books, such as J. M. Bumsted's *The Peoples of Canada* (wide-ranging over two volumes, but still oddly old-fashioned about literary canons); and local histories of more than local consequence, such as Barry Gough's *The Northwest Coast* (on British navigations to 1812) or Sally Ross and Alphonse Deveau's *The Acadians of Nova Scotia*. The West Coast also came in for some geographical analysis this year which anyone interested in the cross-disciplinary nature of cultural studies should take account of: Graeme Wynne and Timothy Oke edited *Vancouver and Its Region*, with data ranging from Native habitation to geology, pollution, economics, and social change; and Bruce MacDonald's *Vancouver: A Visual History* is a stunning representation of land-use patterns over a hundred-year history.

Stunning visual design might more readily be expected in art books. Readers will be impressed by the colour plates in *Treasures of the National Archives of Canada*, and by the liveliness and the quality of illustration in Carolyn Gossage's *Double Duty*, the World War II sketches and diaries of Molly Lamb Bobak, which focus less on violence than on canteen, hospital, and living quarters activity. Readers might be less impressed, however, by the fact that so many of the plates in one highly-publicized and one almost-neglected art book are in black-and-white: Ann Davis's *The Logic of Ecstasy* examines Canadian "mystical" painting (by which the author means transcendentalism and theosophy, mainly) between 1920 and 1940 — the book is valuable for drawing attention again to the paintings of Jock Macdonald — and Maria Tippet's *By a Lady*, a welcome (if highly selective) celebration of "three centuries of art by Canadian women." Perhaps it is the word "celebration" that misleads the text here; yes, celebration is in order — but information is also in order, and despite the references to Carr, McNicoll, Clark, Moodie, Cardinal-Schubert, Pflug, Pratt, Warkov, Munn, Desrosiers, Pemberton, and others, the reader/viewer is left wanting more exact commentary.

Out of many others, two books remain: Ronald Wright's *Stolen Continents* and Jack Hodgins's *Over 40 in Broken Hill*. They make an unlikely pair to close this survey: the one is a politically charged account of Aztec, Maya, Inca, Cherokee, and Iroquois culture, closing with an eloquent critique of Oka and a direct condemnation of the Mulroney government; the other, often hilariously funny, is cast as a set of "unusual encounters in the Australian Outback" — it's a personal travel

adventure into the world of utes and bush trivia and stations and sheep-shearing. I bring them together here in this survey because they represent two current sides to the Canadian connection with the world: one is serious, ethically committed, morally enraged; the other highlights the humour in human behaviour, including that of the observer himself. One author discovers causes; the other discovers friendships. HOW DOES ONE OBSERVE THE WORLD, according to these books? Bifocally, it seems. With luck, both eyes are still open — to scenes and subjects and others' sense of priority, and to the sense of self that still affects how one judges and how one sees.

W.H.N.

HERITAGE

Roger Nash

We eat food from fields we did not clear.
 Piled rocks look like unopened
 letters, undelivered in the dry grass.
 Then we moisten and exchange bodies on a strange
 bed. The carved headboard twines us
 together, in an unknown, varnished hand.
 Afterwards, back on the street, the clouds
 are, as usual, illegible, the drains unsigned.
 We do not return to places we left.
 A stranger sips coffee attentively there,
 though the walls can't recall our names.
 But we remember to be thankful, constantly, that everything
 important began with us. The shade
 we sit in so romantically automatically throws
 up the side of a shed, a broken rake
 rotting beside it. We are our own heritage.
 As leaves burn brown in the surprising
 air of spring, may we be consistent
 enough to forget to hand it on.

"MEAT LIKE YOU LIKE IT"

The Production of Identity in Atwood's "Cat's Eye"

Stephen Ahern

You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *Vanity*, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure. The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight. . . .

— John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (51)

There is never only one, of anyone.

— Elaine, *Cat's Eye* (6)

MARGARET ATWOOD'S NOVEL *Cat's Eye* is a case study in the pathology of female identity construction in contemporary middle-class Canadian society. Conventional social codes and behaviour are dissected in detail; in the words of one critic, the novel "reads as an anthropological catalogue of the evolution of Toronto's tribal customs from the forties to the eighties" (Manguel 67). Elaine Risley's first-person narrative in many ways takes the thematic form of a traditional *Bildungsroman*, in which the novel's protagonist undergoes a troubled quest for identity. The difference in Elaine's case is that there is no final resolution to her search, for she is caught in an obsessive cycle that compels her to replay in her mind the fragmented pieces of her childhood in a futile attempt to recover a unified self-image. The structure of the novel reflects the lack of closure to Elaine's dilemma, as past continuously counterpoints present, blurring the traces of any linear development in her self-understanding. Though Elaine builds up defences and becomes acutely aware of the world around her, her psychological development is arrested in a kind of atemporal stasis. What is the cause of Elaine's feelings of loss, of missing a key that would somehow explain the displacement that she has experienced as a result of her traumatic childhood?

I would argue that her fragmented identity is the result of her immersion in a world of contradictory patriarchal discourses, a world governed by an ideology of gender difference that on the one hand creates her as a subject free to pursue her

personal and artistic potential, and on the other constructs her as an object to be judged according to the basest measures of commodity valuation. Elaine's sense of self is lost somewhere in the void between these two antithetical representations. The development of Elaine's character is a dramatic example of the powerful forces of ideological hegemony at work: the patriarchal contradictions she internalizes during childhood are propagated in a universe that is almost exclusively female, a world in which men are perceived either as shadowy, peripheral forces, or as "secret allies" (163) in the struggle against the incomprehensible vagaries of female malevolence. This problematic delineation of the dynamics of girls' and women's relationships raises many questions, especially regarding the extent to which Elaine's general social milieu negatively affects her psychological well being. These two intertwined issues are central to the thematic construction of *Cat's Eye*, and merit further critical exploration.

One of the most obvious contrasts in the novel is the difference in Elaine's psyche before and after she enters mainstream society. Atwood plugs into the traditional romantic discourse of nature equalling innocence: up north, the young Elaine is depicted as being in a kind of pre-linguistic state of grace. She is almost wholly unformed socially, a cultural *tabula rasa*, having parents who are for the most part rather unconventional role models. Elaine is dimly aware of gender differences only as a result of brief encounters with "Dick and Jane" school readers (29). Her innocence becomes naiveté, however, when her idealized image of other girls is rudely exploded by hard experience. She soon misses her earlier nomadic life, the "old rootless life of impermanence and safety" (33) that was paradoxically so much more secure than Toronto the Good, with its stifling middle-class morality. Returning from the north is like coming down from a mountain, "descend[ing] through layers of clarity, of coolness and uncluttered light . . . into the thicker air" (68). Elaine will forever look back at this early period with an idyllic nostalgia: "Until we moved to Toronto I was happy" (21).

When the Risleys move south to the city and Elaine enters school, the process of her gendered identity construction begins in earnest. Elaine is a neophyte in the complex world of real girls, uncomprehending of the codes of behaviour that cause her such grief: "I know the unspoken rules of boys, but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder" (47). Now among her peers, Elaine enters the discourse of power and weakness that in Michel Foucault's conception is inescapable, for it is "a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (61). The dynamics of patriarchal re-production are omnipresent even at the social level of prepubescent girls. For the power of the dominant class is not a monolithic entity somewhere "out there"; in Louis Althusser's definition, ideology is not something abstract, but is actual *lived experience* that shapes us emotionally and intellectually and forms our responses (39). According to Althusser, the primary function of ideology is control: by "constituting"

concrete individuals as subjects" (45), the dominant ideology of Western liberalism creates an illusion of individual autonomy and freedom of choice. People "recognize" themselves, construct their identity, in the ways in which ideology "interpellates," or defines, them as subjects, and therefore voluntarily fill the roles given them (55-6). This internalization of patriarchal capitalist ideology is how the "reproduction of the relations of production" (28) are secured: by creating a hegemony that flows through and controls the consciousness of every citizen, the existing dominant socio-economic system generates a self-perpetuating status quo.

THE PROBLEM CONFRONTED BY WOMEN in such a patriarchal tradition, apart from the obvious fact of their second-class status, is, in the view of Simone de Beauvoir, a confusion caused by contradictions in the discourse in which they find themselves positioned. Like men, they are expected to play certain pre-programmed roles that constitute "a set of norms and expectations applied to the incumbent of a particular position" (Banton qtd. in Henriques 22). "Woman" is, however, the target of two mutually-exclusive discourses: on the one hand, she is constructed as an autonomous subject like men are, but on the other hand is burdened by myths of femininity that construct her as the alien, idealized and/or defiled "Other" against which "man" has felt compelled to define himself (69). Woman therefore sees herself "not as a subject but as an object paradoxically endowed with subjectivity" (718). De Beauvoir as a result of this contradiction conceives of woman as "hesitating between the role of *object*, *Other* which is offered her, and the assertion of her liberty" (33). I can think of no better way than this to describe the dilemma in which Elaine Risley finds herself.

As an adult, Elaine has a very individualistic view of the world. She pursues her art as a means of personal expression, caring little for the external inducements of money and fame. She is both disdainful of, and intimidated by, the glitzy superficial hype of commercial galleries. She refuses to be pigeonholed: informed that "[a] lot of people call you a feminist painter" by a trendy, black-clad diva of an interviewer, Elaine warily responds "I hate party lines, I hate ghettoes" (90). At the same time as she asserts her individuality, however, the voice that haunts her cuts her down to size: "*Your clothes are stupid. Your art is crap. Sit up straight and don't answer back*" (91). This voice that echoes in her head is the voice of patriarchal ideology, which, while constituting Elaine as an "independent" subject, also requires her to play the role of the weak, subordinate woman in society. In her gendered subject/objectivity, Elaine is a parody of the Cartesian *cogito*, for though she can *think*, her *being* is fragmented. The process of fragmentation began the first day Elaine went to school, and thereby entered the realm of social technologies — or to use Althusser's terminology, "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs) — whose function it is to control the population.

Foucault proposes a similar conception of social technologies that exist to "normalize" the populace (206). One of the most effective of these institutions is school discipline, which in his view "succeed[s] in making children's bodies the object of highly complex systems of manipulation and conditioning" (67). Mrs. Lumley, aided by the intimidating pictures of the King and Queen, is the central instrument of formalized oppression in the social microcosm of Elaine's classroom: she "rules by fear" (78). Her "dark, mysterious, repulsive" bloomers make her even more terrifying, for they represent a clue to the unspoken reasons why the children of St. Mary's are divided *en masse* into the categories BOYS and GIRLS. The underwear of a grown woman somehow speaks of the strange hidden mixture of shame and potency that femininity increasingly signifies to the girls:

They're sacrosanct, at the same time holy and deeply shameful. Whatever is wrong with them may be wrong with me also, because although Miss Lumley is not what anyone thinks of as a girl, she is also not a boy. When the brass handbell clangs and we line up outside our GIRLS door, whatever category we are in also includes her. (81)

Female sexuality is a threatening force to be denied, and, when it surfaces, to be shamed into repression. This communal fear is manifested in the reaction to the murder in the ravine of a young girl, who *dared* let herself be "molested" and killed: "It's as if this girl has done something shameful, herself, by being murdered. So she goes to that place where all things go that are not mentionable" (241).

Far from trying to mitigate the hypocrisy of such warped double standards, mothers are complicit in this conspiracy of silence: "There's a great deal they don't say. Between us and them is a gulf, an abyss, that goes down and down. It's filled with wordlessness" (93). Elaine later realizes, as a mother herself, that this guilt is not so cut and dried, for in many ways their mothers' hands were tied by strict social taboos (157). Like Cordelia's adolescent sisters Perdie and Mirrie, there was "some invisible leash around their necks, holding them in check" (93).

The adult Elaine can, however, find little excuse for the power that was wielded by Mrs. Smeath. Mrs. Smeath's personality reads like a checklist of the "contrasting Virtues" whose inculcation into the general populace Althusser believes is the primary goal of ISAs: she is the very embodiment of "modesty, resignation, submissiveness on one hand, cynicism, contempt, arrogance, confidence, self-importance, even smooth talk and cunning on the other" (Althusser 30). Mrs. Smeath, in condoning the torment that Elaine is forced to undergo, becomes for the young girl both the hypocrisy and the watchful vigilance of her society: "Her bad heart floats in her body like an eye, an evil eye, it sees me" (180).

That Mrs. Smeath is a paradigm of bourgeois morality is made clear when the adult Elaine has her first public showing as a member of the "F(OUR) FOR ALL' feminist collective. Mrs. Smeath is incarnated in acrylic as *The White Gift*, which in childhood seemed to Elaine to be "blank, sinister bundles of tissue paper

... made uniform, bleached of their identity and colours" (124). Mrs. Smeath (and her replacement, daughter Grace) is interchangeable with millions of middle-class matrons just like her, a point underlined by the fact that as a stock character she is mistaken for the indignant woman who throws ink on Elaine's painting (352-3). By painting Mrs. Smeath, compulsively, over and over, Elaine seems to be trying to come to terms with the patriarchal guilt she has internalized herself: "She looks out at me from the flat surface of paint, three-dimensional now, smiling her closed half-smile, smug and accusing. Whatever has happened to me is my own fault, the fault of what is wrong with me. Mrs. Smeath knows what it is. She isn't telling" (338).

Though the female world of imposed limits over which Mrs. Smeath holds dominion is in some ways self-reproducing, it is ultimately controlled by men, represented by fathers, who as the final repository of discipline hold a mysterious and threatening power of sanction: "... daytime is ruled by mothers. But fathers come out at night. Darkness brings home the fathers, with their real, unspeakable power" (164). The problem with ascribing final blame to individual men for Elaine's oppression is that in Elaine's experience, males are the least of her worries. Her brother is her first ally, teaching her to trust her instincts and to "see in the dark" (26). Confronted later by the dogma of a feminist group, Elaine rationalizes her discomfort: "Sisterhood is a difficult concept for me, I tell myself, because I never had a sister. Brotherhood is not" (345). In high school, her "relationships with boys are effortless"; "it's girls I feel I have to defend myself against; not boys" (237). She "knows things about boys," understands the macho roles they are forced to play (238), and, sharing in their silence, feels a mutual need to escape peer pressure together to "desert islands, momentary, unreal, but there" (237). Her attraction is visual, aesthetic, and physical. Boys for her are objects of fascination, bodies of "pure energy, solidified light" (240).

Elaine's preference in men changes from such stumbling teenage boys, to brooding angst-ridden Byronic types, and finally to her husband Ben, whose reassuring strength seems to epitomize the traditional male stereotype. Men always seem, however, peripheral to the real issues of Elaine's life.

Her art teacher Josef is a walking catalogue of patriarchal myths of femininity: he feels women should live for him only (305), and has an objectivizing, Pre-Raphaelite vision of women as "helpless flowers, or shapes to be arranged and contemplated" (318). He is a demon-lover of the Heathcliff variety, and though Elaine is initially attracted by his mystery, she comes to see through "his secrecy and his almost-empty rooms, and his baleful memories and bad dreams" (297). Her ex-husband Jon had similar "cloudy-headed notions about women" (404), but she now feels as if she shares a common bond with him, as if they were both veterans of the same long-past war (266). Though speculating that men's new knowledge of their own fallible humanity has perhaps made them "trickier, slyer,

more evasive, harder to read," Elaine concludes that "[f]orgiving men is so much easier than forgiving women" (267). Men are depicted as a kind of inert but dangerous natural phenomenon, around which women must try to pick their way carefully (268). Not being conscious, men can no more be blamed for harm than a sharp rock; in Elaine's allegorical painting, three *Falling Women* plummet down into the ravine onto men who are "lying unseen, jagged and dark and without volition, far below" (268).

Women, however, cannot plead ignorance as a defence, for women "know too much, they can neither be deceived nor trusted" (379). Women, with their "hard, legitimate judgments" (378), are an unknown, threatening quantity to Elaine. The fissures in her identity are produced in a world inhabited predominantly by women. Though the spectre of male domination looms dimly on the horizon (or in the ravines), the forces that distort and weaken Elaine's confidence and place her in a contradictory subject-position are overwhelmingly female.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE AGENT in young Elaine's indoctrination is, of course, Cordelia. Cordelia functions as the "conscience" of the patriarchal status quo, insidiously undermining Elaine's self-confidence: "*What do you have to say for yourself?*" Cordelia used to ask. *Nothing*, I would say. It was a word I came to connect with myself, as if I was nothing, as if there was nothing there at all" (41). Cordelia's voice invades Elaine's consciousness, filling her with criticism and self-doubt. The whole universe sits in judgment on her; even the stars now "look watchful" (101). Even as an adult, Elaine cannot escape the voice that reappears in moments of stress, echoing in her head, commanding her to conform, or entreating her to self-destruct — most dramatically when Elaine slits her wrist with an Exacto knife (373-4).

True to de Beauvoir's conception, Cordelia uses Elaine in the classic patriarchal pattern of projecting what one is trying to escape/reject within oneself onto an "Other." Elaine rapidly internalizes Cordelia's insecurity, and the malice it generates. The effects of this influence are long-lasting: after Susie's botched abortion attempt, Elaine's feelings of compassion are cut off by "a small, mean voice, ancient and smug, that comes from somewhere deep inside my head: *It serves her right*" (321).

Trapped by Cordelia's incessant torment, the young Elaine's fantasies turn to self-crasure: "I think about becoming invisible," about eating poison berries, drinking Javex, jumping off the bridge (155). She learns less drastic methods of escape by filling her head with music, and by fainting almost at will. The split in her personality reaches its final stage when, after fainting, she actually mentally flees her body: "I'm seeing all this from above, as if I'm in the air, somewhere near the GIRLS

sign over the door, looking down like a bird" (172). Elaine has internalized the perspective of the "Watchbird," the embodied voice of patriarchal censure (138), and is the victim of a split identity as a result.

Only up north can Elaine find a way to bridge what is, in the terms of Lacanian psychology, a "gap between the conscious self and the self presented in discourse" (Belsey 65). Like one of her brother's butterflies, she can for a time shed the cocoon of language that has both constructed and constricted her in the city. Here she can be free of the subject/object discourse, and therefore temporarily escape from being judged, from judging herself:

I've begun to feel not gladness, but relief. My throat is no longer tight, I've stopped clenching my teeth, the skin on my feet has begun to grow back, my fingers have healed partially. I can walk without seeing how I look from the back, talk without hearing the way I sound. I go for long periods without saying anything at all. I can be free of words now, I can lapse back into wordlessness, I can sink back into the rhythms of transience as if into bed. (143)

This reversion to a pre-linguistic state is, of course, necessarily a fleeting illusion, for Elaine has already become immersed in the semiotic structure that signifies her as female, and therefore as a "site of contradiction" (Belsey 65). She has already passed through Lacan's "mirror-phase," in which the child "perceives itself as other, an image, exterior to its own perceiving self, [which thus] necessitates a splitting between the *I* which is perceived and the *I* which does the perceiving" (Belsey 64). The fact that images of mirrors and reflections abound in *Cat's Eye*, and are a dominant motif in Elaine's paintings as well as in her inner life (e.g. 327, 408), underscores the possible symbolic significance of this psychoanalytic metaphor. Toronto itself functions as an ISA in the reinforcement of Elaine's negative self-image, for "it still has power; like a mirror that shows you only the ruined half of your face" (410).

As Elaine's childhood feelings of fragmentation increase, she turns to self-mutilation as a means of grounding herself in reality: the pain of pulling strips of flesh from her feet "was something to hold onto" (114). This compulsion stays with her long past childhood; living with Jon years later, Elaine is plagued by the same disorder: "Every move I make is sodden with unreality. When no one is around, I bite my fingers. I need to feel physical pain, to attach myself to daily life. My body is a separate thing" (338). When she returns to Toronto for the retrospective of her works (and life), Elaine begins chewing her fingers again, for blood is "a taste I remember" (9). In an image that echoes that of the hacked-up female mannequins Jody uses in her graphically anti-sexist "MEAT LIKE YOU LIKE IT" exhibition, Elaine feels as disembodied as she did in Grade Five: "I tuck myself into my clothes, handling my arms and legs as if they're someone else's" (42).

Cordelia's criticism has forced Elaine to be unsure of every move she makes. Only her cat's eye, with its "impartial gaze," has the ability to protect her from the

disjuncting effect this brainwashing has had on her psyche: "With the help of its power I retreat back into my eyes" (155). That the marble "so blue, so pure" (141) offers a promise of recovered wholeness becomes even more apparent when Elaine has a vision in which the heart of the Virgin Mary resembles the red plastic purse in which she stores her glass talisman (184). Soon after, she has the experience that marks the turning point in her power relations with Cordelia: left to freeze in the dark ravine, she is rescued by the glowing-hearted Virgin, who like the cat's eye protects her, "wrapping me in warmth and painlessness" (190). This dark, cloaked lady is the Virgin "of lost things, one who restored what was lost" (198).

IRONICALLY, the symbolic meaning of this crisis is one of the lost keys to self-understanding that haunt the older Elaine, who feels compelled to one of the lost keys to self-understanding that haunt the older Elaine, who feels compelled to fill in the missing pieces of her past: "I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia," she ventures, "I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (227). After her encounter with the mysterious Virgin, young Elaine gains the strength to walk away from Cordelia (193), but at what cost? As she enters Grade Six, her recent past is obliterated: "Time is missing" (201). She has absorbed the power of the cat's eye, and she cannot be touched: "I no longer need them. I am indifferent to them. There's something hard in me, crystalline, a kernel of glass" (193).

Elaine has switched places with Cordelia, and assumed all of the mental problems of her alter ego. She feels detached from her peers as she begins high school (207), and cannot fit in socially "without feeling I'm acting" (209). Mocking her mother's trite expression, she observes "I am happy as a clam: hard-shelled, firmly closed" (201). Elaine develops a "mean mouth" as a way of both covering up her insecurity, and pushing the limits of the socially acceptable (234-5). She cannot, however, escape the self-objectification that is the legacy of Cordelia, patriarchal ideology's prepubescent *agent provocateur*: "I can't believe in my own sadness, I can't take it seriously. I watch myself in the mirror, intrigued by the sight of tears" (208).

Elaine and Cordelia become one another's elusive *doppelgänger*, representing the disparate parts of each other's fragmented identity. Elaine realizes after her disturbing high school visit to Cordelia's house that her old nemesis "has expected something from me, some connection to her old life, or to herself" (259). Elaine, in turn, seeks the same connection years later during her visit to Toronto:

There are things I need to ask her. Not what happened, back then in the time I lost, because now I know that. I need to ask her why. If she remembers. . . .

She will have her own version. I am not the centre of her story, because she herself is that. But I could give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection. This is the part of herself I could give back to her.

We are like twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key. (411)

Does Elaine find a resolution to what can be seen as her search for unity? She certainly comes to terms with some of the demons of her past. She now sees that Mrs. Smeath — who in her paintings is “bigger than life, bigger than she ever was. Blotting out God”—was a “displaced person” too (404-5). Elaine regrets not having tried to understand Mrs. Smeath’s own position of being trapped in “a small-town threadbare decency.” She could have in her portrayal gone for “justice”; she admits that “Instead I went for vengeance.” Elaine realizes that Mrs. Smeath was as much a victim of patriarchal ideology as she herself was. Malice just propagates the ignorance: “an eye for an eye leads only to more blindness” (405).

Similarly, Elaine exorcizes the ghost of Cordelia’s torment, now seeing clearly that the flaws for which she suffered guilt were never hers at all:

There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness, the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia’s; as they always were. (419)

In a scene echoing the visitation of the Virgin, Elaine absolves Cordelia of all past sins. Whether Elaine’s final forgiveness of her childhood persecutors brings a kind of closure to her story is left unclear, for the facts of her gendered subjectivity remain the same. The only true escape she finds is in her art. Of course, the liberation she finds in painting is a result of its “irrelevance” in the eyes of Jon (the voice of contemporary aesthetic patriarchy): “There is freedom in this: because it doesn’t matter what I do, I can do what I like” (346). What Elaine finally misses most is the similar freedom she was hoping to share with Cordelia when, no longer valued as sexual objects by the patriarchal system, they could let loose like the old ladies they used to see on the streetcar who “have a certain gaiety to them, a power of invention,” who “don’t care what people think,” and who “have escaped, though what it is they’ve escaped from isn’t clear to us” (5). In their telling youthful dream of the future, Elaine and Cordelia only hope that “when the time comes we will also be free to choose” (5).

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HANDS SURPRISED AS STARFISH

for J. age 5½

Zoë Landale

Every day you make me art
 fresh from your smelly markers
 cinnamon & strawberry fragrant.
 Wherever I sit
 I have heaps of happy stories beside me
 two cardboard boxes in the basement, stuffed,
 houses with ears, mummas, daddies & babies.
 Yesterday I taped five new families
 to the side of my word-processor.
 Today I sit beside my machine,
 chew my pen, disconsolate,
 my colours are not going well.
 I look over to your red & purple
 & turquoise hands straggling, waving.
 The hands you make, surprised
 as starfish
 get me every time.
 Something about the way they flourish open:
 my own hands don't dare to hope
 for so much.
 Yours are knee-level
 cheerful.
 I have to smile back
 at them. Expectant, they demand
 good nature.
 An ocean's worth.

HOREB REVISITED OR: FIVE WAYS TO WALK RIGHT BY A BURNING OBJECT

Zoë Landale

1

Ignore it.
Spontaneous combustion never happens
to someone
you know.

2

Transfix it with
contempt.
What, you, to be caught
believing
in leaping warmth
of holiness?

3

Call it art.

4

Call it light,
a trick of irritated photons,
by definition an illusion.

5

Tamp the probability index
down to zero.
Gaze straight at flame
make your eyes
recant
orange.

*[Horeb, the mountain Moses saw the burning bush.
See Exodus 3.4:17]*

GENEALOGY OF COLOURS

Zoë Landale

When her husband says *No more*,
one child is enough
the woman's heart flies out the window
crying White white
the edge of gulls' wings
against sky
All the colours, she tells her daughter,
are in white
The two of them imagine cracking white like an egg
Out slide violet green blue
& their relations, refract from nearby trees

I can't see any reason to
His eyes are green & steady
as when she first brought him home
ten years ago
except
she can walk on that gaze now
& not fall through

The wicker table has crumbs on it, broken strands
Their coffee cups are empty,
absurd reminder of order when none exists
none at all
& her heart insists White white
She bats the noise away
Damn it, they're still talking,
there's hope

I'm too old
he says
She nods,
nods several times as he
makes his points
She pulls her skin tighter for comfort
though it is too thin
& she is in darkness
out where the south-easterlies bluster
upside down on the clothesline
her own hesitations tangled

with red & yellow nursery rhymes,
 the shout of White, white
 lost mother-colour
 Liar & deceiver
 for not acknowledging her own
 relief
 that he has decided
 for them, finally
 This is expected pain
 she has served the shadow of it
 at her table, nightly
 At least her daughter is in bed
 unable to say
Why do you look like that, mommy?
The shadow has come home to roost, dear
& I would I had left it alone

Tomorrow her child will ask
Can we mix all the colours in the world
back together & get white?
 When the woman goes to speak
 lost colour will slip
 from her silence
 bright & falsely cheerful flapping
 in the brisk south-easterly wind



EARTH-QUAKING THE KINGDOM OF THE MALE VIRGIN

*A Deleuzian Analysis of Aritha van Herk's
"No Fixed Address" and
"Places Far From Ellesmere"*

Marlene Goldman

C RITICAL OPINION concerning Aritha van Herk's fictions have generally tended to be mixed. One reviewer of her most recent text, *Places Far From Ellesmere*, had the courage to ask, "What is this work?" (Beer 36). Another critic, somewhat less given to speculation, perhaps, simply concluded that the work is a "genreless book that makes a powerful argument for genre" (Thomas 70). In what follows, I hope to show that van Herk's most recent fictions, *No Fixed Address* (1986) and *Places Far From Ellesmere* (1990), are best understood in the context of their attempt to address and transform the traditional narrative structures of western Canadian regional fiction.

Van Herk is unabashedly critical of the one-sided nature of storytelling in the west. As she says, "[t]he fact is, men write epic fiction: about life, about war, about what matters, including who [sic] they have screwed and whom they have killed. Sometimes, as an alternative, they write sensitive writerly novels about the male act of writing fiction" ("Double" 276). By far the greatest obstacle that women writers must negotiate when they try to get a word in edge-wise is the legacy of masculine representations of Woman.¹ Van Herk points out that, in any list of western writers, Grove, Mitchell, Ross, Wiebe, and Kroetsch are invariably cited; Margaret Laurence remains the exception (see "Women" 15). As far as van Herk is concerned, the western literary tradition is a thoroughly male terrain: "the art that has defined it [the west] is masculine and it appears to have defined its art as a masculine one" ("Women" 15). Worse, within traditional western fictions, women are "fixed as mothers/saints/whores, muses all" (18). Van Herk insists that the prairie is "in bondage to an image" (17); the term "bondage" may

seem a trifle dramatic, but, when one reads the manifestos and fictions written by western male writers, the word seems appropriate enough.²

In *The Canadian West in Fiction*, Edward McCourt traces the development of literature in the western regions as it was depicted by its earliest chroniclers — fur traders, explorers, missionaries, mounties and, later, travellers, journalists and romantic novelists. As his study reveals, for the most part, the West has been seen and described from a masculine perspective. The feminist critic, Annette Kolodny, in her book, *The Lay of the Land*, underscores the impact of this masculine perspective. She points out that, during the pioneer period of American history, the settlers promoted the myth of the land as woman. In many instances, mapping the new land was likened to the possession of “virgin continent.” Although Kolodny’s study is limited to the settlement of the United States, her findings are applicable to the physical and literary appropriation of the Canadian landscape as well.³

Perhaps Rudy Wiebe, in his essay “Passages by Land,” best illustrates the masculine perspective which van Herk strives to undermine in her own fictions. In this essay, Wiebe offers one of the most clearly articulated examples of the masculine impulse toward mastery of the supposedly feminine landscape:

[T]o touch this land with words requires an architectural structure; to break into the space of the reader’s mind with the space of this western landscape and the people in it you must build a structure of fiction like an engineer builds a bridge or a skyscraper over and into space. . . . *You must lay great black steel lines of fiction, break up that space with huge design and, like the fiction of the Russian steppes, build giant artifact. No song can do that; it must be giant fiction.*

(Wiebe 259; my emphasis)

Van Herk whole-heartedly rejects the desire to “fix” the prairie by imposing this type of grid, fashioned from a male perspective; and she likewise rejects the representations of women as Woman proffered by male western writers. By contrast, she remarks that the male west “has to be earth-quaked a little, those black steel lines and the looming giant toppled. Not destroyed, oh no, but infiltrated” (“Women” 24). In keeping with this philosophy, her increasingly experimental fictions explore alternative relationships between women and place — relationships based, not upon the capture and mastery of the landscape, but upon the impulse toward deterritorialization. I would suggest that this gesture toward deterritorialization, read by some critics as genrelessness, resembles an ideologically subversive stance which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to as “nomadology.”

In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari outline a cartographic model of the lines of power and desire. In contrast to Foucault’s view of the dynamics of power, Deleuze and Guattari’s model offers the possibility for social and individual transformation; their model also shares many features of feminist strategies whose aim is to subvert what is called phallogocentric thought. Adapted, rather than adopted, the work of Deleuze and Guattari offers an innovative set of

methods and procedures that can serve to displace the “pervasiveness of the structure of binary logic that has dominated Western philosophy since the time of Plato” (Grosz 7). The Deleuzian model is of particular interest to feminists because, in accordance with feminist theory, it displays an interest in viewing “difference” outside the structure of binary pairs in which what is different “can be understood only as a variation or negation of identity” (Grosz 8). The subject, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is not an ‘entity’ or thing, or a “relation between mind (interior) and body (exterior); instead, it must be understood as a series of flows, energies, movements . . . linked together in ways other than those which congeal it into an identity” (Grosz 12). In this fashion, the Deleuzian model, like feminist models, destabilizes traditional modes of conceiving identity as unified and masculine.

Read in relation to the texts of Aritha van Herk, the work of Deleuze and Guattari, with its emphasis on the deterritorialization of identity, politicizes our understanding of van Herk’s attempt to explode genre and plot, and her portrayal of women who flee to or create unmapped territory in an attempt to escape the grid which fixes the image of Woman. In their work, Deleuze and Guattari align attempts to subvert traditional representations of identity with revolutionary political struggles. Viewed in this light, the domain of fiction ceases to remain an aesthetically neutral realm which exerts virtually no influence on the lives of individuals. As far as Deleuze and Guattari are concerned, fictions are implicated in political struggles and can be used by minority groups to subvert the State apparatus. Thus, when van Herk argues that, if women hope to write fiction, they must reject their traditional identity as “muse” and get out of “this male structure” (“Women” 18), she can be said to be aligning herself with what Deleuze and Guattari describe — oddly, if effectively — as a “nomadic war machine.”

Van Herk shares with Deleuze and Guattari, as we shall see, an interest in using a cartographic model to discuss attempts to reformulate female subjectivity beyond the discursive positions sanctioned by the State. In discussions of western regional literature, van Herk tends to utilize spatial metaphors, and positions herself as a *woman* writer in a “kingdom of the male virgin.” As she says, “I come from the west, the kingdom of the male virgin. I live and write in the kingdom of the male virgin. To be a female and not-virgin, making stories in the kingdom of the male virgin, is dangerous. You think this kingdom is imaginary? Try being a writer there. Try being a woman there” (“Gentle” 257). In interviews, van Herk continues to describe her identity as a woman in spatial terms, arguing that she belongs to “the region of woman” — a region defined by its characteristic sense of “otherness” (1). Elaborating on the nature of this “region,” van Herk states:

[T]here’s a very obvious difference between the region of women — that of the home and family, the traditional territory that women have, and now the regions they are reaching for outside, attempting to establish themselves in a different way — and

the quintessentially male regions of fiction which have been the great theatres of the world. Men always write about war and peace and action and heroes.

("Interview" 2-3).

In her writing, van Herk emphasizes that both women writers and their characters need to escape; they must both become "spies in an indifferent landscape up until now defined by other eyes" ("Women" 24).

In many ways, her notion of escape is in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming imperceptible and transforming oneself into a nomadic war machine. In her writings, van Herk portrays women as guerilla fighters, scouting out hostile territory; at one point, she boasts that women "have an apron full of alternatives, all of them disguises, surprise weapons. We are beginning to dot this landscape but we can't be seen" ("Women" 19). Before looking more closely at particular correspondences between van Herk's fictions and the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, a brief review of some of the latter's major concepts might be helpful.

IN *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari begin by identifying the structure of binary logic with the State; they also characterize the State according to its essential function, namely, "capture," which involves the stratification of space and the control of a variety of "flows," including the flows of individual energies and movements, population, commerce, commodities, and money or capital (385). Working along what they call "molar lines," the State sets up its field of interiority and parcels out closed spaces to people, "assigning each person a share and regulating the communication between shares" (380). On one level, then, the State's impulse to capture and control space is evident in a city's geographical grid; on another level, this impulse is evident in the images individuals use to organize and describe space. Rudy Wiebe's image of the grid conforms to this type of impulse toward control.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, working in opposition to the State and its mode of binary thinking are a multiplicity of decentred, "molecular" entities, which are organized, not in the hierarchical or "arborescent" manner of the State, but according to a "rhizomatic" structure (6-7). They use the organic metaphor of a meandering root structure to describe assemblages based on multiple connections which "bring together very diverse domains, levels, dimensions, functions, effects, aims and objects" (Grosz 13). According to Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomatic structures have the capacity to function as "nomadic war machines."

Understandably, many feminists have balked at the idea of appropriating the term "war machine"; for one thing, what could be more male-identified than the military and war? Likewise, the term "machine" makes feminists uncomfortable because the infrastructure associated with machinic functioning and technocracies

remains predicated on the exclusion of women (Grosz 5-6). However, in working with the concepts of the State and the nomadic war machine it is important to remember that both of these terms refer to a constellation of characteristics, rather than to concrete, physical entities; this explains why they are used by Deleuze and Guattari to designate anything from organizations to modes of thinking. Used in this way, the terms are no longer reserved to describe male bastions. There is no denying that the use of the term "war machine" to describe feminist projects remains problematic; however, it is important to re-evaluate arguments that assume that only supposedly "feminine" terms and strategies are acceptable, while other, presumably "masculine," strategies must be eschewed. If nothing else, Deleuze and Guattari's application of the term to describe the efforts of a variety of groups — including the feminists — destabilizes any easy opposition between "masculine" and "feminine" techniques for subversion.

Deleuze and Guattari's writings constantly preclude the possibility of constructing simple dichotomies. For instance, they propose that the distinction between the State and the war machine ultimately can never be fixed because the border between the two is permeable; they argue that, throughout history, the State has constantly appropriated the revolutionary potential of the war machine. While their concept of the nomadic war machine is based on the characteristics of traditional nomadic tribes, the authors' goal lies in utilizing the idea of a war machine to describe the activities of isolated groups or "packs" "which continue to affirm the rights of segmentary societies in opposition to the organs of State power" (360). They suggest that "each time there is an operation against the State — insubordination, rioting, guerrilla warfare, or revolution as act — it can be said that a war machine has revived, that a new nomadic potential has appeared . . ." (386).

In contrast to the State, which works to create stratified space, the nomadic war machine seeks to maximize deterritorialized or smooth space. For this reason, the shifting sands of the desert, whether sand or ice, are home to the nomad because, in the desert, there is no attempt made to enclose the landscape which is constantly changing. Even though the nomadic trajectory may follow trails or customary routes, "it does not fulfill the function of the sedentary road" which encloses space (380). Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that one's mode of perception changes in the desert because "there is no line separating earth and sky; there is no intermediate distance, no perspective or contour; visibility is limited. . . . It is a tactile space, or rather 'haptic,' a sonorous much more than a visual space" (382). Whereas the line of power associated with the State is "molar," the line corresponding to the nomadic war machine is the "molecular" path of escape or the "line of flight": "This is . . . a line without segments which is more like the collapse of all segmentarity. It is the line along which structures . . . break down or become transformed into something else. It is the line of absolute deterritorialization" (Patton 65). It is this line of flight or transformation which subverts traditional

binary oppositions — destabilizing, for instance, the distinction between the categories of man and woman, human and animal, as well as mind and body.

In their work, Deleuze and Guattari align the war machine and its line of flight with processes which they refer to as “becomings.” These are processes which systematically break down binary oppositions constructed by State-thought. As Elizabeth Grosz notes there is an order to these “becomings”:

There is . . . a kind of direction in the quantum leap required by becomings, an order in which becoming-woman is, for all subjects, a first trajectory or direction: becoming-woman desediments the masculinity of identity: becoming-animal, the anthropocentrism of philosophical thought, and becoming-imperceptible replaces, problematizes the notion of thing, entity. Indiscernibility, imperceptibility and impersonality remain the end-points of becoming. . . . (23)

In my use of the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, I recognize, in conjunction with other feminist critics, that there are serious problems for feminists associated with their assertion that both men and women must engage in “becoming-woman.”⁴ Most obviously, Deleuze and Guattari’s model of “becoming” seems to appropriate women’s experience once again, idealistically portraying it as a supposedly neuter, universal step which both men and women must strive to attain and then move beyond. However, even if their work replicates patriarchal structures to a certain extent, aspects of their theories can be usefully salvaged. As Elizabeth Grosz insists, it is important not to dismiss their work out of hand, but to determine whether their work can serve as a “powerful tool or weapon in feminist challenges to phallogocentric thought” even though their writings may be deemed patriarchal or phallogocentric (6). Furthermore, any efforts to remain untainted by phallogocentric thought, well-intentioned though they might be, remain highly problematic because, as Grosz underscores, “no text — not even ‘feminist’ texts — can in a sense be immune to this charge [of phallogocentrism], insofar as the very categories, concepts and methodologies available today are those spawned by this history . . .” (6).⁵ In the debate between keeping feminism “pure,” or utilizing “tainted” phallogocentric theories, I align myself with Grosz and other feminists who believe that we must employ all the theoretical tools at hand, just as we must shape them to our use.

LEAVING THIS CONTROVERSY ASIDE, I want to look at the correspondences between the work of Deleuze and Guattari and van Herk’s feminist, militaristic strategy for infiltrating and destabilizing the masculine terrain. Van Herk’s insistence that women need to distance themselves from their traditional “fixed” representations as Woman — “mothers/saints/whores, muses all” (“Women” 18) — which surfaces in all of her writing, but most emphatically in *No Fixed Address* and *Places Far From Ellesmere*, corresponds to Deleuze and

Guattari's emphasis on resisting State control and "becoming-minoritarian," a transformation that rends individuals from their "major identity," and aims toward rendering individuals imperceptible (Deleuze and Guattari 291).

As we shall see, *No Fixed Address* investigates the process of "becoming-minoritarian" and represents this transformation using cartographic imagery. In this way, the text draws relationships among mapped and unmapped territory and female identity. However, this text examines what happens when women do not ultimately align themselves with the State; as the title suggests, the novel does not conclude by positioning the protagonist within the "fixed" bounds erected by the State. In this case, the term "address" refers, on the one hand, to both physical location and the linguistic notion of address; the latter entails an understanding or, as in this case, a lack of understanding, concerning the ideological "location" of speakers in a given discursive situation. In this way, the title playfully signals the disturbance created in the linguistic terrain when women choose to become invisible within the terms designated by traditional representations of Woman.

No Fixed Address is composed of four sections, each bearing the same title "Notebook on a missing person." The novel's picaresque heroine, Arachne Mantia, becomes this "missing person" when she escapes into male territory as a travelling underwear salesperson. Throughout the novel, Arachne drives a 1959 Mercedes through a myriad of prairie towns, plying her trade. As one critic argues, underwear in *No Fixed Address* functions as "a metaphor for the repression of women . . ." (Leckie 279). Although Arachne sells undergarments, which recall State control, and the time when it was "taken for granted that woman's body should be prisoner, taped and measured and controlled" (10), she herself never wears the stuff. Far from playing by society's rules, Arachne is an "amoral, selfish, dishonest" woman (103). By far van Herk's boldest heroine, Arachne finds it easy to reject State-thought and become a nomadic warrior because she was never trained to be a Woman in the first place. Ironically, she must rely on her boyfriend, Thomas, to teach her how to don a feminine disguise in order to navigate in the "'real world,' . . . the respectable world, in which she is an imposter" (103). Patterned on the character of the traditional male rogue, Arachne is a sexually casual, itinerant trickster, who, like the class of spiders she is named for, treats men like flies (see van Herk's interview, "Kiss" 86). As Arachne explains to her friend, Thana, men are "'just bodies, you could put a paper bag over their heads'" (33). Unlike the prairie fictions in which the little woman waits at home, in *No Fixed Address* the situation is reversed, and Arachne's faithful lover, Thomas, a cartographer for the Geodetic Survey Company, chastely waits for her. Furthermore, with the aid of the maps that Thomas and other map-makers like him draw, Arachne fulfills her insatiable longong to spider "her own map over the intricate roads of the world" (223). Arachne's appropriation of Thomas's maps illustrate the extent to which van Herk has subverted the State's practice of controlling

"flows." Here the cartographer, although male, is portrayed as loving and domesticated, and Arachne's enjoyment of the maps he produces indicates that maps, which are very often created by the State, can be used for radically different purposes than the ones they were originally intended to serve: as a nomadic war machine, Arachne uses Thomas's maps to locate the boundaries of civilized society and to escape its borders.

Arachne's wanderings can be aligned with van Herk's desire to expand "the borders of the region we inhabit as women." Not only does Arachne stray physically, but she also strays psychologically from the traditional image of Woman. For instance, Arachne is portrayed as a woman "without a scrap of motherly feeling..." (38). In accordance with the findings of Nancy Chodorow, Arachne maintains that motherhood "is something socialized, something incubated in a girl child with dolls and sibling babies" (38). And that "something" is the one thing she did not get from her mother, Lanie. One month after she was born, Arachne's mother left her alone and went off to work as a waitress, leaving Arachne to grow "without a mother bovering over her progress" (85). When Lanie wanted to go off to a Bingo or a shoe-sale, she would lock Arachne in the backyard as if she were a dog. At three years of age, Arachne learned how to climb the fence and would spend her time wandering alone through the neighbourhood. As Arachne explains, her forays helped to shape her "solitary and observant life" (42). Rather than receive a traditional education in the reproduction of mothering, Arachne is educated to become a nomadic war machine.

Her penchant for violence surfaces quite early. As a child, her dolls were "clothespins divided into two armies who alternately attacked and decimated each other" (38-39). At fifteen years of age, she founded and became the sole female member of a street gang, which she named the Black Widows (191). As Deleuze and Guattari point out, war machines are "dark assemblages" which include war societies, secret societies, and crime societies (242); they also insist that "gangs of street children" fall under the category of a war machine (358). In van Herk's novel, Arachne's gang is described as a "clutch of swaggering city rats..." (192). Deleuze and Guattari use the image of a swarm of rats to describe the type of structure which subverts the molar organization of the State, arguing that "the proliferation of rats, the pack, brings a becoming-molecular that undermines the great molar powers of family, career, and conjugality..." (233). Thus, Arachne's early association with her gang or pack primed her for an adult existence as a war machine.

As an adult, Arachne destabilizes State-thought in a variety of ways. Most obviously, her trade as a travelling salesperson allows her to indulge in a lifestyle that is antithetical to the type of fixed existence which women are encouraged by the State to adopt. Furthermore, as the narrator explains, "Arachne travels to travel. Her only paradox is arriving somewhere, her only solution is to leave for

somewhere else" (164). It is useful to compare the narrator's description of Arachne's "lust for driving" (172) with Deleuze and Guattari's description of the nomad's attitude toward travel:

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points. . . . But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*. (380)

In van Herk's novel, Arachne, like the nomad described above, enjoys the process of travelling, the *intermezzo*, rather than the accomplishment of arrival. By contrast, as Ian MacLaren points out, in *No Fixed Address*, the italicized voice of the narrator (who is desperately trying to plot Arachne's movements) represents the realist reader who is bent on establishing a map of Arachne's journey (xxxv). The narrator, neurotically obsessed with creating a realistic map of Arachne's movements, can be aligned with State-thought, whose vital concern is to "vanquish nomadism" and to "control migrations" (Deleuze and Guattari 385). In the end, Arachne disappears altogether from the grid she has created. Like a spider, she creates her web only to abandon it, waiting for her prey to become helplessly tangled in the threads.⁶

Whereas the plots of van Herk's two previous novels portray heroines returning to the fold (in *Judith*, the protagonist claims an address [188], and in *The Tent Peg*, the heroine, J.L., stakes a claim [210]), *No Fixed Address* refuses to reduce Arachne's desire to travel to the confines of a realistic plot: the spider-like Arachne is never caught in her own web. Instead, she fearlessly crosses into unmapped territory. Moving beyond the conventional roles of daughter, wife, and mother, she remains sexually appetitive and adventurous — so much so, that she flaunts social convention that relegates the elderly to an asexual limbo, and has a passionate affair with Joseph, a coppersmith who is almost ninety. One of the more intriguing boundaries that Arachne crosses is the division between life and death itself. Toward the end of the novel, Arachne dies; as the narrator explains, "one of her lives [was] certainly over" (301). But the story does not end with her death because the text does not bow to the dictates of traditional plot structures, which, as Daphne Marlatt points out, always award marriage or death (or insanity) to the heroine (Marlatt 105). Instead, the inconclusive conclusion of *No Fixed Address* portrays Arachne, still very much alive, fleeing the law — a metaphor for the "laws" of fiction, perhaps — driving north toward the arctic. As the narrator explains, the arctic "is the ultimate frontier, a place where the civilized melt [sic] away and the

meaning of mutiny is unknown, where manners never existed and family backgrounds are erased. It is exactly the kind of place for Arachne" (316).

With its emphasis on the north as anonymous territory, *No Fixed Address* develops a link between the unmapped northern landscape and the cognitive space where women can plot radical alternatives to traditional representations of female identity. More precisely, Arachne's transformations correspond to the Deleuzian model of "becoming," whose end-point, as Elizabeth Grosz indicates, consists in becoming indiscernible, imperceptible, and impersonal (23). As Stephen Scobie remarks, in *No Fixed Address*, the most radical subversion of traditional representations consists in the refusal of representation itself. This occurs when Arachne becomes a "missing person": "She has certainly moved beyond the confines of an individual personality, whether defined in the loose terms of the picaresque tradition or in the stricter terms of the fiction of realism. She has become a different person, a missing person" (Scobie 40). Here the plotting of identity and the plotting of landscape fuse because, when Arachne drives to Long Beach in B.C., she drives over the edge, "the brink, the selvage of the world" (291). As Scobie notes, the word "selvage" is formed from the combination of the words "self" and "edge," so that her journey literally takes her to the self's edge and beyond (39).

In the end, the realist reader/narrator, desperate to capture Arachne, is left miserably following her trail of abandoned panties, those emblems of the repression of the female body, which are strewn along a road that never ends. Ironically, one reviewer, obviously sympathetic with the text's realist narrator, vents his frustration at the turn of events, which begins when Arachne abandons Thomas and the normalcy which he represents. According to the reviewer, after that, "We're not sure what is real and what is not, so it hardly matters. Arachne is no longer a reverse role-model, but has become merely words on a page" (McGoogan 34). Despite his frustration, McGoogan has hit on a key point. Arachne does not remain a reverse role-model; instead, she moves beyond the frame of binary thinking, leaves the grid behind altogether, and becomes unrecognizable as a real Woman (or Man, for that matter). Her escape reveals that the traditional image of Woman or Man and its mirror reflection were never more than simply "words on a page" or their equivalent in the first place.

IN *Places Far From Ellesmere*, not only is the traditional representation of Woman subverted, but the structure of realistic fiction continues to be destabilized as the narrator journeys from place to place and muses about the landscape, its history, its inhabitants, and, strangely enough, its graveyards. This text focuses most directly on the relationships between the mapping of place and the plotting of fiction, and the repercussion both types of plotting have had on

fictional representations of female identity. At every instance, the narrator is, in fact, searching out possible sites for a "future grave" (140). In her review of the text, Hilda Kirkwood describes van Herk as a "contemporary mystic, quasi-religious, with a death-fixation" (29). However, van Herk does not have a "death-fixation," so much as a desire to explore the nature of "engravement," which, as the pun indicates, concerns the process of engraving plots (see *Places* 23, 61). In the text, the word "grave" pivots on this double meaning: a grave for people as well as a fixed *plot* for stories. As the narrator intimates, physical engravement, i.e., burial in the landscape, has affinities with the engravement or emplotting of fictions: "to dare to stay after death, to implant yourself firmly and say, 'Here I stay, let those who would look for a record come here'" (61). Writing, which is committed to paper, like a body committed to the earth, becomes both a record for others as well as an ambiguous icon: "Enclosed, focussed, [sic] a possible fortress . . ." (62). Although the narrator tests out the possibility of locating a plot in three different places, like Goldilocks in the fairy tale, she is not permitted to make a final selection (140-41). Ultimately, she recognizes that she is destined "to become ashes. Ashes alone" because it is not safe for women to choose a fixed plot (141). Her insistence on remaining fragmentary and her awareness of the dangers associated with locating oneself in the literary landscape recall Marlatt's point that traditional plots end only in death, marriage, or insanity (a form of death) for the heroine. The narrator of *Places Far From Ellesmere* warns that women must resist the temptation to find a final "home"/grave/plot because there "are murderers at large" (141).

In the text, the impulse to resist the temptation to rely on a traditional plot affects the structure of the work. As I noted earlier, the text has generated tremendous confusion among reviewers. What remains clear, however, is that the self-conscious avoidance of plot, and the undermining of traditional forms of representation and gender roles leads to the undermining of genre categories. It is a mistake, perhaps, to try to squeeze this genreless work into a "fixed" classificatory system that it is so clearly attempting to resist.

Van Herk herself has dubbed the work a "geografictione," in an attempt to describe the text's fusion of the processes of map-making and fiction-making. In accordance with its reliance on cartography, each of the novel's four sections maps a specific "exploration site." These sites include the author's hometown of Edberg; the city of Edmonton, where she attended university; Calgary, where she currently resides; and, finally, Ellesmere Island, the arctic desert where she journeyed with her partner, Robert Sharp, an exploration geologist. It is on this floating polar desert that the narrator enacts a re-reading of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin*, a reading which frees Anna from Tolstoy's murderous plot (82).⁷ In accordance with the Deleuzian model discussed above, the narrator journeys from one stratified site to

another, where the individual is captured and enclosed, before she finally escapes to the smooth space of the desert.

As in the previous novel, the northern landscape once again offers a refuge for women from the over-determined, masculine representations of Woman. When the narrator travels to Ellesmere, she brings Tolstoy's novel with her as "a lesson, to solve a problem in how to think about love; to solve a problem in the (grave) differences between men's writing and women's writing . . ." (82); once again, the word "grave," can be understood to mean "plot." As Linda Hutcheon suggests, the word also conveys the sense of "graveness" or seriousness typically associated with masculine, epic fiction. Rather than rewrite the masculine fictions of the prairie, as she begins to do in *No Fixed Address*, in *Places Far From Ellesmere*, van Herk advocates abandoning them altogether: "Go north. . . . If there are westerns, why can there not be northerns? Northerns of the heart. . . . Anna has been punished too long. Take her with you to Ellesmere" (85).

In the first section, the narrator engages in a meditation of the nature of Edberg as home and as a possible site for engravement. Although she finally understands that she cannot capture the town in a fictional engravement (37-39) the narrator does provide some salient details regarding her hometown — details which emphasize its fortress-like nature. In her account of Edberg, she describes its "six square blocks" and the town's grid-like structure, stressing the emphasis placed on the control of flows (37). In her reading of Edberg's history and her early life in the town, she primarily remembers the set of prohibitions that were geared to restrict her movements (24-29). In contrast to the town's repressive character, the image of the platform at the train station, which stood "on the lip of the world," functions as a figure for desire and escape (16). It is on the platform that the narrator first imagines seeing Tolstoy's Anna Karenin (16). Later on, she remarks that Anna "will get off to pace the platform . . . and to remember that illegitimacy lurks everywhere, she has only to read the story differently, her own story waiting to be un/read by the light of these places . . ." (36). However, this image of Anna getting *off* the train highlights the crucial fact that a creating re-reading of the story, what Deleuze and Guattari would call a "line of flight," can only occur when one diverges from the linear narrative trajectories associated with State-thought, symbolized by the train-tracks.

In the novel, the image of train-tracks corresponds to Rudy Wiebe's image of the fiction writer's grid, those "great black steel lines of fiction." Within the section on Ellesmere Island, the narrator clarifies this association between the train-tracks and State-thought when she explains that Anna was railroaded into committing suicide by Tolstoy. She goes on to align Tolstoy with the mysterious peasant who appears in Anna's dreams and magically arrives on the scene when Anna commits suicide in the novel. Tolstoy and his alter ego, the little peasant "working at the rails," are held responsible for grinding Anna "beneath the freight cars of the

train" (119).⁸ In essence, the train-tracks symbolize the rigid, prearranged structure of the masculine narrative trajectory.

In the second section, the narrator attempts to escape the prohibitions associated with Edberg by travelling to Edmonton. Although she travels to this city to get away from prohibitions, as it turns out, Edmonton — this "once-fort, Hudson's Bay Company stronghold" — like Edberg, is structured according to a grid (52). Associated as it is with the State and State-thought, Edmonton cannot possibly satisfy the narrator's desires for escape. The text offers a clue that this is the case when the narrator asks, "what's to be expected of a fort(ress) set up to trade/skin Indians?" (43), and then likens herself to an Indian: "you now the Indian coming with your skin, your fresh eyes up from the Battle River country . . ." (44). As in the previous section, the fortress is once again opposed to the smooth space of the desert. For the narrator, the city remains a "stagnation point" within the world at large. Her memories of it are of "the darkness of winter and of buildings, of *enclosed cold*" (53; my emphasis). In this section, the image of Anna Karenin reappears once again, signalling the narrator's desire to escape what is clearly another of the State's fortresses (48).

In the third section, the image of the fortress surfaces yet again. The narrator wryly comments on her new home, Calgary, saying, "Found yourself a Jericho, have you?" (57). Jericho was, of course, the biblical walled-city, which Joshua and the *nomadic* army of Israel destroyed. Each of Calgary's four quadrants is discussed in a separate section of the text. Portrayed as a labyrinth, Calgary fulfills the primary goal of the State, which is to effect capture. The shopping malls are described as labyrinthine "bubbles of light and air that claim closure, insist on wholeness and order" where you "wandering, lost, cannot find the door you came in or any door at all . . ." (72). At one point, the narrator likens herself to a minotaur trapped within a maze: "Who can find you here, a clumsy bawling beast in the centre of a web of thread, a cat's cradle of encapturement?" (73).

Not only is Calgary a maze, it is also a fortress of sterility; as the narrator explains, "sex is too playful for Jericho . . ." (73).⁹ In the midst of the discussion of the city's maze-like structure and its virginal, Christian idealism, the narrator introduces the concept of nomadology. She remarks that Calgary was begun by the "oldest occupation, the nomadic herding of grazing animals," and that the transient nature of the city is due to the nomadic legacy of the ranchers (68, 69). Now, when she poses the question, "Where is Home?" she recognizes that, from certain vantage points, home may not exist, and she sees that there is "no evidence of city" from certain points "outside" the metropolis — points of view which belong to the "nomad wandering the prairie" (71). Ultimately, the narrator decides that Calgary, a fortress built out of "dragon's teeth that have grown themselves into monoliths . . ." (71) is, in conjunction with Edberg and Edmonton, a place "to run away from . . ." (72). She winds up her tour of this exploration site with a plea

in support of nomad-thought, and she urges individuals to escape Calgary's labyrinth of stone and to return to deterritorialized space. In the end, she commands the city to shout, just as Joshua and his troops shouted in an effort to raze the walls of Jericho.

In the text's final section, entitled "Ellesmere, woman as island," the walls have shattered, the male west has been successfully "earth-quaked," and the exploration site shifts to the deterritorialized, nomadic polar desert of an arctic island. In this desert landscape, the female body ceases to be the site for the projection of masculine fantasies; the chimera of Woman gives way to a non-hierarchized body. As the narrator explains: "You are only a body, here in this Arctic desert, this fecund island. Lungs, fingers, a stomach, legs and feet. This fragile world far tougher than you are, a floating polar desert for all characters to emulate" (77-78). In their work, Deleuze and Guattari invoke the concept of the "Body Without Organs" to describe a body which is free from the restrictions imposed on it by State-thought. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests:

Their notion of the Body Without Organs (BWO) constitutes Deleuze and Guattari's attempt to both denaturalize the human body and to place it in direct relations with the flows or particles of other bodies or entities. . . . Rather than, as psychoanalysis does, regarding [sic] the body as the developmental union or aggregate of partial objects, organs, drives, bits, each with their own significance . . . which are, through oedipalization, brought into line with the body's organic unity, Deleuze and Guattari instead invoke Antonin Artaud's conception of the Body Without Organs (BWO). This is the body disinvested of all fantasies, images, projections, a body without a psychical interior, without internal cohesion or latent significance. Deleuze and Guattari speak of it as a surface of intensities before it is stratified, organized, hierarchized. . . . [I]t is a limit or a tendency to which all bodies aspire. ("Thousand" 14).

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS DELEUZIAN MODEL of the Body Without Organs, the narrator portrays the interaction between body and environment on Ellesmere as one of free-flowing "pleasure" and "seduction" (109). The syntax used to describe the simple action of drawing water from a river reflects the extent to which the narrator's body is in direct relations with the flows or particles of other entities: "buckets and water and stones and the muscles of shoulder and arm" (109). The conjunction of the human and nonhuman elements in this passage conforms to the rhizomatic structure of nomad-thought. As Brian Massumi explains: "Nomad-thought replaces the closed equation of representation, $x=x \neq y$ ($I=I \neq \text{you}$) with an open equation: . . . $+x+z+a$ Rather than analyzing the world into discrete components, reducing their manyness to the One of identity, and ordering them by rank, it sums up a set of disparate circumstances in a shattering blow" (xiii). With the aid of nomad-thought, the narrator is able to experience her body beyond the confines of its designation as

"the Sex." Moreover, in conjunction with the destabilization of these binary oppositions, she is also able to deconstruct the static enclosure which characterizes the plot of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin*.

The narrator explains that she could only take one book with her on her trip to Ellesmere. Although her friend, Rudy Wiebe, suggested that she take *War and Peace*, she does not want to read masculine epic fiction. She chooses *Anna Karenin* because, as she says, she is looking for "an image of a woman," even one scripted by a man (81). In an attempt to rescue Tolstoy's Anna, the narrator takes her to Ellesmere and unread her (85). As in *No Fixed Address*, the north once again becomes the home of the nomad — the deterritorialized space which lies outside the enclosed spaces of the State's fortresses. In *Places Far From Ellesmere*, the narrator underscores this, saying: "The northerners belong to no nation, no configuration of (wo)man" (125). Even the puzzle-ice which covers the ocean provides a clue to the type of fluid unreadings made possible in this arctic space. The narrator's/reader's unreading of *Anna Karenin* is likened to a thaw in the static mass of ice (93), and, at one point, the ice forms a picture of Anna herself (111-12). Ultimately, the image of the puzzle-ice transforming from molar masses to fluid molecular shards functions as a figure for the exploratory strategy of a feminist reading of Tolstoy's text: "The words are stirred, mixed, like pieces of a jigsaw, broken up into their separate shapes and the whole picture lost . . ." (113). As the narrator explains, "reading is a new act here, not introverted and possessive but exploratory, the text a new body of self, the self a new reading of place" (113).

When she undertakes her unreading of Tolstoy's novel, the narrator discovers that Anna is punished as a result of her eroticism. More precisely, at the heart of Anna's desire for Vronsky and her love of books lies her fundamental desire to read her own life, an impulse which is not permissible in a society where female desire represents "an unleashed demon that should be controlled and organized, scripted and domesticated" (107). In a close-reading of the passage where Tolstoy arranges for Anna to commit suicide by throwing herself under the wheels of the train, van Herk highlights the fact that it is primarily Anna's ability to read which is negated by her death: "*And the candle by which she had been reading the book filled with trouble and deceit, sorrow and evil, flared up with a brighter light, illuminating for her everything that before had been enshrouded in darkness, flickered, grew dim and went out forever*" (Tolstoy 802, qtd. in van Herk 120-21). However, in the high arctic of Ellesmere Island, the darkness into which Tolstoy casts Anna, and the trains which he arranges to murder her are banished: "The trains that shunt Anna back and forth between Moscow and Petersburg . . . could not conceive of how to traverse Ellesmere. No amount of hammering could shape this floating woman/island into a metal bar. Within this endless light, she resists all earlier reading" (121). Ultimately, the "site exploration" of Ellesmere island offers a fierce condemnation of the imposition of the "great black steel lines" of

masculine fiction. Writing, in the service of the State, is revealed to be akin to rape. The narrator's use of the inclusive pronoun "you" further emphasizes that all women have suffered from the rigid frame imposed by the representation of women as Woman: "Anna murdered, *you murdered*, your body abandoned under its burden of blood and bone, the terrible violation of an iron writing" (142; my emphasis).

To summarize, in the texts discussed in this study, attempts are made to subvert traditional forms of storytelling which have characterized western regional fiction. Rather than conform to a "fixed" grid, which positions women as Woman, van Herk's most recent texts forge alternative narratives, which, to borrow the words of Deleuze and Guattari, resist "capture" in favour of "deterritorialization." As I suggested earlier, *No Fixed Address* challenges established representations of Woman through its portrayal of Arachne, an amoral underwear salesperson, who indulges in the pleasures of a nomadic existence. Not only does the text problematize conventional gender roles, it also subverts established plot structures by refusing closure: Arachne does not die, she simply becomes "imperceptible," disappearing into the uncharted, arctic landscape. Similarly, van Herk's latest "geografictione," *Places Far From Ellesmere*, continues to emphasize the limitations of traditional representations of Woman as well as established plot structures — the products of "engravement." Here the distinction drawn by Deleuze and Guattari between "State-thought" and the "nomadic war machine" surfaces in terms of an opposition between the grid-like structure of the western towns and cities (depicted as fortresses) and the unmappped, nomadic territory of Ellesmere Island. As in *No Fixed Address*, the shifting arctic desert is portrayed as a site where radical re-reading of traditional plot structures are made possible.

In the light of van Herk's boldness in taking on the traditions of western regional literature, and her successful destabilization of established plots and their representations of female identity, criticisms which dismiss her work out of hand seem far too harsh; worse, they reveal a misunderstanding of her project, which is not so much to change the map as it is to change the process of mapping altogether. What emerges are texts which instigate shifts from capture and cartography to deterritorialization and nomadology.

NOTES

¹ In using the term "Woman," I refer not to actual historical individuals (i.e., women), but to what Teresa de Lauretis describes as the product of various "social technologies of gender," which assign individuals to a particular category that did not exist out there in "nature" (4).

² The following serve as examples of the prairie's "bondage": first, Frederick Philip Grove's assertion that order "must arise out of chaos; the wilderness must be tamed" (Grove 227); second, the prevalent image which Laurence Ricou isolates in western fiction, namely, the binary opposition between the vertical man and the horizontal world; and, finally, the feminized landscape portrayed in Henry Kreisels story, "The

Broken Globe" (58). The imagery used in each case is, according to van Herk, undeniably masculine: "a black line breaking up space. There is no entrance here, only imposition, juxtaposition, the hammer blow of an extrusive shape" ("Women" 18).

- ³ For a parodic depiction of the metaphoric feminization of the Canadian landscape, see Susan Swan's novel, *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, p. 180-83.
- ⁴ For a discussion of the reservations which feminists have articulated in response to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, see Elizabeth Grosz's study, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics," 2-5. This paper was delivered at a Deleuze conference at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, on May 16, 1992, and I believe that she intends to include it as a chapter in a forthcoming book.
- ⁵ I was disturbed by a talk at the Canadian Women's Studies Association, May 30 to June 1, 1992, which focused on the evils of post-structuralist theory. In a session, entitled, "Postmodernisms: Feminist Critical Responses," Somer Brodribb spoke of the dangers associated with "touching the phallus," and the tendency of phallogocentric, poststructuralist theory to undermine and obfuscate the clarity of truly feminist strategies.
- ⁶ My thanks to M. Harry at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, for pointing out the nefarious behaviour of spiders, which Arachne emulates.
- ⁷ In selecting Tolstoy's classic, van Herk may well be responding directly to Rudy Wiebe's assertion that the prairie deserves a literary representation based on the fictions of the "Russian steppes."
- ⁸ Van Herk refers to the Penguin translation of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin*, 802.
- ⁹ Robert Kroetsch first described Calgary as a city of male virgins in an article which mocked the "failure of sexuality" in the newly-created city. He concluded that Calgary is "ultimately Christian in its sexual posture: women are the source only of man's fall" ("Kingdom" 1).

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(UNTITLED)

Kathleen Wall

I confess I love
the ambiguity of distance
that transforms
a falling yellow leaf
to fluttered moth —
or moth to leaf.
Does it matter what I name
a vision so apposite,
since moth is a transformation
of leaves to wings?

Or the confusion of cornfields
that arrange themselves for my traveled instant
into rows
then disperse to green and flowing chaos.
What word is there for fixed and planted order
that dissolves from any other vantage?

If I knew the names for flight,
for small brown tufts transformed
to quick and silver dips and arcs,
perhaps I could name lark sparrow
or pine siskin
on wing.
But we do not have words
for the calligraphic air that they transcribe,
or for the way the evening drifts
beneath a jubilant ideogram of wing.



WOMAN AT THE SCHWARZENEGGER FILM

Jay Ruzesky

If I had girls it wouldn't be like this;
this could be a love story and
these children could be cherubs,
blowing flutes, strumming harps
above jet streams and earthly bounds,
above the sprawling city,
the road currently a mess of mud
and broken asphalt which is stretching
sideways like a fat person taking
a deep breath up the lawn
to my house that needs painting.

They would be thankful.

There are easier ways to travel back
through time. The rebel sends a guardian
to protect his younger self.
No one seems to feel any pain.

It had to start somewhere, sometime.
Below the level ground of Iowa
a pile of spinning electrons bounces,
prisoners in a row of padded cells.

Maybe now some pressure builds
deep in the heart of my two small boys
who are anxious, who are on the edge
of their seats, who are punching and kicking
their way toward the end of the world.

July 17 '91



FROM COMPLICITY TO SUBVERSION

The Female Subject in Adele Wiseman's Novels

Ruth Panofsky

AN EXAMINATION OF THE FEMALE SUBJECT in Adele Wiseman's novels charts the radical shift from complicity with the patriarchy of orthodox Judaism in *The Sacrifice* (1956) to subversion of that culture in *Crackpot* (1974). Both works describe insular communities whose ideologies rather than their practices reflect a traditional and orthodox Judaism and which participate minimally in the large society. Each novel configures one female character as a whore who exists on the periphery of the community. *The Sacrifice* finally refuses to accommodate the prostitute. An example of "a female character who cannot properly negotiate an entrance into teleological love relations, ones with appropriate ends, a character whose marginalization grows concentrically as the novel moves to the end" (DuPlessis 16), Laiah is murdered for challenging Judaism's patriarchy. In the figure of Hoda, *Crackpot* seeks retribution for Laiah's death and provides a revisionist reading of the earlier text which attempts to recover a place for women within Judaism and fiction. *Crackpot* is written against *The Sacrifice* as a critique where "community and social connectedness are the end of the female quest, not death" (DuPlessis 16).

Wiseman's first novel "sacrifices" a female sensibility to the patriarchal discourse of orthodox Judaism. Primarily a tragedy, *The Sacrifice* is a male-centred text whose prevailing consciousness is that of Abraham. Despite his slaying of Laiah, the narrative is aligned consistently with Abraham, an alliance which is signalled early on through a detailed description of his physical discomfort. As repeated references to his eyes suggest, Abraham's vision, however distorted, will dominate the work:

The train was beginning to slow down again, and Abraham noticed lights in the distance. . . . He tried to close his eyes and lose himself in the thick, dream-crowded stillness, but his eyelids, prickly with weariness, sprang open again. (3)

By focusing on Abraham's perception and his decision to disembark the train, the narrative deliberately and immediately positions him at the centre of the action.

Further, early references to his "throbbing aches" (3), flawed vision, and rash behaviour foreshadow the similar responses which overwhelm Abraham during his murder of Laiah.

Abraham sanctions compliance for women which is evident in his attitude toward Sarah, Ruth, and Laiah. In fact, in the world of *The Sacrifice* if one is female acting is tantamount to sinning. Hence, Abraham endorses his wife's debilitating passivity as an appropriate response to the tragic loss of her elder sons without understanding that she is silenced by the cultural imperative to internalize her tremendous grief, manifested as "spasms" that only "wear themselves out in exhaustion" (50). Chaim Knopp and other male characters respect Sarah for her submissiveness. In defiance of his own loquacious wife, for example, Mr. Plopler wistfully describes Sarah as "such a quiet one" (134). The one time she differs with her husband by correcting his conscious misattribution of a Christian cousin to her side of the family, Sarah does so timorously, speaking softly with "her troubled gaze on her hands in front of her" (125). As her husband apologizes she looks down, feeling "ashamed of what she had let slip," and is soon "silent in his arms, as though already distant" (125). Sarah's timely death occurs in the following chapter, soon after her momentary transgression of the norms which govern female humility.

In contrast, Sonya Plopler and Bassieh Knopp have distinctive voices throughout the novel and continually announce their personal desires. Their direct manners and forthrightness, however, offend the other characters. Moreover, the narrative's endorsement of this distaste becomes evident in the comic moments which often are achieved at the expense of Sonya Plopler's penchant for gossip and Bassieh Knopp's tendency toward self-aggrandizement.

Despite her irritation with her mother-in-law, Ruth admires the marriage of Sarah and Abraham, the success of which depends on the rigid adherence to culturally sanctioned roles and their attendant codes of behaviour. Ruth aspires to a similar shared intimacy between herself and Isaac. Although she does not envision herself as fragile, she fantasizes that Isaac may one day treat her "as though she were made of glass" (134). This reverie conforms to the values of orthodox Judaism upheld by Abraham. As long as Ruth cleaves to this fantasy she does not provoke her father-in-law. When she takes the initiative required to support herself and her family after Isaac's death, however, she challenges Abraham's ideal of the dependent female.

Ruth's cataclysmic argument with Abraham is spurred by her decision to act, a move toward economic independence which is the catalyst for the murder of Laiah. Like Sarah, whose lifelong suffering is the aftermath of the irrational killing of her sons during a pogrom in Russia, Ruth bears the burden of another's crime. She continually fights "the impulse to blame herself" (310) for Abraham's murder of Laiah and is plagued by the fear that she has misunderstood her father-in-law.

Powerless whether or not they embrace the subordinate position which Judaism traditionally assigns to women, the novel's female characters bear a weight of suffering.

Although Laiah shares in the suffering of Sarah and Ruth, her pain is heightened for she is denied the respect they receive as wives and mothers. Further, as a prostitute she is ostracized by the same women who otherwise would offer her community. Laiah therefore is marginalized by her marital status, by her childlessness, and by her livelihood. But marginalization proves insufficient punishment for Laiah's offences. Her deliberate challenging of Judaism, which deems it highly inappropriate for a woman to behave as temptress, cannot succeed within the world of *The Sacrifice*. As Nancy K. Miller states, "in so much women's fiction a world outside love proves to be out of the world altogether" (45). As a result, Laiah endures material and emotional hardship: economic insecurity, failed relationships, the denial of love and friendship, loneliness, verbal and sexual provocation, and barrenness. Her desire to give and receive love is repeatedly and sadly misinterpreted by a community which does not condone the expression of female desire, sexual or otherwise.

UNLIKE THE CHARACTERS OF THE NOVEL, the narrative periodically shows sympathy for Laiah: "Life had not dealt squarely with her. . . . Nothing had ever gone right for her from the very start" (192). More often, however, the narrative mirrors Abraham's dominant attitude toward Laiah and treats her with irony and disdain. Laiah is presented primarily as a hypocritical woman who yearns for acceptance by the same society whose patriarchal constraints she publicly defies with her displays of vanity, sensuality, and worldly knowledge.

The slaying of Laiah is an attempt to silence a woman who protests against the narrowness of her life as a Jewish woman and who seeks through self-expression and personal freedom to undermine Judaic convention. Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains:

Death comes for a female character when she has a jumbled, distorted, inappropriate relation to the "social script" or plot designed to contain her legally, economically, and sexually. Death is the result when energies of selfhood, often represented by sexuality, at once their most enticing and most damaging expression, are expended outside the "couvert" of marriage or valid romance: through adultery . . . , loss of virginity or even suspected "impurity" . . . , or generalized female passion . . . (15)

Laiah, who is described ironically as a "devil" (33), is guilty of all the above, adultery, impurity, and passion. Moreover, her sexual desire is couched in incestuous language: Abraham is confused by the "childish petulance in Laiah's voice" (302) when she asks "'Little father' . . . 'will you be good to me?'" (300-01).

Unlike the lesser transgressions of Sarah and Ruth, those of Laiah are sexual in nature and therefore are punishable. As DuPlessis affirms, "Death in general is a more than economic arrangement, for the punishment of one desire is the end of all" (16). In a scene that recalls Abraham's profane slaughter of a cow when he was apprenticed to a corrupt butcher, Laiah is attributed bovine features and is ceremoniously butchered: "under her eyelids her eyebulbs were large and fine. Her forehead wrinkled and was somehow sad, like that of some time-forgotten creatures than had crept out to seek the sun" (303). Unlike his biblical namesake who is prevented from sacrificing Isaac, the fictional Abraham carries out the murder of Laiah.

Within this tradition-bound society the norms of patriarchy will not be flouted without repercussions and Laiah is killed for her indiscretion, a shocking articulation of the misogyny which is embedded in the narrative. Nonetheless, in its denial of reconciliation and reparation to its female characters, privileges which the novel finally accords its male characters, *The Sacrifice* proclaims itself a patriarchal text.

In *Crackpot* the fate of the female subject is radically revised. While *The Sacrifice* draws to a close with Laiah's corpse and its flow of "warm blood" (304), *Crackpot* begins and concludes with large, accommodating, sensual Hoda. In Wiseman's second novel, a female-centred work written in the comic mode, the nurturing matriarch has displaced the overseer, judge, and patriarch of *The Sacrifice* and the narrative is aligned with the female rather than the male subject.

Crackpot prefers Hoda's physical amplex and earthy appetite to Abraham's noble stature and his disavowal of pleasure. Hoda challenges her assigned passive role. Demanding to be seen and heard, she rejects the silence of Sarah in favour of garrulity and, unlike Ruth who toils respectably for years, Hoda achieves an economic success which exceeds her initial expectations. Moreover, unlike Laiah, Hoda publicly embraces her work. She is not alienated or punished or murdered for her choice of profession; rather she is rewarded with love and marriage. In fact, *Crackpot* is a novel of celebration, a record of the singular triumph of a Jewish prostitute.¹ Eighteen years earlier Laiah had been denied a similar success. By 1974, however, a different vision and a revised understanding of women's position within Judaism are articulated in *Crackpot* which, partly through mood and characterization, subverts orthodox tradition.

Whereas the first pages of *The Sacrifice* construct the male as the dominant subject and prevailing consciousness of the novel, *Crackpot* opens with an engaging description of Rahel and Hoda, her overfed daughter. The work immediately affirms the secondary position of its male characters in relation to their female counterparts and the dominance of the female voice. *Crackpot* redraws the family matrix to consist of a husband who is a passive idealist, a wife who is a wage-earner, and a child who is a self-willed individual. While Abraham remains the noble patriarch throughout the tragic turn of events in *The Sacrifice*, Danile never enjoys

the position of a man who either is revered by the Jewish community or respected as the head of a household.

Because of his blindness Danile is marginalized by his own people and is largely ineffectual as both husband and father. In fact, Danile's position within the community and his family is superseded by Rahel who, despite her own infirmity, supports her family by cleaning the homes of Jewish families and by Hoda who assumes responsibility for her father following Rahel's death, whose perspective dominates the work, and with whom the narrative is compassionately aligned. The sympathetic portrayal of Hoda contrasts sharply with the previously ironic treatment of Laiah. By the second paragraph of the novel, when the young Hoda rumbles "Maa-a-a-a-ah" in "a surprisingly chesty contralto" (7), she has laid claim to the text. The prostitute as enticer of *The Sacrifice* is recast in *Crackpot* as the prostitute-cum-earth mother who displaces the male in an affirming tale of "condoms," "prurience," and "incestry" (300).

Unlike *The Sacrifice*, where the narrative's irony connotes disdain and several characters express their disapproval of Laiah's sexuality, *Crackpot* conveys admiration for Hoda through comic irony. Hoda is respected for her behaviour which challenges Judaism's ethos of female submissiveness, the same behaviour for which Laiah is vilified in *The Sacrifice*. At the Public Health Office, for example, where she is tested for venereal disease and all but proclaims herself a prostitute to the others seated in the waiting room, Hoda forfeits neither the narrative's nor the reader's approbation. Rather, she is described as having

developed, over the years, a kind of sophistication, a public attitude, a way of outfacing whoever faced her. Deliberately, she would introduce the question, "What do you do for a living?" so that she could work round to telling them, in her turn, still sloshing her [urine] specimen innocently, "Me? Oh, I make ends meet . . ." (210)

In contrast to Laiah, whose several attempts to achieve self-sufficiency are thwarted, Hoda appears throughout *Crackpot* as she is described above, resourceful, independent, and heroic. The shift from tragedy in *The Sacrifice* to comedy in *Crackpot*,² which signals the move from solemnity to celebration and from a critical to a sympathetic narrative, indicates support for Hoda's challenging of normative behaviour for women and allows for her personal triumph at the close of the novel.

THE MARKED SIMILARITIES between Hoda and Laiah are their prostitution and the marginalized status attributed to them by others. The characterization of Hoda differs from that of Laiah, however, in significant ways. Rather than suffer for her choice of profession, Hoda flourishes in spite of it. She successfully supports herself and her father by her meagre income. Hoda enjoys

long-lasting relationships with friends and family members and strives to sustain difficult associations with her Uncle Nate, for example. Unlike Laiah, whose family history is undisclosed, Hoda is the cherished daughter of devoted parents and she nurtures her elderly father. Hoda shares the companionship of her colleague, Seraphina, without the jealousy and competition that exists between Laiah and Jenny. Moreover, Hoda serves both the therapeutic and sexual needs of her customers, many of whom regard her as their friend.

Hoda refuses to be excluded and participates as a secular member of the Jewish community, as well as a citizen of the large urban centre in which she lives. Although she often feels alone and disconnected, hers is not a predominantly lonely life as is Laiah's. In contrast to Laiah, Hoda responds to verbal or sexual provocation with characteristic humour, a limited means of self-protection adopted by Jews throughout history. Solemn reactions are reserved for those situations which warrant them, such as Hoda's first incestuous encounter with her son David. Moreover, unlike Laiah, Hoda bears a child who is both the cause of tremendous anguish and the vehicle for her personal reconciliation which concludes the novel.

In fact, it is primarily the act of childbirth which distinguishes Hoda from Laiah. Judaism views the birth of a son as a privilege and the birth of a male child confers high status on a woman. Although she is denied that status by virtue of her occupation and her circumstances as an unwed mother, Hoda reclaims her son through incest.

In *The Sacrifice* the incestuous desire of Laiah for Abraham is implicit. In *Crackpot*, however, the act of incest is central and is both subversive and subverted by the novel. In a parodic⁸ inversion of mother-son incest, *Crackpot* turns the tale of Jocasta and Oedipus on its head. Instead of engendering tragedy and alienation as it does in the Theban drama, the incestuous relationship between Hoda and David facilitates the novel's comic resolution. As Linda Hutcheon explains, "Parody today is endowed with the power to renew. It need not do so, but it can. . . . What has traditionally been called parody privileges the normative impulse, but today's art abounds as well in examples of parody's power to revitalize" (115).

In another parody of the biblical story of Lot, Abraham's nephew who remains unaware of his incestuous encounters with his daughters, Hoda assumes the unlikely position of maternal authority by displacing the father and by choosing to accept rather than reject her son. Here, incest is neither an unacknowledged act, as in the case of Jocasta and Oedipus, nor a means of begetting male heirs, as in the case of Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38).

Instead, incest becomes an act of compassion as Hoda selflessly enters a relationship with David who, like Oedipus and Lot, remains oblivious to the true nature of the sexual union in which he participates. Although Hoda suffers with the knowledge that she is David's mother, the decision to succumb to his request for sexual relations is prompted by maternal concern and she is careful not to abuse

her position of power. Moreover, through their incestuous connection Hoda and David are united spiritually.

The use of incest as a means of achieving reconciliation subverts the general understanding of the act as one in which the father is the perpetrator of a sexual crime and the daughter is the violated innocent. The reversal of roles in *Crackpot* does not have devastating results, as incest usually does either in fiction or in reality. Instead, both female and male subjects mature as a result of their intimacy and move on to more gratifying experiences.

The engagement of Hoda and Lazar, with which the novel concludes, is characteristic of the affirming nature of comedy. In contrast to Laiah, who is silenced for her deviant behaviour, Hoda is rewarded with marriage through which she finally is reinscribed into Judaism. As she relinquishes her profession and assumes the role "of a good wife" (298) she secures a place within her religion and her community. While marriage to Lazar and potential childbirth may suggest the objectification of Hoda through a loss of individuality and independence, an ending "in which the gain is both financial and romantic success in the 'heterosexual contract'" (DuPlessis 4), her reinscription into Judaism must be seen as a celebration of renewed opportunity, a revision of the unsatisfactory alternatives available to women in *The Sacrifice*.

Hoda is neither silenced nor destined to the solitary life of an aging prostitute; rather she is allowed personal fulfillment, a subversive achievement for women, to say nothing of whores within Judaism. In her discovery that "she really liked love, now that she had found out exactly where it lived and how it worked. Love lived where it couldn't help itself, had to say yes, couldn't resist and had to give in, couldn't think, couldn't hide, couldn't pretend . . ." (108), Hoda triumphs where Laiah is punished.

The Sacrifice and *Crackpot* construct a female subject as prostitute in order to free her from the limitations imposed on all women, married or single. While *The Sacrifice* does not embrace the prostitute, who already exists on the margins of society, and castigates her for desiring freedom, *Crackpot* celebrates her life and rewards her with integration. Whereas Laiah weakens over time, Hoda literally and figuratively proves larger than the constraints of the patriarchy. *Crackpot's* revisionist reading of the earlier novel is an atonement for the unholy, parodic "sacrifice" of Laiah and an attempt to locate a place for women within Judaism and fiction which will foster their independence and accommodate rather than repress their individuality.

NOTES

I am indebted to Sylvia Brown and Laura McLauchlan for their readings of an early draft of this paper.

¹ The figure of the Jewish prostitute is rare enough in Canadian literature. A third example occurs in Miriam Waddington's poem "The Bond," where the speaker

identifies herself with a "Whore, Jewess" who is "twice outcast." *Green World*. New Writers 3 (Montreal: First Statement, 1945) n. pag.

² Although the critical reevaluation of genre from a feminist perspective is relevant to my argument, I have refrained from a generic examination of Wiseman's novels since that is not the focus of this paper.

³ My use of "parody" conforms to Linda Hutcheon's definition of the term as "imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways. Ironic versions of 'transcontextualization' and inversion are its major formal operatives, and the range of pragmatic ethos is from scornful ridicule to reverential homage." *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985) 37.

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SIGN

J. Michael Yates

Something wishes just to be what it is.
 One comes to regard time as nonexistent hazily.
 You have something to fall back on.
 You do that: Fall back.
 One year was like every other.
 Eventually everything would happen.
 Nothing can be just what it is.

SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST

T. Berto

A ripple, an eroded
spine it holds
back the Ohio, the Mississippi
refusing their confluence
until past
its forests so thick, glades so dense
even the N.P.R. from Carbondale
can't get through
its chlorophyll vapour
and oxygen hum

But disease fells greater powers; blights
constructed of small components, voices
in legislature and whines
in mills conspire
to grind him to submission
of product, progress

"Shawnee is the most fragmented
forest in the eastern . . ."
—shards and slices, chips of trees
are visions
stirred by late laments
of those who've witnessed
A fever will come,
and medicines will debate
how best to restore, to reserve,
and without any doubt,
control his wild ways

"Board feet," "sustainable use," commitments,
poverty, — even disease has need
chewing at the edges
making way for cowbirds
erosion, luxuriant furniture

It stands silent, waiting
both sides static
coddling the strength
the towering potential energy
of the giant's thundering crash

WORKING MAN FASHION

Barry Butson

no fashion knew he
my father never wore
in his smoky life shorts
nor did he ever pull
on a sweater or
short-sleeved shirt

his preference or practical
needs were work pants,
braces, long-sleeved shirt
no tie not my father
in the pocket of his shirt
a pack of cigs always
on his feet wool socks
and worn leather shoes
that tied up tight

all days of the weeks
wore he these feathers,
when he could have been
a peacock

"A FOREIGN PRESENCE IN THE STALL"

Towards a Poetics of Cultural Hybridity in Rohinton Mistry's Migration Stories

Ajay Heble

1. Foreign Presences

The title for this paper finds its origin in a short story called "Squatter" by South-Asian-Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry. This story, from Mistry's collection *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, is, for reasons which I hope will become apparent a little later, a story within a story, and it comes to a focus in the character of Sarosh, an Indian from a Parsi community in Bombay who decides to emigrate to Canada. Before Sarosh leaves his native India, a party is held in his honour and, at this party, his friends and family debate the relative merits and demerits of Sarosh's decision to go abroad. Some of his friends commend Sarosh, suggesting that, by emigrating, he is doing a wonderful thing; "his whole life," they feel, is going to "change for the better" (*Tales* 154). Others, however, are somewhat more circumspect, insisting that Sarosh is making a big mistake: "emigration," they argue is "all wrong, but if he wanted to be unhappy that was his business, they wished him well" (*Tales* 154). As a way of striking a kind of compromise between these two opposed factions, Sarosh, in "a moment of lightheartedness" (*Tales* 154), makes the following promise: "My dear family, my dear friends, if I do not become completely Canadian in exactly ten years from the time I land there, then I will come back" (*Tales* 154-55).

Ten years later, we find Sarosh, now Sid, completely Westernized in every respect save one — he is unable to use Western toilets:

At the point where our story commences, Sarosh had been living in Toronto for ten years. We find him depressed and miserable, perched on top of the toilet, crouching on his haunches, feet planted firmly for balance upon the white plastic oval of the toilet seat. (*Tales* 153)

Later we are told that Sarosh, in the privacy of his own home, is able to squat barefoot. Elsewhere, however,

if he had to go with his shoes on, he would carefully cover the seat with toilet paper before climbing up. He learnt to do this after the first time, when his shoes had left

telltale footprints on the seat. He had had to clean it with a wet paper towel. Luckily, no one had seen him. (*Tales* 156)

Unable to pass a motion Western style by sitting on the toilet seat, Sarosh repeatedly finds himself climbing up onto the seat and simulating the squat of Indian latrines in order to achieve the desired catharsis. Despite the intensely personal nature of Sarosh's problem, the story continually urges us to consider the social and cultural ramifications of his inability:

The world of washrooms is private and at the same time very public. The absence of feet below the stall door, the smell of faeces, the rustle of paper, glimpses caught through the narrow crack between stall door and jamb — all these added up to only one thing: a foreign presence in the stall, not doing things in the conventional way. And if the one outside could receive the feter of Sarosh's business wafting through the door, poor unhappy Sarosh too could detect something malodorous in the air: the presence of xenophobia and hostility. (*Tales* 156)

Although this might seem to offer a rather unconventional and incommodious point of departure for a scholarly paper, I begin with this moment because it seems to me to describe a signally pragmatic instance of cultural dislocation. It bespeaks an uneasiness which can only be the result of the problematic relationship between interlocking cultural landscapes, between an ethnic heritage and a new life in the West, or, to put it slightly differently, between what Rosemary Sullivan, in an article entitled "The Multicultural Divide," simply calls *there* and *here*. In Sullivan's words, "this is not a cheap polarity of eelgrass and snow, of a vapid idealized image of a past that is the focus only of nostalgia and a simplified alienating *here*. It is tougher than that. *There* and *here* are interlocked" (26).

That this is not, in Sarosh's case, a cheap polarity is evinced in various ways throughout the story. The "sad but instructive chronicle" (*Tales* 153) of Sarosh's life in Canada is offered by Nariman, the storyteller, as only *one* instance of immigrant experience; in fact, his story of Sarosh significantly begins with the counter-example of Vera and Dolly, two girls who "went abroad for studies many years ago, and never came back. They settled there *happily*" (*Tales* 153, my emphasis). While the offhand, seemingly incidental reference to Vera and Dolly serves as a convenient entrance into Nariman's story of Sarosh, it more suggestively functions as a reminder that different individuals have had varying degrees of success in negotiating their identity vis-à-vis a new system of cultural referents.

It is, however, tempting to see in Sarosh's predicament something that might be symptomatic of the immigrant experience. His inability to use Western toilets becomes, in his mind, a sign of his failure to adapt to a new culture. The discomfort occasioned by his perceived failure is played out through two overlapping areas of alienation: personal unease and social displacement. On a personal level, Sarosh's tale is a kind of narrative of failed conversion: he senses that he has failed because he has not become completely Canadian. On a social level, Sarosh's wash-

room habits seem to give rise to an increased sense of hostility and xenophobia. Upon detecting that things in the stall are not, as it were, being done in the "conventional way," others, at least as Sarosh sees it, will simply reject him as a foreign and intrusive presence. But what we need to keep in mind, here, is the fact that Sarosh's story is framed by Nariman, a storyteller with a penchant for unpredictability and ambiguity, for "lots of subtle gradations of tone and texture" (*Tales* 147). Why does Mistry situate the story of Sarosh's failed immigrant experience within the context of a narrative framed by a storyteller?

2. *Dismantling Fictions of Identity*

The figure of Nariman, the storyteller, is important for our understanding not only of this particular story, but of Mistry's fiction in general precisely because he, like Sarosh, inhabits the interstices of culture. Despite using the inserted tale of Sarosh as a warning for future generations of Indians who plan to seek happiness and success abroad, Nariman's own patterns of behaviour implicitly work to undermine the impact of his story. If the example of Sarosh seems to point up the dangers inherent in the process of ethnic interaction and to argue for a *return* to one's place of origin, Nariman himself contradicts the lesson which he seeks to impart to his listeners. He does this by revealing the extent to which he relies on and is steeped in Western cultural practices. In addition to his fondness for introducing new English words into his stories, for exposing "young minds to as shimmering and varied a vocabulary as possible" (*Tales* 146), Nariman, we are told, owns a Mercedes Benz (a Western symbol of success and affluence), has cultivated the moustache of a Western movie star (Clark Gable), and likes to whistle a march from a Western film (*Bridge on the River Kwai*). Though they may initially appear to have little, if anything, to do with the story of Sarosh, these allusions to Western popular culture are important for the subtle and intriguing ways in which they remind us that post-colonial identity is always already a hybridized formation.

Mistry, then, frames Sarosh's story within Nariman's in order more effectively to explore the consequences of migration. Rather than simply proceeding on the basis of an opposition between the new world (as a source of alienation) and the old world (as the only authentic source of values), Mistry interrogates the relationship between diverse cultural groups and dismantles traditional structures of authority which privilege an essential cultural purity. Moreover, Mistry employs the story-within-a-story technique in "Squatter" as a kind of structural analogue for the very process which Sarosh undergoes: the activity of re-forming the self in a new culture. The shift from a familiar frame of reference (hence the story begins with Nariman's invocation of Vera and Dolly, two girls who, despite having left the compound many years ago, are vividly remembered by the boys who gather around to listen to Nariman's tales) to a strange and foreign one becomes a structural enactment of Sarosh's experience of cultural displacement. The effect which

Nariman's story has on his listeners reinforces this point: the fact that they are unable to determine whether this is a comic or a serious tale forces us to recognize the extent to which notions of purity and structures of authoritarian discourse are being undermined:

Some of the boys struggled hard to keep straight faces. They suspected that Nariman was not telling just a funny story, because if he intended them to laugh there was always some unmistakable way to let them know. (*Tales* 154)

The story itself, like Sarosh, like Nariman the storyteller, is hybrid: at the juncture of the strange and the familiar, the serious and the funny, without ever purely being any one of these things.

What, then, are we, as readers, to make of Nariman's story of Sarosh? In seeking to become completely Canadian, Sarosh seems to want to forget his ethnic past, to efface his origins, and to lose his sense of identity by immersing himself in the Western hegemonic culture. His goal is clearly assimilation and his inability to accomplish the desired transformation can only be seen as a sign of failure: "If he could not be westernized in all respects, he was nothing but a failure in this land — a failure not just in the washrooms of the nation but everywhere" (*Tales* 162). Sarosh, thus, in his own peculiar way, seems to corroborate the view advanced by sociologist Robert Park in his 1928 essay, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man." In this famous piece, Park speaks of the "moral dichotomy and conflict [which] is probably characteristic of every immigrant during the period of transition, when old habits are being discarded and new ones are not yet formed. It is inevitably a period of inner turmoil and intense self-consciousness" (893). Moreover, Sarosh, during this transitional decade in his life, would appear to emerge as an instance of what Park calls

a new type of personality, namely a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break . . . with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he [seeks] to find a place. (892)

Unlike Park's "new type of personality," however, Sarosh, as we have seen, certainly seems willing to make a complete break with his past. The problem stems from what he is *unable* to do. Or is this necessarily the case?

What if we were to interpret the story of Sarosh not in terms of alienation, discomfort and failure, but rather in terms of a *resistance* to hegemonic practices? Such an interpretation would rescue Sarosh from the fate to which he seems to have resigned himself. No longer would we have to think of him, to use Park's terms, as exemplifying the "unstable character" of "the marginal man" (881). Instead of stressing his instability, we might focus on the way in which certain modes of behaviour, certain social practices, have been relegated to a position of inferiority by the dominant culture. In their formulation of a theory of "minority

discourse," Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd call for the need to see difference and otherness not as symptoms of an inferior position, but as "figurations of values radically opposed to those of the dominant culture" (10). By clinging to old world social practices — though apparently not by choice — Sarosh, it seems to me, may at some unconscious level be attempting to preserve remnants of meaning unique to his domain of experience in India. What I am suggesting, then, is that in the same way that Nariman's tale of Sarosh, with its deliberate blurring of borders of classification, is a hybridized formation, so our interpretation of the central meaning of this tale is similarly problematized. More explicitly, the act of interpretation, here, fractures in half to reveal its own dependence on a kind of hybridity.

3. *Form and Mastery*

The final point I'd like to make about the frame in Mistry's tale might best be understood when situated within the context of the following remark. Analyzing the tension between centre and margin in the fiction of Mistry and Bharati Mukherjee, Ashok Mathur writes, "their art is an interplay of dichotomies never resolved (nor resolvable), always shifting in and out of focus. Everything blurs: predator becomes victim, cause becomes effect, fact becomes fiction, transparency turns opaque" (19). The frame structure, I would argue, is itself part of this complex site of interaction. Nariman, the teller, is both outside the frame, narrating, and inside it as a minor participant in the action. The fact that he *knows* Sarosh, and is, in fact, invited to his welcome-home party, signals Nariman's position inside the frame. What is more revealing, however, is the way in which his own life is almost a mirror-image of Sarosh's. I say "almost" here because, unlike Sarosh, Nariman is not displaced; for that matter, he is not even inconvenienced by his dependence on Western systems of thought. Nevertheless, Nariman's own hybridized identity alerts us to the possibility that the framed moment in Mistry's text might be as much about Nariman as it is about Sarosh. Or, to put it slightly differently, the border which separates the person doing the framing from the person being framed is itself subject to the kind of blurring we see throughout the story. Given his position both inside and outside the frame, Nariman finds himself in a particularly effective discursive situation, able to speak with what Linda Hutcheon calls "the forked tongue of irony. . . which allows speakers to work *within* a dominant tradition but also to challenge it" (9).

Working from within in order to subvert: this is, of course, precisely what Rohinton Mistry does throughout the stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, and in the argument that follows I want to suggest some of the ways in which this discursive strategy is played out in some of these stories.

In his extraordinary re-reading of the Harlem Renaissance, Houston Baker discusses some of the "sounding strategies" which enabled American blacks to establish their own (also hybridized) Afro-American identity. He speaks of two

strategies which, when taken together, constitute the essence of black discursive modernism: "mastery of form," and "the deformation of mastery." Baker's formulation is instructive in our current context because it alerts us to the fact that a self-conscious adoption of the discourse employed by a hegemonic white culture (what he calls "mastery of form") represents an important stage in the process of subversion ("the deformation of mastery"). Baker's "sounding strategies" from black literary and cultural history find a kind of approximation in post-colonial notions of abrogation and appropriation. Here are the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*:

The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. There are two distinct processes by which it does this. The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of "English" involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege. (Ashcroft 38)

In Mistry's fiction, as we might expect, these strategies of language-use overlap and interlock in a way which makes it difficult to distinguish agency from response, cause from effect.

Mistry's mastery of form, his "ability to give the trick to white expectations" (Baker 49), expresses itself in the ironic continuation of certain stereotypes and clichés. Rustomji, in "Auspicious Occasion," bemoans the departure of the British in India because "Johnnie Walker Scotch, freely available under the British, could now be obtained only on the black market" (*Tales* 15). Similarly, Kersi's parents, in "Lend Me Your Light," seem to take the inferiority of their nation as a given: "We've seen advertisements in newspapers from England, where Canadian Immigration is encouraging people to come to Canada. Of course, they won't advertise in a country like India — who would want these bloody *ghatis* to come charging into their fine land?" (*Tales* 178). By having these Indian characters — and the fact that they are Indian is, of course, crucial — articulate their own sense of inferiority in terms of (a) how much better off they were under British rule, and (b) their very willingness to hold the conviction that Canadian Immigration would not want to advertise *in a country like India*, Mistry appropriates the clichés of colonialist discourse, while simultaneously rejecting their validity. Mastery of form functions here, by way of irony, as a kind of deformation of mastery.

4. Identity and/as Hyphenation

The tension between these two (hybridized) strategies of language-use (mastery of form and deformation of mastery) is roughly played out in the central dramatic conflict in "Lend Me Your Light." Like "Squatter," this story also deals with

problems of immigrant experience, but the tone here is unmistakably tragic. Enlarging on the opposition between two childhood friends, Jamshed, who, scornful of his native India, leaves for the Promised Land of America, and Percy, who adamantly stays in India to help villagers in their fight against exploitation, the story finds its focus in Kersi, the narrator, who comes to represent the struggle between the two extreme positions.

Even in his school days in Bombay, Jamshed sets himself apart from others. Instead of having lunch with his classmates in the "school's drillhall-cum-lunch-room," he eats in the family car: "His food arrived precisely at one o'clock in the chauffeur-driven, air-conditioned family car, and was eaten in the leather-upholstered luxury of the back seat, amidst his collection of hyphenated lavishness" (*Tales* 174). There is, it seems to me, something ironic about Mistry's use of the term "hyphenated" in this context. Jamshed dines amidst the hyphenated splendour of a "chauffeur-driven," "air-conditioned," "leather-upholstered" family car, but, once he takes up residence in America, he is unable to recognize his own hyphenated identity. As one critic puts it, "... so lost is Jamshed in a world of his own creation, so convinced is he that he has successfully attained the center, that he cannot even recognize his own roots of marginality" (Mathur 25). Moreover, when he returns to Bombay for a visit, Jamshed perpetuates stereotypes about the inferiority of Indians, insisting that Indians should do what they can to become more like Americans: "Indians [are] too meek and docile, and should learn to stand up for their rights the way people do in the States" (*Tales* 185). This is, of course, more than a mere comparison; Jamshed speaks here as a proponent of assimilationist theory. As an immigrant in the United States, he has willingly renounced his ethnic heritage and taken on the values of Americans. As far as he is concerned, he has become *one of them*.

Percy, by contrast, refuses Jamshed's invitation to take up a new life in the United States, and continues to fight for change and justice in a small Maharashtra village. His brother, Kersi, the narrator of the story, is, however, not nearly as certain of his own position. He too, like Jamshed, has emigrated, though he has chosen Canada, rather than the U.S.A. But unlike Jamshed, Kersi has made efforts to retain something of his ethnic past: "I became a member of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario. Hoping to meet people from Bombay, I also went to the Parsi New Year celebrations and dinner" (*Tales* 182). That Kersi inhabits the ambivalent space between cultures becomes strikingly evident when he comments on a letter he has just received from his brother Percy: "There you were, my brother, waging battles against corruption and evil, while I was watching sitcoms on my rented Granada TV. Or attending dinner parties at Parsi homes to listen to chit-chat about airlines and trinkets" (*Tales* 184). Kersi, in this passage, recognizes the extent to which his Indian heritage has been effaced by the North American cultural mainstream. He also understands that his attempts to retain some

vestige of his ancestral culture have resulted in little more than idle chit-chat. Unlike Nariman, who, in "Squatter," moves with considerable ease between two cultures, or at least between two domains of language-use, Kersi sees his hybridized identity as the site of a struggle between opposing sets of cultural values.

Earlier in the story, Kersi receives a letter from Jamshed. On the subject of his visit to India, Jamshed had written, "Bombay is horrible. Seems dirtier than ever, and the whole trip just made me sick" (*Tales* 181). Kersi is "irritated" by the fact that Jamshed "could express so much disdain and discontentment even when he was no longer living under those conditions" (*Tales* 181). He thus fashions his own letter to Jamshed, trying desperately to assert his ethnic origins:

I described the segment of Toronto's Gerrard Street known as Little India. I promised that when he visited, we would go to all the little restaurants there and gorge ourselves with *bhelpuri*, *panipuri*, *batata-wada*, *kulfi*, as authentic as any in Bombay; then we could browse through the shops selling imported spices and Hindi records, and maybe even see a Hindi movie at the Naaz Cinema. I often went to Little India, I wrote; he would be certain to have a great time. (*Tales* 181-82)

Upon writing this, however, Kersi immediately submits himself to a process of self-correction. "The truth is," he tells us, "I have been [to Little India] just once. And on that occasion I fled the place in a very short time, feeling extremely ill at ease and ashamed, wondering why all this did not make me feel homesick or at least a little nostalgic" (*Tales* 182). Kersi's confession alerts us to the fact that the "authentic" Indian essence he seeks to recover here is nothing but a constructed memory. Or, to put it slightly differently, this self-corrective gesture constitutes, for Kersi, a pronounced recognition of his own hybridity: despite being drawn to his brother's strong sense of purpose, Kersi also bears within himself much of Jamshed (Mathur 25). Hence when Kersi too returns to India, he is ashamed to admit that his views are very much in accord with those of Jamshed: "Bombay seemed dirtier than ever. I remembered what Jamshed had written in his letter, and how it had annoyed me, but now I couldn't help thinking he was right" (*Tales* 187). I do not mean to suggest, here, that Kersi simply comes down on the side of Jamshed, but rather to indicate that the force of Mistry's accomplishment in "Lend Me Your Light," as indeed in many of the other tales in the volume, resides in his evocation of the plight of the cultural hybrid: the impossibility of defining immigrant identity exclusively in terms of one's ancestral past or in terms of one's ability to assimilate into the new culture. Identity, as Kersi discovers, is more a matter of process than a fixed condition.

5. *A Poetics of Hybridity*

At this point, I would like to return to the strategies of language-use I spoke of a moment ago. The problematic interplay between the two positions I have been discussing, between what we might loosely call essentialism and assimilation, rever-

berates in the very language of these stories. While Jamshed, to adapt Baker's formulation, seems to have mastered the form of a Western hegemonic discourse (with all its attendant clichés concerning those on the margins), there are two additional remarks which should be made here. The first concerns our need to distinguish between Jamshed's sense of mastery and Mistry's appropriation of English. If, as I have been suggesting, Mistry works from within in order to subvert, if, by implication, he appropriates English as a vehicle for exploring levels of otherness within himself, Jamshed, by contrast, adopts the behaviour and values of Western culture only in order to immerse himself in that culture. Secondly, the limitations of Jamshed's assimilationist endeavours are revealed in his recourse to modes of expression which belong to the past he thinks he has discarded. Thus Jamshed, in spite of himself, alerts us to the fact that he cannot simply deny his ethnic heritage. Here is what he writes to Kersi about his visit to Bombay: "Nothing ever improves, just too much corruption. It's all part of the *ghati* mentality" (*Tales* 181). Continuing in this vein, he goes on to imply that in America things are much better. The point here is that he fails to recognize the implications of his own use of language. For all his eagerness to immerse himself in Western culture, Jamshed reveals his reliance on a set of linguistic assumptions which are specifically Indian. Deriving its contemporary usage from the context of India's hardy mountain dwellers, the term "*ghati*," as it is used both by Jamshed and by Kersi's parents, becomes a derogatory label for Maharashtra's common labourers. The "*ghati* mentality" to which Jamshed alludes thus has a certain kind of cultural resonance: the very phrase serves to remind us that Jamshed has grown up at a particular time and as a member of a privileged class in India.

Unlike Jamshed, Kersi would seem to be cognizant of the implications of his use of language. Despite his own "fluency in the English language" (*Tales* 178), Kersi openly articulates his hybridity through his use of interlocking discursive strategies. In other words, he too has mastered the form, but his appropriation of English is tempered with a deliberate admixture of words and phrases from his domain of experience in India. Thus in his letter to Jamshed, Kersi attempts to assert and inscribe cultural difference through the very *act* of writing non-English terms: "*bhelpuri, panipuri, batata-wada, kulfi*." Part of the point here, I take it, is the fact that these uniquely Indian culinary delights cannot simply be rendered into English. *Bhelpuri* and *panipuri* have no equivalent terms in English, and the English counterparts for *batata-wada* and *kulfi* (potato pastry and ice cream) are inadequate because they fail to acknowledge what the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* call the "importance of the situating context in according meaning" (Ashcroft 66).

The notion of language as a sign of cultural distinctiveness plays an analogously important role in "Swimming Lessons," the final tale in the collection. The narrator, though unnamed, is presumably Kersi once again, and in this piece we learn

that Kersi, like Mistry, is a writer. Set primarily in Toronto, "Swimming Lessons" also contains shifts to India, where the narrator's parents, in a series of metafictional moments, read and comment on the text which their son has recently written — thus interrupting the text which we, as readers, are in the very process of reading. I'd like to conclude this paper by turning to a passage from "Swimming Lessons" which duplicates the discursive configuration of the migration stories in the collection. After having received a short, unforthcoming letter from their son in Toronto, the narrator's parents fashion their own letter to him. Here is the father telling his wife what to write: "*remind him he is a Zoroastrian: manashni, gavashni, kunashni, better write the translation also: good thoughts, good words, good deeds — he must have forgotten what it means*" (*Tales* 236). That the father's prescription, here, needs to be followed by a translation becomes a kind of reminder of Mistry's own involvement with what I am calling a poetics of hybridity. Thus alongside an insistence on Kersi's heritage ("*remind him he is a Zoroastrian*"), there is an acknowledgement of the necessity of translation: an awareness of the extent to which Kersi has been involved in the process of integrating his ethnic differences into the sameness of a Western cultural mainstream.

In the migration stories in *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, thus, Mistry, through a series of interlocking discursive formations, articulates the ambivalent space between the "old" culture of India and the "new" culture of Canada. Caught between *there* and *here*, his characters and narrators, sometimes in spite of themselves, are engaged in the activity of defining their own hybridity. Like them, Mistry himself is someone who — as a South-Asian-Canadian — negotiates between different cultural traditions, and his fiction powerfully attests to the need for the Canadian literary landscape to open up to include a new kind of critical activity. Indeed, the emergence in Canada of writers like Mistry, Joy Kogawa, Dionne Brand, and Tomson Highway indicates the necessity of moving beyond a nationalist critical methodology — where "the desire to come to terms with oneself in place and time and in relation to others" is, as David Tarras suggests, "a national instinct" (10) — to a cross-cultural exploration of the discourse of hybridity as it is played out both within and beyond our national borders.

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SALT WOMAN

Jane Munro

salt
rim to a small lake, a mere
she called it, leftover from a previous life
salt woman on the verge
savoring herself

sal sapientia
sharpened by evaporation
a little salt makes sugar sweeter
and lemon tangy
white crust

salt
cleans a wound smartly
rough crystal
common as the first name you share with thousands
yet recognize as your own

salt
brings out the flavour
does not fester

IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Kenna Creer Manos

Lost beneath these stars,
My eye tricks out the home shapes from the north:
Tilts up a Cassiopeia,
Invents an Ursa Major
To colonize
The chaos of the sky.

Just so, the mind imports its kin;
Each wilderness invaded
By the immigrants of eye.

WASHDAY

Jane Munro

Her linen is laid out
to bleach and tighten;
also, her laces.

Lust races into brittle thickets,
fires the mantles
of manzanita blooms.

Tread carefully
down this dark slope
for the queen's monday bodices
are foaming, pungent as herbs,
wanton as the thornbushes
on which her pretties hang
while she is outrunning her weeds.

"THINGS HAPPENED"

Narrative in Michael Ondaatje's "the man with seven toes"

Ray Wilton

THE MAN WITH SEVEN TOES" may be seen as Michael Ondaatje's first major narrative. However, reading this text as narrative presents numerous difficulties, not the least of which is the tendency of the individual poems to elicit lyric expectations that in fact resist narrative continuity. The design of the book, with its broad pages, visually emphasizes the independence of the poems, and the poems themselves tend to contain short flashes of imagery or meaning, resembling photographs or paintings hung in a series. The poem's evocation of conflicting lyric and narrative expectations disorients the reader, compelling her or him into an active awareness of the role of those expectations in the text's production of meaning.

Sam Solecki, in his essay on *the man with seven toes*,¹ explores the form of the text concentrating primarily on imagery and texture, finding that "echoes and parallels" in phrases and images "create a common ground or structure — even the possibility of an unsuspected metaphysical order — underlying the separate lyrics." However, he notes that that order is ambiguous and "avoids becoming a constricting grid." He finds that the structure built around imagery and metaphor pulls the reader towards a static spatial apprehension of the reality depicted, but one with unresolvable ambiguities, and one that fragments when we examine the text as a whole and discover the contradictions. The resulting discomfort for the reader roughly parallels that of the heroine, the anonymous woman, in the poems:

In *the man with seven toes* . . . it is the form as well as the content that pushes the reader into the unfamiliar ground of the work to the point that his reading of the sections of the text becomes roughly analogous to what is happening in the story . . . [and] demands the reader's active participation as an interpreter of a reality that is often not only ambiguous but even chaotic.²

However, while Solecki astutely cites ambiguities and discontinuities in the text, and also the tendency of the work to draw the reader into coming to terms with these difficulties, he says little or nothing of what the "reader's active participation" contributes to the narrative. How is our awareness of our participation significant?

Perhaps answering this question requires our becoming more sensitive to what Solecki calls "the tenuous narrative line."

Roland Barthes offers a theory on the general operations of narrative which aptly applies to Ondaatje's work. He says that narrative is the working out of a "logic" that is "exposed, risked and satisfied." This working out is "a process of becoming."³ Such a process strikes me as having important similarities to what Ondaatje refers to in the poem "a gate in his head" as "moving to the clear,"⁴ the difference being that Barthes is referring to narrative as a recreation of the process, while Ondaatje is referring to the lyric as "exposing" the logic and freezing it in mid-process. In both cases, the end of the process, whether it be a logic "satisfied" or the achievement of intellectual clarity, implies a static apprehension of the content, or cohesion. In *the man with seven toes* the individual lyrics suggest a static apprehension of "a process of becoming" while the continuity developed through recognizing narrative convention draws the reader into enacting the process. Solecki, it seems to me, ignores the latter process, and thereby precludes the possibility of discovering order in the text to be, at least partially, a temporal phenomenon, which seems to me central to Ondaatje's poetics.

In the opening lyrics of the narrative Solecki finds "no temporal, spatial or syntactical continuity." Of the first poem he says, "The character and the scene are isolated in space — 'desert and pale scrub' — and time."⁵ Yet the content to some extent suggests an adherence to narrative convention:

the train hummed like a low bird
over the rails, through
desert and pale scrub,
air spun in the carriages.
She moved to the doorless steps
where wind could beat her knees.
When they stopped for water she got off
sat by the rails on the wrist thick stones.

The train shuddered, then wheeled away from her.
She was too tired even to call.
Though come back, she murmured to herself.⁶

At the risk of stating the obvious, each time "she" is mentioned in the above poem, we assume that the pronoun refers to the same person, and that each action has a causal link with the other actions: she is on a train and when it stops she gets off, then is left behind. Convention leads us to believe in the consistency of the existents (characters, items of setting), in this case "she" in "desert and pale scrub," through a series of events.

The principles of connection and coherence assumed in the first poem at the level of 'naturalized convention,' that is convention so familiar it is no longer consciously noted, continue in the next poem. It is not too much for us to assume

that the same person from the opening lyric falls asleep, and then in the second poem awakes: "She woke and there was a dog / sitting on her shoulder" (10). Despite the narrator's reticence when it comes to offering context, there is here in the first two poems sufficient cause for the assumption of "story."⁷ Granted, much of that story is left out of the discourse, but in reconstructing a story from a fragmented discourse, as readers we actively participate in a narrative process, even if in making assumptions based on naturalized convention we do not participate at a conscious level.

ONDAATJE JOLTS US into awareness of our participation when in the fourth poem he undermines narrative convention by changing the identity of the narrator without warning or seeming acknowledgement: the natives "laughed, / then threw / the red dress back at me" (12, *my italics*). This shift throws into doubt our previous assumptions of consistency. We are forced to reconsider those assumptions and in the process of doing that discern that the shift may actually occur between the second poem ("she woke and there was a dog . . .") and third poem ("entered the clearing and they turned . . ."), where the identity of the missing pronoun before the verb "entered," which narrative convention initially led us to assume to be "she," becomes ambiguous. The shift in point-of-view, clearly indicated by the use of the pronoun "me" in the fourth poem, throws into doubt our assumptions maintained throughout the first three poems, and leads us into an awareness of those assumptions and the narrative process instigated by them. Clearly, such undermining of narrative convention simultaneously risks and foregrounds the narrative process. By initially allowing the possibility of conventional narrative continuity, Ondaatje lures us into expectations which he subsequently denies, compelling us into an awareness of our participation in the process of ordering.

However, more than an obvious shift in pronouns marks the transition occurring in the opening four poems. A shift from external to internal focalization also occurs. The first and second poems, where the train leaves the woman and she later follows the dog, could easily be rewritten in the first person without significantly changing the sense. The difference between the narrative in the first two poems and that which follows resides in the increasing emphasis on the woman's response to her situation. In the second poem Ondaatje provides little or no indication of how the woman thinks or feels about her situation, he simply states that situation:

She woke and there was a dog
sitting on her shoulder
doing nothing, not even looking at her
but out over the land.

She lurched and it sauntered
 feet away and licked its penis
 as if some red flower in the desert.
 She looked away but everything around her was
 empty.

Sat for an hour.
 Then the dog moved and she followed,
 flies prancing at her head. (10)

Ondaatje as narrator situates the woman in proximity to the dog and in relation to the desert while a specified "hour" passes. By thus locating her in space and time he provides us as readers with a point of reference in the story. Furthermore, the narrator is essentially transparent, emphasizing the story and not his discourse. For instance, the language is more metonymic than metaphoric; of the two metaphors brightening the text, the first is introduced with the explanatory "as if," where the explicit identification of the trope suggests the narrator does not wish to confuse the story's events with their depiction. The second metaphor occurs in the last line perhaps as a hint of the change in focus about to occur. In any case, we gain an unobstructed view of the heroine's actions and her location, the story's existents and events, as well as our relation to them, without noticeable intervention from the narrator.

However, in the third poem the language becomes much more terse and metaphorical, while also providing less indication of the woman's location spatially and temporally:

entered the clearing and they turned
 faces scarred with decoration
 feathers, bones, paint from clay
 pasted, skewered to their skin.
 Fanatically thin,
 black ropes of muscle. (11)

In effect the text shifts from an emphasis on story to an emphasis on discourse, from an emphasis on what is seen to how it is seen, which results in the increased prominence of the narrator. The discourse in fact obscures the story and thereby, as readers, our point of reference. Thus, coinciding with the change in narrator, a shift that undermines the narrative process, is the growing prominence of the narrator. As we become aware of the narrative process and our role in it, we also begin to notice the presence of the narrator, and through the clouding of our view of the story as well as our point of reference, begin to identify with her disorientation.

Our participation occurs at the level of narrative act, in the act of reading, where the real action is.⁹ The shift away from story induces us to seek from the increasingly discontinuous discourse the continuance of a coherent story line. This participation in the process of ordering, paralleling the woman's situation of being lost,

is a temporal activity. Thus the time consumed in the narrative act parallels the implied passage of time in the story. However, as our location both temporally and spatially in the story grows more indefinite, we gain a sense of moving in time and being lost in time simultaneously; events occur with seeming randomness, without causal order.

In the next series of poems the coherent story line we saw in the earlier poems continues to fade to the point where no temporal connection exists:

not lithe, they move
like sticklebacks,
you hear toes
crack with weight,
elbows sharp as beaks
grey pads of knees. (13)

We have here a description of an ongoing situation, given in the present tense. The use of the present tense (or in more precise narrative terms, "simultaneous" narration, wherein story and its articulation occur simultaneously) locates the narrative instance within the scope of the events narrated, but as the events are ongoing the narrative instance remains indeterminate. Although time passes, we as readers participating in the search for coherent order based on the story line, are effectively losing that sense of order.

The next two poems likewise lack temporal location. The first poem describes a rape and the second a ritualistic dance. In them, the foregrounding of the narrative process, instigated a few pages earlier by Ondaatje's undermining of convention, intensifies, while the increased discontinuity in the story threatens the narrative process altogether. A tension builds as the fragmented discourse threatens to destroy the continuity between the poems, the continuity derived from our awareness of a story line. The weakening of the connections between the poems emphasizes the structural ambiguity built into the text, the conflict between our expectation of lyric and narrative conventions. The sequence of poems threatens to fragment into individual, self-enclosed units, while we strive to link them together by providing some system of relatedness.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF RECONCILING conflicting perceptions intensifies almost unbearably, and finally provokes an almost cataclysmic release. As the order offered by a continuity in story fails, and as the emphasis increasingly tips over onto the side of discourse, the discourse finally breaks free from the story line, and thereby relinquishes any temporal reference in the story. However, an alternative order offers itself, one derived spatially through imagery and metaphor.

goats black goats, balls hushed in the centre
cocks rising like birds flying to you reeling on you

and smiles as they ruffle you open
 spill you down, jump and spill over you
 white leaping like fountains in your hair
 your head and mouth till it dries
 and tightens your face like a scar
 Then up to cook a fox or whatever, or goats
 goats eating goats heaving the bodies
 open like purple cunts under ribs, then tear
 like to you a knife down their pit, a hand in the warm
 the hot boiling belly and rip
 open and blood spraying out like dynamite
 caught in the children's mouths on the ground
 laughing collecting it in their hands
 or off to a pan, holding blood like gold
 and the men rip flesh tearing, the muscles
 nerves green and red still jumping
 stringing them out, like you (16)

The shift to spatial articulation accompanies a complex change in narrative voice. The woman, the narrator, separates herself from her environment, begins to perceive herself as a distinct entity outside the events of her story. We see this in her repeated reference to herself as "you." She, in fact, makes a conscious separation of her discourse from story, as the repeated introduction of metaphor with "like" indicates, showing her awareness of the distinction between reality and her depiction of it, and her need to distance herself from her story and rewrite it in a way that allows her some immunity. We see in her a growing disregard for the facts of the story: "[t]hen up to cook a fox or whatever, or goats. . . ." She manipulates the story to fit the pattern of discourse, attempting to give the chaos of her experience in story an order derived through imagery and metaphor.

The difficulty of sustaining a subjective position distant from the events of the story is shown in the chaotic energy of the "goats" poem, the frantic pursuit of an adequate metaphor that will capture the experience and dissipate its threat. The narrator leaps from one metaphor to the next seeking one that will hold and still that wild energy, but that energy always exceeds the attempt at its articulation. The reason for this is, of course that what the poem tries to capture at this point is its own process of ordering. To clarify this we need to note a number of processes at work.

In the "goats" poem the woman narrates an event that has already occurred in the two previous poems. At least she perceives the events as sufficiently similar to establish a sense of repetitiveness. This perception allows her to deny the difference, change, and in effect slows the narrative giving her more time to process the events. She can then begin to articulate patterns. But what becomes clear is that these patterns belong not to the events themselves but to her articulation of them. As we have already noted, the focus of the narrative shifts from story to discourse, from

the action in the story to the activity of narrating. The narrative act becomes the subject of the "goats" poem as it seeks to capture that activity within lyric stasis.

Her attempt almost succeeds. Through metaphor and a distancing of herself from her story the woman as narrator develops a conceptual framework in which to articulate the violence and chaos of her experience. That articulation to some extent gives her control over the violence, the story, and she achieves a sense of order that, although uncertain and ambiguous, provides a tentative point of reference.

and put their heads in
and catch quick quick come on
COME ON! the heart still beating
shocked into death, and catch the heart still running
in their hard quiet lips and eat it alive
alive still in their mouths throats still beating Bang
still! BANG in their stomachs (16)

The word "still" is rendered ambiguous in all its occurrences in this context, through having both temporal and spatial connotations, meaning both 'continuing' and 'not moving.' Mrs. Fraser thus expresses through the image of eating the heart alive a need to capture movement, and thereby expresses an inner reality in a constant state of flux that will not completely succumb to that need. That is, to a degree she fulfills her wish. She articulates her experience and finds within it a point of reference in the 'here and now' however ambiguous and unstable that point might be. In the poem that follows, Mrs. Fraser experiences at least partial acceptance of her situation:

at night the wind
shakes in your head
picks sweat off your body

yards away, they
buck out the night
The sky raw and wounded (17)

She perceives herself in the second person, she perceives "they" at some distance away from herself "at night," and then there is the sky "raw and wounded," a projection of her own pained but accepting response to her environment. The important point is that she has found a tentative but temporal location: not within the story, but within her articulation of it, the discourse.

As we, as readers, participate in the woman's dislocation in the earlier poems, we also now participate in her sense of relocation in the here and now. As the discourse breaks away from the story line, the connection between where we are now and where the narrative began, beside the tracks after the train left, gives way. At the same time, the sense of certainty that such a connection offers is lost. The

combination of the loss of a point of reference in the story line, with a shift to internal focalization as well as simultaneous narration,⁹ evokes the sense of being in the here and now, a position relative to our location in the traversing of the foregrounded discourse. In other words, instead of relating where we are now in the narrative act to our position in the story, we are compelled into the inverse position of relating that story to our position in the narrative act. Like Mrs. Fraser we seek in the movement across the discourse, the narrative act, an order. After the order offered by story fails we seek a spatial order in terms of metaphor and imagery that will give coherence to our movement. Ordering becomes a temporal movement through space: time orders space and space orders time. We find ourselves, with Mrs. Fraser, compelled into an ontological position without a stable foundation, into accepting coherence as a movement within a fluctuating and uncertain reality.

As the woman escapes from the natives, we escape from our conventional notions of narrative and share her renewed sense of location in the present. From here, with the help of a convict escaping from civilization, she finds her way back to civilization. Meanwhile, for us a vague sense of the story line returns to the narrative: events occur from lyric to lyric which, although surprising, are both temporally and spatially located: Mrs. Fraser and the convict spend days and nights in a journey across streams, through swamp and trees, until they finally move into the plain and along a river.

ALTHOUGH THE RETURN OF A discernible story line suggests a returning to conventional narrative, that conventionality continues to be undermined by vast ellipsis between individual lyrics, and as well by random but significant changes in the identity of the narrator:

he had tattoos on his left hand
 a snake with five heads
 the jaws waiting
 his fingernails chipped tongues;
 crossing a stream
 he steadied her elbow
 and she tensed body
 like a tourniquet to him. (21)

Ondaatje apparently narrates here, but unlike his narrative at the beginning of the text, now there is a different focalization. As narrator he is more prominent, registering through metaphor and imagery his reaction to the story, emphasizing the discourse while not losing sight of the story. In fact, this kind of internal focalization remains constant throughout the remainder of the text, regardless of who

actually narrates. For instance, no change in focalization occurs in the next poem, although we find a change of narrator.

in grey swamp
warm as blood, thick
with moving. Flesh
round our thighs like bangles.
Teeth so sharp, it was later
he found he'd lost toes,
the stumps sheer
as from ideal knives. (22)

It would seem the fluctuations in the identity of the narrator enact a melding of points of view, where different points of view share a common discursive reality. The effect is a sense of moving toward coherence or intellectual clarity.

Coinciding with the shifting point of view and the emergent sense of clarity are subtle but important shifts in narrative instance. In the above poem, for instance, the absence of not only the subject pronoun at the beginning of the poem, but the verb as well, renders the narrative instance indefinite. If such an ellipsis suggests anything, it is that of immediacy, a sense of present tense or simultaneous narration. Yet in the third sentence of the poem the narrative instance turns out to be an imperfect form of subsequent narration: "... it was later / he found he'd lost toes. . . ." In other words we have a form of interpolated narration. A clear instance of this occurs in another poem.

lost my knife. Threw the thing at a dog
and it ran away, the blade in its head.
Sometimes I don't believe what's going on. (27)

The narrator clearly narrates the event subsequent to its occurrence, but when is not clear. The concluding comment suggests the narrative instance exists within the journey back to civilization, rather than outside that journey, thus rendering the narrative instance, like the narrator in this passage, indeterminate.

Positioned in the indeterminate here and now, having relinquished the certainty of a coherence beyond her articulation of it, the woman finds that events take on a renewed brilliance so very unlike her experience on first leaving the train. Lacking the absolute order of time or space, "Things happened and went out like matches" (38). She now sees the convict "striped and fabulous / like beast skin in greenery" (33).

eyes were grey beetles
toes were half gone
chest was a rain sky
shirt was a rainbow
mouth a collyrium that licked my burnt eyes (40)

Those "burnt eyes" receive the salve that enables renewed vision.

IN THE PROCESS OF MOVING THROUGH the text we develop a sense of continuity between the poems that is not based upon a clear story line, but upon a process of discursive ordering both spatially and temporally. We maintain throughout a sense of our participation in the process of ordering, our participation temporally in connecting a collection of disparate verses together. In the latter portion of the narrative this sense grows increasingly intense as the narrators seem to drop away; or more accurately, we merge with them, dissolving the borders between subjectivities, including the one between ourselves as readers and those depicted in the narrative. At the same time we experience a movement towards clarity. The achievement of this goal appears in sight when we arrive back in civilization and at the end of our journey:

She slept in the heart of the Royal Hotel
Her burnt arms and thighs
soaking the cold off the sheets.
She moved fingers onto the rough skin,
traced obvious ribs, the running heart,
sensing herself like a map, then
lowering her hands into her body.

In the morning she found pieces of a bird
chopped and scattered by the fan
blood sprayed onto the mosquito net,
its body leaving paths on the walls
like red snails that drifted down in lumps. (41)

Sam Solecki notes that here "the narrative closes with the ambiguous and densely allusive poem whose almost every image echoes some image or situation occurring earlier."¹⁰ These echoes give the impression of the imagery taking on a coherent form, or of the narrative's logic "being satisfied," or as Solecki puts it a sense of "some kind of summarizing judgement upon the story." The sense of impending closure, and the reference through "echoes" back to the events of the narrative, give the illusion of arrival at the point of coherence and order in the text. A static apprehension of the narrative's content seems for the first time within reach as the narrative slows.

She could imagine the feathers
while she had slept
falling around her
like slow rain. (41)

The slowing, calming effect of this image evokes the sense of arriving or concluding. Nevertheless it is an ambiguous conclusion, as Solecki says, for however much the image of "slow rain" succeeds in taming or civilizing the violence, the violence remains within.

The last poem provides the real sense of closure, post-narrative summation, and at the same time reconfirms our awareness of static order as illusion. The clichéd sentiments of the final stanza in the poem conventionalize, even trivialize, as they attempt to capture within metaphor an experience that has only been grasped temporally within the narrative act.

Green wild rivers in these people
 running under ice that's calm,
 God bring you all some tender stories
 and keep you from hurt and harm (42)

It hardly does the story justice. Rather, it reflects ironically on our need for the illusion of static order. While it may be the end of the process of ordering, it eliminates too much to be satisfactory. The sense of cohesion it attempts fails: the narrative remains an ambiguous sequence of disparate fragments, the order of which can only be tentatively grasped in the temporal process of traversing the text. In fact, the sense of movement towards cohesion results as much from our need for order, as it does from any absolute order built into the text.

Or, an alternative reading of the conclusion offers itself, and perhaps one even more to the point. The clichéd "green wild rivers" could be said to take on new meaning within the overall context of *the man with seven toes*. Gaining specificity, the dead metaphor is revitalized and meaning reproduced.

NOTES

¹ Sam Solecki, "Point Blank: Narrative in Michael Ondaatje's *The Man With Seven Toes*," *Canadian Poetry* 6 (Spring-Summer 1980): 14-20. Rpt. in *Spider Blues: Essays on Michael Ondaatje*, ed. Sam Solecki (Montreal: Véhicule, 1985); 135-49.

² "Point Blank" 15.

³ Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," trans. Stephen Heath, *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982) 294-95.

⁴ Michael Ondaatje, "The Gate in his Head," *Rat Jelly* (Toronto: Coach House, 1973) 62. "And that is all this writing should be then. / The beautiful formed things caught at the wrong moment / so they are shapeless, awkward / moving to the clear."

⁵ "Point Blank" 18.

⁶ Michael Ondaatje, *The Man with Seven Toes* (Toronto: Coach House, 1969).

⁷ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978) 19. "[E]ach narrative has two parts: a story, the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of setting); and a discourse, that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated."

⁸ By "narrative act" I mean the actual event of narrating or enunciating, which by extension necessarily includes the action of both sender and receiver. See Gérard

Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 26-27.

⁹ Genette, p. 219. He points out that simultaneous narration produces an unstable situation wherein the emphasis can tip either way, onto the story or the discourse. Context determines the direction the emphasis takes.

¹⁰ "Point Blank," 21.

BEAR

John O'Neill

The man in this poem has become a bear.
The man in this poem, any
man in your life you place in this poem,
a bear. Is gone and
the bear arrives. You will wake up beside
him, in the frosty
morning try to pull the quilt close and will
find it's his skin:
the fur is attached to the man who said, "I do." But doesn't.
The bear will go,
lumber from your bed, not bent on your harm,
and you will remember
your life with him, before: years spent as he
built up reserves,
alone, at work that kept replacing you. After all,
you asked him to change, when
the bear was thin, and never expected this, *this*—
long nails raking your legs in the night,
the rug on his back,
and his breath telling you what he has
eaten. Walk away from him, slowly,
never turn away. Let him watch
the fullness of your leaving.

COLLECTING TIPS

WRITING THE WOMAN ARTIST: ESSAYS ON POETICS, POLITICS, AND PORTRAITURE, ed. Suzanne W. Jones. U of Pennsylvania, 44-95 cloth, 17.95 paper.

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Wilderness Tips*. McLelland & Stewart, 25.95 cloth.

IN HER INTRODUCTION to the nineteen essays in *Writing the Woman Artist*, Suzanne Jones describes each essay with a few passing observations about earlier work on the subject of the portrayal of women writers in work by women. Yet she does not provide a substantive discussion of why the question matters, of what wider issues are involved in such portrayals and, why it is necessary, perhaps important, to gather nineteen new essays on the subject. Moreover, Jones misses the opportunity to theorize or contextualize the subject. The absence of a clear statement about organization indicates another short-coming. I am not impressed by the editor's claim that these essays "broaden the study of the woman artist figure beyond the novel as a genre, beyond literature written in English" and beyond the boundaries of race, class and nationality. In fact, only one essay includes a visual artist, and none deal with woman playwrights or film-makers. Why is there nothing on Carol Churchill or Emily Carr or Cindy Sherman, for example? Most writers considered in the essays are American; a few are British, one is Norwegian, one German, one Chilean. Here the striking omissions, to my mind, are Margaret Atwood, Marguerite Duras and Christa Wolf. Despite a genuine effort to move beyond white middle-class American writing to include Audre Lorde and Maxine Hong Kingston, the need for such

inclusions is scarcely a new discovery, and Jones exaggerates her claims for breadth.

The major failing of this collection, however, is the lack of breadth in quite another sense. As a group, these essays demonstrate too little awareness of the complex forces, of which gender is only one, that condition human identity. Several of the essays operate out of unexamined assumptions about the male artist and, as a result, they tacitly endorse a unitary, reductive, oppositional model for the female artist and find fault with all female artists who do not conform to the model.

There are three exceptions: in "When Privilege is no Protection," Linda Dittmar provides a fine analysis of the challenges an artist faces, and she reminds us that the writer's wide "positionality" is a key determining factor in her creation of artist figures. Mara Witzling chastizes Judy Chicago for not conforming to the assumed model of the female artist, but she is aware of this problem, and the essay itself is lively and provocative. Alison Booth provides a refreshing historical perspective on two major writers—Eliot and Woolf.

If Margaret Atwood's work is not considered in *Writing the Woman Artist*, it cannot be because she has not tackled the subject. Her poetry provides many excellent examples of the artist/writer figure, from Circe to Susanna Moodie, and at least two of her novels, *Lady Oracle* (1976) and *Cat's Eye* (1988), are portraits of the artist. *Wilderness Tips*, Atwood's third collection of short stories, also depicts the woman writer, but only in passing. What links these stories is not writing or the writer so much as memory and the passage of time.

In this volume, Atwood has collected ten stories portraying aspects of contemporary Canadian life that move forward in time, from the first story set in the 1950s to the last set in the present, and

that shift back and forth in space from urban to wilderness scenes. The terrain is familiar: here again is Toronto, here again is a series of women, now middle-aged, most of them survivors, a few of them successful, and all of them unhappy. Here again are Atwood's unsettling similes and her ruthless one-liners. The stories in *Wilderness Tips* have much in common with Atwood's last novel *Cat's Eye*. They are pictures at a retrospective exhibition, and they seem to have been chosen deliberately to evoke, echo and recall. The risk with this strategy is that the reader will suffer *déjà vu* instead of experiencing a rewarding sense of discovery or re-discovery. Read one by one, when they were first published in a variety of magazines, these stories would have made an individual impact that is diminished when they are collected.

In the last story of the collection, and for me one of the more disappointing ones, "Hack Wednesday," we are told that the central character, Marcia, measures the value of her middle-aged husband of many years by his ability to surprise her: "She knows the general format of the schemes he's likely to come up with, but not the details. Surprise is worth a lot." Of course Atwood's point here is that surprises are few and far between, but that only increases their essential value in story-telling as well as in husbands. Like Marcia, I know what Atwood is likely to come up with; it's the details I watch out for.

"Isis in Darkness" is a better story because of the details. On one level, it is a portrait of the artist as a woman, but the woman is being seen by a male narrator and would-be biographer/critic who, in fact, cannot see the woman at all. On another level, the story is a disturbing, inconclusive sketch of multiple failures. The woman fails at life and art, dying early in relative obscurity, loneliness and abject poverty; the narrator, a failed aca-

demic, fails at life as well, most notably when he allows the poet to leave the sanctuary of his home at a critical low point in her life. But perhaps the worst failure of the story is the narrator's complete inability to understand the woman as writer or the writer as woman. The fact that he is ransacking the past for information to help him write a book about *his* Selena when the story ends is small comfort. This Isis will remain in darkness because whoever the real woman/poet is or was, she will only be further obscured by the self-centred memories and artificial constructions that Richard, or anyone else, will make of her.

In two of the stories, "The Bog Man" and "The Age of Lead," Atwood handles this retrospective process with great skill, and the results are moving. "The Age of Lead" is Atwood at her best. The narrative focus shifts between Jane's memories of her childhood friend and adult comrade, Vincent, and a television documentary about the Franklin expedition. The two strands of the narrative finally coalesce in an image of bodies in ice, and the common thread binding the two is death by hidden poisoning.

Like the title story, *Wilderness Tips* is not about how to survive in this forest; it is not about how to survive at all. If there is a wilderness in these stories, it is not so much that of Muskoka or Algonquin Park as it is the wilderness of time in which we all wander looking for direction, footprints, signs. Atwood's characters, like Dante in the *Inferno*, find themselves on a path in a dark wood "in the middle" of their lives, but unlike Dante they are not going anywhere because there is no where else to go. The only trouble with this particular story is that, told over and over again, it ceases to surprise me, the sense of risk that tempts me to start down the path in the first place disappears.

SHERRILL GRACE

ROOTS OF FEMINISM?

NELLIE MCCLUNG, *Purple Springs*. 1921. Introd. Randi R. Warne. U of Toronto, \$40.00 cl./\$19.95 pa.

ILANA PARDES, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*. Harvard UP, \$29.95.

MAVIS REIMER, ed. *Such a Simple Little Tale: Critical Responses to L. M. Montgomery's "Anne of Green Gables"*. Scarecrow, \$25.00.

ALTERNATIVES to male discourse as the source and subject of literature present themselves in Reimer's collection of essays, McClung's newly-introduced novel, and Pardes' work of biblical analysis. The extent to which each of these works explores its own potential as such, however, varies greatly.

McClung's novel, first published over seventy years ago and now reprinted with an introduction by Randi R. Warne, is, as Warne explains, a "fictional retelling" of McClung's own experience of "heady days in Manitoba politics." Pearl Watson, the heroine of *Purple Springs*, demonstrates the forthrightness, humour, and perseverance that enabled McClung herself to become internationally renowned as a speaker, writer, and activist in an era of "nation-building." McClung's role in the shaping of Canadian feminism, including her experience as one of the "Famous Five" in the 1929 case in which women became "persons," is detailed (with an eye to entertainment as well as enlightenment) in Warne's introduction, which puts forward McClung's writing as a clever vehicle for conveying a vision of social change. Considerably less emphasis falls on McClung's skill as a crafter of fiction, yet *Purple Springs* deserves appreciation as much for its quality as fiction as for its relevance to historical fact.

Purple Springs is the third of four novels by McClung, and builds on characters and settings established in *Sowing Seeds in Danny* (1908) and *The Second*

Chance (1910). Pearl, a young woman in a rural community, is in love with a young doctor who breaks off their romance; she struggles with a "clamorous sense of injustice" as one who "had always been scornful of the tears of love-lorn maidens"; she speculates about what would have happened "if Elaine had played basket-ball or hockey instead of sitting humped up on a pile of cushions in her Eastern tower, broidering the sleeve of pearls." For Pearl, a mathematical equation in which "x" is missing is the best analogy for her trouble, and she determines to pursue a career.

The heroine contends against not only her own disappointment but also the attitudes represented by the village gossip, Mrs. Crocks, who feels that women should not "concern themselves" with politics. As a school teacher who has been to the city, Pearl — the offspring of hardworking "Empire-builders" (72) — returns to upset the local government by means of her wit and rhetorical skill. No less significant an accomplishment is her defense of an emotionally abused woman, Mrs. Paine; later, she rescues Mrs. Gray of another community — Purple Springs — from public censure and familial rifts. The resolution of Pearl's own problems with the doctor is, however, rather too pat, and it is difficult to reconcile our notion of a woman who embodies the qualities of at least a few Eliot heroines — Maggie in *Mill on the Floss*, Dinah in *Adam Bede*, and Dorothea in *Middlemarch* — with an ending reminiscent of Austen's suspiciously perfect resolution in, say, *Northanger Abbey*. Thus, the failure of Warne's introduction to address the possible ambiguity of the ending of *Purple Springs* is, from a literary/critical point of view, too important to be overlooked.

A lack of appreciation for the literary qualities of a classic work in Canadian women's fiction is also the weakness of Mavis Reimer's collection of essays about

Anne of Green Gables. Although the editor claims (or disclaims) in her introduction ("The Anne-Girl and the Anne Book") that most of the essays she has selected will consider Montgomery's work as "children's literature," this is certainly no excuse for the acritical material that mars much of the book. Plot summary and nostalgia pervade the so-called "critical responses" to the novel; Muriel A. Whitaker recalls how "eagerly" she read as a child the novels of Montgomery (didn't we all?); Temma F. Berg recalls "the book that most profoundly influenced [her] as a child and young adolescent"; Gillian Thomas feels "sad" about the decline of Anne into adulthood. Even the pieces that begin promisingly — Janet Weiss-Townsend's "Sexism Down on the Farm?" (a response to Perry Nodelman) for example — tend to end with platitudes that do not go much beyond a statement of Montgomery's ability to delight "young and old"; Mary Rubio (disappointingly) indulges in the fruitless speculation of how Montgomery's fiction would have been altered had she "lived a happier, fuller life." Lest we despair that Montgomery's work has inspired no other kinds of responses, the latter half of Reimer's collection includes three essays that shine among the others. The highlight of the collection is an essay by Susan Drain; citing a single, primary text (*Anne of Green Gables*), Drain explores notions of community and belonging in the novel. Nancy Huse's charting of "Journeys of the Mother" and Eve Kornfield and Susan Jackson's discussion of the "Female Bildungsroman" demonstrate that the novel does indeed lend itself to feminist criticism. Also useful are Reimer's "Suggestions for Further Reading" at the end of the book; sub-sections include "Life and Letters" and "Contexts and History of Reception." Indeed, a more detailed survey of these "further" sources would consti-

tute a more solid volume than does *Such a Simple Little Tale*.

Sound research, scholarly attention to detail, critical awareness and acumen are the qualities that render Ilana Pardes' *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* a dense yet refreshing new work. This book (as did Reimer's, in fact) emerged from doctoral studies; Pardes introduces *Countertraditions* as "a dialogue between Berkeley and Jerusalem." The author's "goal" is the exploration of "the tense dialogue between the dominant patriarchal discourses of the Bible and counter female voices which attempt to put forward other truths." In doing so, she argues, a "theoretical heterogeneity" consisting of an "interdisciplinary approach — feminist theory, literary criticism, biblical scholarship, and psychoanalysis — is necessary to tackle the "heteroglot text" of the Bible. Pardes adeptly intertwines these strands, while surveying and critiquing more limited examinations of the same subject matter; she is particularly wary of ahistorical interpretations of the Bible, which tend to homogenize its "striking diversity."

Pardes' skill as a critic is as apparent in her use of material from sources ranging from Bakhtin to Bloom to Freud to ancient Egyptian mythology, as it is in her own attempts to unravel nuances of meaning in Hebraic texts.

DEBORAH BLENKHORN

UNIFIED DUALITY

NICK BANTOCK, *Griffin & Sabine: An Extraordinary Correspondence*. Chronicle/Raincoast, \$19.95.

NICK BANTOCK, *Sabine's Notebook: In Which the Extraordinary Correspondence of Griffin & Sabine Continues*. Raincoast, \$21.95.

IT IS APPROPRIATE that *Griffin & Sabine* and *Sabine's Notebook*, the first two books in Nick Bantock's three volume investiga-

tion of the nature of individuality and artistic creation, should be inspired creations themselves. The Bowen Island artist/writer, who has illustrated over 300 book covers and designed numerous ingenious pop-up books, incorporates handpainted postcards and actual sealed envelopes into his documentation of the visual and literary correspondence between two artists—an intriguing exchange that is also a descent into the characters' psyches.

Griffin Moss, London postcard designer (Bantock immigrated to Canada from England in 1987), is a repressed, lonely man whose work is his life. Unable to give his impulses free reign in everyday existence, he transforms them into bizarre illustrations. But when he receives a mysterious hand-drawn postcard from a South Sea island, written by a woman named Sabine Strohem—who seems to know more about his artistic processes than is humanly possible—his life begins to spiral beyond the realm of the ordinary. The first book follows Griffin's relationship with his "muse" as it develops through curiosity, love, and finally fear, ending with Griffin's disappearance after he reads of Sabine's plans to visit. In the second book, the characters' positions are reversed. Abandoning logic in favour of intuition, Griffin travels the world, journeying "backwards" through the history of art and civilization in a search for self-knowledge and the confidence to believe—or disbelieve—in Sabine, while she lives a life of quiet desperation in his London house, responding with love and encouragement to his letters. At the end of the book, he is about to face her when the plot begins yet another spiral.

Bantock has prefaced each volume with a quotation from Yeats's "The Second Coming," and numerous references to the poem, particularly in *Sabine's Notebook*, enrich his investigation of the ever-widening existential gyre into which Griffin is swept through his epistolary encounters

with Sabine. In another layer of intertext, Sabine is Ariadne, holding one end of the string to keep Griffin from going too far astray. This string is also the one that tethers the falcon to the falconer. The question is, into which role does each character fall?

Griffin's fear of learning exactly who and what Sabine is invades his artwork, making it dark, apocalyptic: one postcard, entitled "The Blind Leading the Blind," depicts newly-hatched birds with huge, black, unopened eyes. Although the gryphon is a creature of flight, Griffin and his illustrated birds—frequently falcons—either perch or fall victim to snares. In Australia he meets an old aboriginal woman who tells him his "back [is] open," stroking it with a feather. Given the profusion of winged objects—birds, gryphons, moths, angels, even skeletons and a banana—that take flight in Sabine's artwork, it appears that she already possesses her wings and, like the Australian woman, urges Griffin toward the discovery of his own. Instead he nearly drowns in a failed attempt to visit Sabine's island home. As the book closes, he has found neither truth nor wings.

Bantock has noted that his experience of writing the trilogy was marked by synchronicity—he chose a stamp for Griffin's Paris postcard, only to discover the same stamp in a catalogue several days later, labelled "type: Sabine"—and he passes this phenomenon on to the reader. The characters' observations and artworks frequently echo each other, suggesting that theirs is a dialogue between two parts of the self: male and female, mind and body, mundane and exotic, urban and wild. At home and in his travels, the withdrawn Griffin lives the life of a confirmed bachelor, while the stronger, more adventurous Sabine communes with "fascinating green sand beetles" and, in cemeteries, with her "sisters." Yet both characters are orphans, and their complementarity sug-

gests that together they form the "unity" that Bantock claims is the theme of the trilogy.

The books' real merit is neither narrative nor artwork alone, but Bantock's highly imaginative combination of the two. Like the twin characters, images and text are interdependent, but, as might be expected given Bantock's background, the illustrations are more notable than the prose. The books are physically beautiful, printed on heavy paper with a smooth matte finish. In keeping with Bantock's inspiration for the trilogy — his urge to read the letters, particularly foreign, that his island neighbours received — Griffin and Sabine's envelopes are pasted onto the pages, sealed so carefully that they remain closed until the reader/voyeur opens them and unfolds the contents. Bantock has meticulously handwritten most of the letters and postcards, Griffin's restrained capitals contrasting painfully with the easy, flowing curves of Sabine's hand. The few typed letters are Griffin's, of course, and they arrive complete with characteristic errors.

The prose, while less captivating than the artwork, is far from amateur. Read in conjunction, the books enrich each other, though the second is better written than the first. In *Griffin & Sabine*, the characters reveal themselves too slowly, and, as is true of many epistolary novels, much of the detail, though interesting, does not move the narrative forward. In short, these letters too closely resemble strangers' actual letters. However, in *Sabine's Notebook*, Bantock — who initially asked author Chris Priest to write the text based on his own outline, but was persuaded by Priest that he could do it himself — seems more confident in his role as writer, more comfortable with this collage of art forms he has created. By allowing Griffin to travel, the author creates and exploits opportunities for tension, character revelation, and reversal of expectation. In this

second, dark "act" of the trilogy the stakes are raised, Sabine begins to lose patience and Griffin teeters on the brink of giving up on himself and Sabine. By this point we know and care about the characters sufficiently to be gripped by the details of their correspondence and to experience their distress.

Sabine's Notebook, like its predecessor, ends with a cliffhanger. Does Sabine exist? Does Griffin? Are the two, like the figure with twin sun-heads in Griffin's final postcard, a single entity? To borrow from Yeats, "surely some revelation is at hand." This aura of mystery has no doubt contributed to the books' surprise bestseller status (after an initial press run of 10,000, *Griffin & Sabine* had already sold 250,000 copies when *Sabine's Notebook* was published) and will have readers, myself included, eagerly awaiting the final installment, *The Golden Mean*.

STEPHANIE BOLSTER

ENTRAPMENTS

MICHAEL JACOT. *The Last Butterfly*. Simon & Schuster, \$16.95.

GEORGE MCWHIRTER. *A Bad Day to be Winning*. Oberon, n.p.

J. JILL ROBINSON. *Saltwater Trees*. Pulp, \$11.95.

"AT LEAST THREE FORMS of Entrapment," the title of one story in Jill Robinson's collection, could also be an apt title for my comments, for each of these three books explores versions of entrapment and freedom.

The most obvious example occurs in Michael Jacot's *The Last Butterfly*, a fictional account of the Czechoslovakian concentration camp at Terezin during WWII. The definitions of imprisonment and freedom are clear: one means being inside, trapped in the nightmarish world of ghetto and gas chamber, the other out-

side, in a wartime world which, at first glance, seems to represent escape. That this novel is highly visual (Jacot is a filmmaker and this novel reads in many ways like a film), further emphasizes the distinction between inside and outside. For example, before the Red Cross examine the Terezin camp (in the summer of 1944), the Germans disguise the grim reality of ghetto life by creating a spectacle of near-gaiety; they erect false fronts and paint them, hire entertainers like the actor Antonin, the novel's protagonist. Jacot's readers, unlike the Red Cross, realize this spectacle of liberty is mere charade. That said, however, a kind of personal liberty *does* seem possible within the walls of Terezin. Antonin, for example, learns to drop his entertainer's mask as he comes to recognize the value of human relationships. When he finally adopts the disguise of a German orderly at the end of the novel, it is to free those he has grown to love. Ironically, however, while the prisoner, Antonin, finds personal freedom, it is the German Commander who recognizes there is no escape to a "normal life." Instead he expects that even when the war is over it will "all live on."

The Commander's suspicion that normal life may present yet another version of entrapment is confirmed by Jill Robinson in *Saltwater Trees*. While the nightmare of the Holocaust was communal, the nightmares of Robinson's short stories are hellish precisely because they are not easily shared. In the first story, for example, a husband returns from the grocery store to find his wife crouched, trembling, beside her newly deceased father's scrapbook. The husband "looked puzzled. He turned the pages. And more pages. He saw the pictures of the bodies with white sheets over them, lying on the ground. Saw the headlines, "Sex Crime," saw . . . "Rapist Dismembers His Victim" . . . "[a]nd his breath sucked in." Through *seeing* the evidence, Amy's husband comes to under-

stand the horror his wife has experienced as a child. As readers, however, we also *hear* of Amy's horror.

I always cut carefully along the edges of the articles. I never went over the edges. I made little circles of scotch tape . . . and placed the clippings straight on the pages.

Nice work, he said. . . .

Now read it to your papa.

I don't want to.

You read it, and you read it good. You gotta learn.

Despite our desire to see such abuse as part of another existence, Robinson insists that hers is an everyday world. I am thinking particularly of the ubiquitous grocery store; for unlike most fictional characters, these ones not only eat and drink (at home and in restaurants); they do groceries. To be sure, dailiness itself becomes a kind of trap. Robinson, in a story by that title, provides examples of "At Least Three Forms of Entrapment": a family of four ordering food at a diner; tourists visiting a famous San Francisco female impersonator club; and a gorilla hurling himself at the plexiglass window of his cage and frightening the Rockport-and-Hushpuppy-clad audience. I leave you to draw your own conclusions. Let me just say that in Robinson's collection there are moments when the writing itself escapes the realm of the expected: and, ironically, it is precisely in these moments of escape that she captures her reader's attention.

With George McWhirter's *A Bad Day to be Winning* the reader is invited to see the everyday world as wondrous, but also that beauty and wonder are themselves a kind of trap. The beautiful women in this novel, for example, are painfully lonely, so set apart are they by their beauty. The irony here is that this lyrical collection, set in Ireland during WWII, is itself a work of wonder and beauty, so that the reader is often captured — no, captivated — by the sheer pleasure of the writing. Consequently, I too find myself trapped

— limited. I cannot quote the whole book here, so let me offer you a glimpse. In the opening story, on a night when bombers are flying overhead, the family ventures out in search of a little boy.

Sure as stars in the sky, the boy was at the pump, staring into a saucer, emptying it and staring in again to see if he'd got rid of what was there. . . .

He poked at the lights in the saucer with his finger, the bombers ranked and curved across the meniscus, cutting out the light, then letting it blink on in starry semaphore. . . .

"Why did he come down here?" they asked.

"He came down here to read the stars," the uncle answered for him, "and to carry back a drink for the cat. What else would a wee fella do if he's decent?"

Of course, this collection is not all stars and wonder for McWhirter's characters — that would be pure escapism. Instead, his protagonists are confronted with very real frustration.

If only she could drift off, like the rest of the idle Irish. But herself and the rooster, they were just feathers in the jam, stuck to what they attacked: a hen-run or an asbestos-sided bungalow, whose bricks made a foundation, but went no further, ending one quarter way to the whole house she could live in.

For me, this passage exemplifies the wonder of McWhirter's work: his ability to engage his readers by striking a familiar chord (don't we all share Maggie's frustration with the seemingly futile struggles of daily existence?) and, at the same time, to startle them with a freshness of language and metaphor. For this, and for much more, *A Bad Day for Winning* is a pleasure to read, and reread.

NATHALIE COOKE



CEREMONIES

NADINE SHELLEY, *Barebacked With Rain*. Exile Editions, \$12.95.

MICHAEL REDHILL, *Impromptu Feats of Balance*. Wolsak and Wynn, \$9.00.

"BAREBACKED WITH RAIN" is a collection extensive in its formal range, both precise and surprising in its imagery, and attentive to the music of language. The reader encounters riddle and parodic nursery rhyme, as well as satire, dream vision, and love lyric. Imagist openings often develop surrealist, but in ways that discover the possibilities of the image: Nadine Shelley is anything but the self-indulgent surrealist (or neosurrealist) who, as Stevens complained, invents without discovering. Nor does Shelley ever forget, as Williams cautioned, that the abandonment of the metronome should not signal the abandonment of measure.

Many of the images appear to identify Shelley with poets such as Musgrave and Skelton: images of "hags," transformed animals, crows, and blood. A closer look, however, discloses that the images are not embedded in an overtly shamanic mythology, nor seen without critical distance. A hag suffers ironic rejoinder ("belladonna"); animals undergo metamorphoses that do not insist upon an occult reshaping of experience ("bears"); a crow is explicitly identified with its colour and is denied special metaphysical status ("Drone"); bleeding is suffered in painfully human terms ("Because my breast is where the fairest doves rest"). The use of such images is, in fact, much closer to that of Plath (in whose poetry they all appear) than to that of the West Coast "shamanic" school.

The collection opens quietly, with a small ceremonial of grief: "it is the crossing of the fingers, / the crossing of the heart, / I am the smallest word I know . . ." ("A Preoccupation With Bridges").

With "Let the Show Begin:" the quiet ceremony of grief is, however, quickly exchanged for the cruel puppet theatre of Plath. In "bears" Shelly rewrites Birney's "Bear on the Delhi Road." The opening lines ("bears under siege of falling / kaleidoscopic gypsy dancing") invite comparison with Birney, but the poem then pursues a direction that Birney only suggested. Birney remarked on the difficulty of separating myth from reality; Shelly explores the inextricable links, taking the reader down a vortex (a recurrent image in Shelly) into the unconscious, as "concentric dreaming / prophets" lead bears — themselves dreams — "into the bottomless point." "Waiting in the River Valley" rests upon the point of stasis found in every vortex: uneasy stasis, where "words lie blackened and used / by our feet / cinders of remembrance. . . ." Soon, however, the speaker is drawn back to the vortex: "there is only the revolution of descent" ("dark heart"). In the long prose poem "August 14, the dreaming," a reversal is attained. The poem opens in a stasis of waiting ("a satire of purpose, surely"), but the speaker then listens to the dream of *another* person, and imagery of ascent becomes dominant:

There are angels in the sand. Paulo has made them, his small, dark arms translating gestures into wings. . . . Flat in a prism of light, I can see Paulo beneath the waves. . . .

The angels float up from the sand, refractions of grace. Destructive images in the concluding poems mark a difficult ascent; significantly, however, they are often counterbalanced or transformed. The speaker in "Drone" identifies herself with the "underbelly of a crow," while emphatically refusing to implicate herself in evil associations: "I am no evil flight nor / midnight wing, nothing / today but black." Images of mutilation of the kind prominent in Plath appear in "Imogen" and "Because my breast is where the fairest doves rest," but in the

first these images are given ironic distance, and in the second are subsumed in an image of love. In the final poem of the collection, love is strongly affirmed in spite of suffering: "I am caught in your mouth, like hair. / As long as love, my hair, as long as rain" ("on the inside: The Brain of Pooh").

In the conscious unconsciousness of Shelly's poetry, speakers engage in painful self-criticism as they visit mutilated places of the self that are haunted by loss and absence. They visit: but they also return.

Michael Redhill's *Impromptu Feats of Balance* is aptly titled, for the poems that comprise the collection perform a number of precarious acts of balance, prominent amongst which are a number of apparent deconstructions of experience. The prose poem "(for lesley)" deconstructs its speaker's initial expectation of presence, together with the margins that would define such presence:

putting on this sweater is like going underwater, this territory that is only yours. . . . but there is nothing of you in here at all, only the fabric's bad rendition of the shape you left. . . .

"Pure transport" also appears to achieve its balances only at the cost of erasure: "colours of your body / go limp into my hands / element of absence. . . ." In the first poem, however, it is clear that not all renditions of shape are equally good — there is a standard — and the second concludes with an affirmation in which the lover's apparent absence is found, ultimately, to be a presence: a presence "below vision."

Covert parodic balances shape "Dark water," a rewriting of "Fern Hill" that carries Redhill close to Tom Marshall's "Crab Triptych." Self-reflexive balances shape yet another poem, "You are the narcotic," in which "the poem has you" (one reader who is specifically invoked, but also every reader) and, "knowing

you," wants "to change places." The poem is "a virus" in the speaker, "and you are not immune." The virus does not do for the speaker, however, what J. Hillis Miller would have predicted, for the poem rewrites Shakespeare instead of Miller: "It does not rebuild time, / but it can stop it."

Irreconcilable balances emerge strongly in poems such as "The radio net." In a situation reminiscent of that faced by the speaker in Cohen's "Style," the speaker in "The radio net" is engaged in a problematic relationship with a voice on the radio. The voice proves to be too definite, however, to place its ontological status at issue: it is the voice of a definite subject. It is the very existence of a definite subject behind the voice, in fact — and the existence of a distinct subject in the listener — that makes an irreconcilable balance of tensions possible.

Impromptu Feats of Balance is a genuinely significant collection of poems, poems which neither ignore the problems of meaning nor endlessly postpone meaning in the face of those problems. The poems are carefully shaped by an epigrammatic wit and irony that can, unexpectedly, express itself in a genuinely lyrical voice. Difficult balances are achieved.

ALEXANDER M. FORBES

CRITICAL JUNCTURE

JACQUES GODBOUT, *L'Ecrivain de province. Journal 1981-1990*. Seuil, n.p.

THIS REMARKABLE series of four diaries, two of which originally took the form of radio programs, provides the reader with some fascinating insights into the mind of one of Quebec's most prominent novelists, filmmakers and intellectuals, over a ten year period, from the aftermath of the Referendum to the death of the Meech Lake Accord. The diaries cover four criti-

cal periods, both in Godbout's life and in the cultural and political life of Quebec: December, 1981 to April, 1982; August-November, 1983; July, 1985; and May-June, 1990. Many of the entries involve his experiences and impressions recorded while on a lecture tour in the United States, or on one of his many other junkets to France, Turkey or China. The book is much more than a collection of travel diaries, however. In an informal but highly polished style, Godbout shares with the reader his thoughts about growing old (turning 50) and being colour-blind, about the process of writing, about the effects of jet-lag, as well as his personal view of the political landscape in Canada (including an unflattering portrait of Pierre Trudeau and a description of Elijah Harper as a warrior who unthinkingly sets out to kill Meech Lake as if it were a bison).

Whether he is sitting in his office at the NFB in Montreal, or in a hotel room in Brussels or Istanbul, Godbout records in his diary his reflexions on the success of his own works, such as *Les Têtes à Papi-neau*, on his relations with such well known figures as Gaston Miron and Gilles Vigneault, as well as on the current status of Quebec on the international political stage, seen from the perspective of a fervent nationalist who wants to see Quebec take its rightful place in the international community. However, unlike many of his fellow Quebecers, Godbout tends to emphasize the ties which bind Quebec to other French-speaking countries rather than the differences which separate them. Part travel diary, part essay, and part poem in prose, this book is an entertaining exercise in introspection by a writer who has done more than most of his contemporaries to give Québécois literature the international recognition it deserves.

Throughout these diaries, Godbout stresses that the greatest benefits to be gained from travelling to other countries

are derived from the new way in which the traveller perceives his own country upon his return, from the fresh perspective on one's own values and problems one gains from first-hand experience of the values and problems of others. "L'autre vertu des voyages," he claims, "est la redécouverte des évidences." A case in point is Godbout's view of Montreal, which, he explains, is altered every time he returns from Boston or New York, Paris or Brussels, Istanbul or Beijing. One of the major themes this "provincial" writer returns to again and again is the pleasure he experiences in travelling to new cities: "... je voudrais ne jamais cesser de découvrir de nouvelles villes. ..."

Perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most topical aspect of this very readable book is the extent to which Godbout describes the current crisis in Quebec in very personal terms. Describing the emotions he felt while working on his film on Hubert Aquin, Godbout emphasizes the many levels at which Aquin's experiences mirrored those of the Quebec people as a whole: "ce fut fascinant de pouvoir raconter à la fois le cheminement d'un peuple et celui d'un de ses enfants." This statement applies just as much to Godbout himself as it does to Aquin, as many entries in these diaries aptly illustrate. At the moment (late summer 1990), Godbout sees both himself and Quebec at a critical juncture in their evolution. It is typical of Godbout that he sees the current constitutional crisis in literary terms: "Nous avons une constitution à inventer, comme un roman à écrire."

RICHARD G. HODGSON



MOONLIGHT & THRESHOLDS

STEPHEN MORRISSEY, *Family Album*. Caitlin Press, \$8.959.

BILL HOWELL, *Moonlight Saving Time*. Wolsak and Wynn, \$10.00.

AJMER RODE, *Poems at My Doorstep*. Caitlin Press, \$8.95.

FAMILY ALBUMS are dangerous. In Stephen Morrissey's long serial poem *Family Album*, each verbal photograph is a *mise en abyme*. Each reflects, in spare images that recall both Tom Marshall and Florence McNeil, a stage of the male speaker's earlier self. The speaker's failure to grow as an individual, however, ensures that the photographs also reflect each other. The speaker's movement while turning the pages of his family album signifies his attempt to understand the language of the pictures, and the process of self-reflection generated begins to have consequences for the album itself. The speaker starts to photograph differently as self-reflection changes him, with the result that when new pictures are added, they no longer look like earlier ones, although considerable mirroring continues to occur until an event that, finally, puts a stop to all reflection.

From the beginning, there is something wrong. The first family portrait leaves out both mother and children ("Preludes"). The next pictures recover some of the missing children, but find them arrested in various postures of still life. From the opening scenes of absence, guilt, regret, and suspended motion, the pictures proceed to depict the speaker's movement through progressive — but overlapping — stages of numbness ("Winter in Huntingdon"), sorrow ("Feel Nothing"), and anger ("Three Poems on a Single Theme").

As the album leaves are turned, the

story of a journey into understanding begins to emerge, in counterpoint. "Isolation" discloses the splitting so common in human life (a recurrent topic in Morrissey's earlier poetry). In what is clearly a parody of Dudek's *En México*, "In Mexico" continues reflection upon this splitting by implicitly associating the speaker with Dudek's account of those who, despite suffering, must confront the daily work of living.

The speaker's response to the pictures begins to modulate under self-questioning. His perceptions move toward an acknowledgement of a "child within" — one of the children missed in the first photograph — and the realignment of a present sense of the self in light of that child's existence ("Four Short Poems"). But the ancestral past must also be recognised, for "we become our inheritance . . ." ("July Near Huntingdon"). Recognition permits the renovation of memory and the discovery of meaning as the "full moon overwhelms the night sky" and the speaker becomes "careful to remember" who he "used to be" ("Farewell Darkness"). The light attained proves, however, to be merely lunar.

The next photographs capture family members in acts of escape. The speaker sees that personal habits of denial have a family history: a mother who would not speak about her husband's death ("A Day in 1957"); an aunt and uncle whose house was "furnished as though / they might have to escape" ("The Reunion"). The speaker recognises the typically Canadian, as well as Jungian, problem of individuation: in Margaret Atwood's terms, the problem that occurs when there is a simultaneous need for extrication from, and reconciliation with, a group that has made victims of the very members it has supported.

In "The Return of Memory," another perception is developed: the impossibility of reconstructing "what has been / shat-

tered." When this impossibility is recognised, the speaker is freed to look elsewhere, for what has *not* been shattered. What he finds is the love of his grandmother:

... how could she die
without leaving something of herself?
Not grief or death
but life for life, love for love.

("The Return of Memory")

Healing is not achieved simply by the recovery of memory, or the reconciliation of the conscious self with a personal and ancestral past. The hope of integration is afforded only by something indestructible: by the fact of a love actually given by another, and reciprocated. Previous perceptions have been of value, but only in the actual giving and returning of love is hope finally established, a fact recognised by the speaker in the final poem ("End Notes") when he is struck by a light more bright than moonlight. This light does not spring from within the "old walls" of the self, but it does illuminate them, as "sunlight across millenia" casts "new light on old walls," in a "delirium of light" that suffuses reflection altogether.

In Bill Howell's *Moonlight Saving Time* the reader visits many places of the self photographed in *Family Album*. As in *Family Album*, many of the poems in *Moonlight Saving Time* (which is a collection, rather than a single serial poem) explore childhood and the personal past. Where *Family Album*, however, leads the reader into moonlight, to be delivered subsequently into day, *Moonlight Saving Time* involves the reader in inner quests that are moonlit from beginning to end. It is appropriate that the recurrence of photographs in *Family Album* should be prising that temporal ambiguity should be replaced in *Moonlight Saving Time* by a recurrence of dreams.

The title poem announces an interest similar to Morrissey's: "And this is the silence in which / you discover and own

the quest / that sleeps among all your questions." Reflections upon personal history begin at an even earlier point than in Morrissey, however: "Second person singular" offers a story of sibling love and rivalry in the womb. Similarly, questions about the past do not terminate with the ancestral past, but proceed (often with a quiet humour) to engage history in general — animal, as well as human. "Morgan's cave" opens with a dog's-eye view that commences "long before / the glaciers stopped throwing themselves off / the Scarborough Bluffs"; "This, that, these, and those" closes with a passing view of a dog, seen as a "small myth panting past." In a poetic world in which myths pass one on the street, it is not surprising that temporal ambiguity should be recurrent, nor is it surprising that such ambiguity should express itself in the parody of (singularly appropriate) earlier poets: of Yeats ("Dancers in the distance," "Overnight in Byzantium") and Thomas ("Body talk," "Home run"). In their careful and lyrical evocation of ambiguous experience, these parodies epitomise the collection as a whole.

Ajmer Rode's *Poems at my Doorstep* are "doorstep" poems in their explorations of places in which the domestic life of one culture meets the public life of another. A social commentary emerges convincingly from imagery and narrative (most of the poems wed brief narrative to neoimagist technique), and is not forced upon the latter (although there are exceptions, such as "Labels").

"Mustard Flowers" establishes a number of patterns to follow. The speaker's father sits at a Vancouver bus stop, only to find the stream of traffic eliciting a stream of consciousness. The surrealist result of a yellow car's passing by ("a thousand mustard flowers / bloom in his head") shades into a portrait of cultural dislocation, which in turn shades into implicit social commentary, as the old man

"thinks of Pauli who left his village / for Malaya and / never came back."

The range of social commentary in subsequent poems is extensive. Questions about the origins of racism shape "The Sphinx in Me," while "Playing with Big Numbers" explores the horrors of some very big numbers (the numbers of African children dying each year). Quiet evasions of personal responsibility are shown in their social consequences in "Three Reasons," while an interesting reversal occurs in "Loser," where a commitment to social responsibility is itself as capable of becoming an evasion of personal.

Although the doorstep poems of Ajmer Rode are not "found" poems in the usual sense, and as the title of the volume might prompt a reader to expect, one can only be grateful that Mr. Rode has found them.

ALEXANDER M. FORBES

INSIDE/OUTSIDE

OLENN WILSON, *The Great Sex Divide: A Study of Male-Female Differences*. Peter Owen, £14.50.

MARTA WEIGLE, *Creation and Procreation: Feminist Reflections on Mythologies of Cosmogony and Parturition*. University of Pennsylvania, US\$39.95.

MAGGIE KILGOUR, *From Communism to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*. Princeton, US\$35.00.

ABOUT 1980, a slogan appeared briefly on the lapels of my friends. It read, "non-breeder." Today, having learned a few things about parenthood, I can hardly recall why we liked that slogan. Were we defending choice? Asserting that women without children are valid human beings? No doubt. But the slogan is complicit with what I now understand to be the patriarchal denigration of motherhood, notwithstanding the New Right's rhetoric about the home. Motherhood is a devalued form of (re)production; procrea-

tion is less-than-pure creation. This assignment of value is deeply entangled in the complex relation of nature (sex) and culture (gender). Each of the books here reviewed seeks in some way to loosen this complex knot. The two feminist scholars make possible the reinvestment of cultural values in the mythologies and metaphors surrounding motherhood. Glenn Wilson's contribution, in contrast, validates some of the worst aspects of traditional gender division, arguing, for example, that rape and promiscuity are simply 'natural' to men.

Glenn Wilson is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of London, a Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and the author of a number of books on a variety of topics. *The Great Sex Divide: A Study of Male-Female Differences* reviews evidence for biologically-based sex differences, whether hormonal or stemming from evolution, and argues that such differences constitute the "underpinnings" of social behavior. Unfortunately, Wilson does not consider the social construction of gender. His is the Gordian knot treatment of the sex and gender; more than once, he reduces culture to a veneer with which "moralists" try to disguise brute nature. Although he spends a lot of energy debunking so-called "feminist myths," in eliminating the sex/gender dialectic he disregards a theoretical distinction fundamental to feminist thought since Simone de Beauvoir. Consequently misrepresenting his opponent, he finds it fairly easy to shoot her down. He is then free to pursue his real argument that patriarchy is the natural state of affairs.

One example will have to suffice. Evolution, animal biology and cross-cultural comparison demonstrate, according to Glenn Wilson, that polygyny is, and will likely remain, the "most widespread mating system in the mammalian, primate and human world." Indeed, the survival

of the species may depend on high-ranking, superior males having access to a variety of females. In western society, monogamy is "superficially" endorsed but polygyny is the reality: "a certain proportion of men [drop out] from reproductive competition ('wimps,' deviants, schizophrenics, alcoholics and tramps), while successful businessmen, politicians, actors, television preachers and so on enjoy the favours of several wives, mistresses, groupies, etc. By contrast ... even the most unattractive woman in a village, whom no man would admit to touching, somehow manages to get pregnant every so often." Male "libido," "vigour" and "enthusiasm" are naturally dependent on the supply of "fresh" females. Female libido is genetically irrelevant. Most women, quite sensibly, prefer to ally themselves with a powerful male.

Wilson deplores the fact that so many studies on sex and gender are written by feminists, but I find it astonishing that someone who so evidently delights in male domination dares to claim impartiality. The tendencies he observes (and, on the whole, celebrates) must be understood not only in relation to biology but also as they reflect the cultural construction of gender. Otherwise, we are obliged to accept his argument that patriarchal gender straightforwardly reflects natural survival mechanisms which cannot be "suppressed." Of course, this is the point at which feminist analysis of gender begins, in distinguishing what is inevitable from what can be changed.

Traits which are traditionally considered to be feminine (for example, sexual coyness, lack of aggression, and an inability to do math) are biologically based and thus inevitable, Wilson claims. Such views of feminine nature effectively ally him with right wing groups such as Real Women and the Conservative Government's Family Caucus. However, his critique of the monogamous family as 'unnatural'

allies him, whether he (or we) likes it or not, with those very feminists whom he is at such pains to discredit. Feminism, for some time, has pursued critical analyses of patriarchal family models. The difficulty is in imagining alternatives, and the conservative backlash against single parent and homosexual families means that, as usual, feminists must fight on all fronts at once. For his part, Wilson doesn't even ask the important questions such as, what would sexual liberation look like, for women and for men. In attacking feminism, praising 'traditional' women and 'genetically successful' men, he implies that (superficially) monogamous marriage with lots of affairs and the good old double standard is probably as good a solution as any.

A small saving grace? He is a biological fundamentalist, but not a totalitarian: exceptional women, who wish to be something other than wives and mothers, should be permitted to do what they want — their hormones are probably wonky anyway. As for lesbianism, it is genetically irrelevant play between women who are unlikely to experience orgasm any other way.

Marta Weigle's *Creation and Procreation: Feminist Reflections on Mythologies of Cosmogony and Parturition* is a cross-cultural study of myths of creation and procreation. "Mythology," she notes, "has for the most part been defined androcentrically. Much mythology, like much theology, philosophy, psychology, and aesthetics, elaborates a fundamental premise: that procreation poses an antithesis to creation; to be procreant is not to be creative; parturition cannot be considered the symbolic equivalent of cosmogony." Simone de Beauvoir is cited as an author who early noted the bias in traditional values: "[t]he transcendence of the artisan, of the man of action, contains the element of subjectivity; but in the mother-to-be the antithesis of subject and object

ceases to exist; she and the child with which she is swollen make up together an equivocal pair overwhelmed by life. Ensnared by nature, the pregnant woman is plant and animal, a stockpile of colloids, an incubator, an egg." Weigle's strategy is to juxtapose, for example, this fragment from *The Second Sex* with a short Zuni myth representing creation from the cosmogonic egg. What results is a challenging interplay among traditional and contemporary texts. The project is no less than the creation of a women's mythology, imagined as evolving from images and narrations which celebrates the mundane as *mundus*, this world we live in. Native American narratives and the artistry of Judy Chicago and Mary Daly thus complement each other and are re-read.

By structuring her book as a weaving, Weigle subverts scholarly discourse as she writes it. "[I]n the manner of the spider creations," her weaving "produc[es] a text which is 'a midwifery, a collaborative storying or gossip' — all key terms as a women's mythology begins to make itself heard. "Etymologically, *gossip* means 'god-related';" we learn, and once designated a godparent of either sex, Dr. Johnson defines a gossip as "One who runs about tattling like women at a lying-in," and Mary Daly conjures it as "a women's female friends invited to be present at a birth." The history of the word provides a model of how feminism recuperates what it can from "old wives tales," gleaned knowledge nearly destroyed by witch persecutions and later discredited by male surgeon physicians claiming midwifery as their domain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A valuable compilation of sources and analyses, including a seventy page appendix of "Selected Texts of Creation and Procreation," this book incites the reader to further research. Marta Weigle is Professor of American Studies and Anthropology and Chair of the Department of

American Studies at the University of New Mexico.

Weigle, like Wilson, has recourse to corporeal realities in order to pursue an analysis of gender; however, McGill University's Maggie Kilgour makes the most daring move, in presenting us with *An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation: From Communion to Cannibalism*, as her title announces, with many varieties of eating in between. In this humorous and scholarly tribute to Northrop Frye, with whom she studied at the University of Toronto, and Robert Burton, author of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Kilgour invites her readers to a dinner party with many illustrious guests including Homer, Ovid, Augustine, Dante, Rabelais, Jonson, Milton, Montaigne, Coleridge, Melville, Bakhtin, Derrida and Freud. Metaphors of incorporation — eating, basically — are discovered everywhere and are everywhere discovered to conceal cannibalistic and all too human eccentricities.

Whereas for Burton, melancholy is the transcendental signifier, the sign which consumes all other meaning, in Kilgour's anatomy, eating itself performs this role. Reading Derrida, she notes that "sublimation" may be the "a central tactic of logocentric thinking, in which differences are set up in order to be synthesized." Sublimation is both "a leap to higher levels of thought by which apparent contradictions are resolved" and "a means of subsuming what is outside the self, another kind of colonial discourse that makes the strange familiar." Cannibalism is simply the extreme form of this syndrome whereby the binary opposition of inside/outside is reversed and matter is made significant. The Eucharist is perhaps the other extreme; in any event, "[a]s the neoplatonists said, extremes meet, and it seems difficult to keep communion from collapsing back into cannibalism."

This book is a lot of fun, and is also original and serious. The last chapter in-

terprets gender as a binary opposition sharing many qualities with the (by now) infamous opposition of inside/outside. The elaborate historical and rhetorical framework constructed throughout the previous five chapters is finally folded into a sophisticated reading of feminist theory by Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Evelyn Fox Keller. Binary, metaphysical gender is thus collated not only with the Freudian theory of the oral stage — Kilgour refers us to the works of Melanie Klein — but also with the foregoing anatomy. Yum Yum.

SUSAN KNUTSON

MÉTONYMIES

Métonymies: Essais de littérature canadienne comparée/Essays in Comparative Canadian Literature, sous la direction de Larry Shouldice. Cahiers de littérature canadienne comparée, no. 2, Département des lettres et communications, Université de Sherbrooke, n.p.

SHARON BUTALA, *Upstream: "le pays d'en haut."* Fifth House Publishers, \$19.95.

ELEGANTLY OVERTAKING the high expectations created by its provocative title, "'Cross Dressing': Genre Confusion in Glassco and Grandbois," Larry Shouldice's essay in *Métonymies* reveals, in its closing paragraphs, the amorous metamorphoses of Alain Grandbois' *Avant le chaos* and John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* when the two texts are read side by side. Neither, Shouldice notes, is "entirely what it purports to be: Grandbois's fiction is substantially autobiographical and Glassco's autobiography is substantially fictionalized. It may even be possible that Grandbois' short stories are . . . more autobiographical than Glassco's memoirs, which conversely may be more fictional than Grandbois' fiction. . . . [T]he two books . . . end up occupying virtually the same generic space." Shouldice uses George Woodcock's term, "creative re-

membering," to explain the process whereby fiction and autobiography — at least in these two Canadian accounts of Paris in the twenties — change places with each other.

As Ronald Sutherland points out in the "Introduction," Shouldice thus returns the reader to the collection's opening essay, D. G. Jones' performance of "creative criticism." Jones enacts his theme in an amusing dialogue between a dry and wry professor and someone who is making earnest efforts to understand Derrida, Lacan and Frye. The thematic correspondence between *Métonymies*' first and last essays is neat enough to contradict — somewhat — Shouldice's modest editorial description of the book as a "loose collection of essays on various aspects of Comparative Canadian Literature by students and teachers involved in our graduate programmes at the Université de Sherbrooke." If we accept his claim that "no attempt was made to provide a focus . . . except . . . an investigation of the frontier between contiguous entities," then we must be left wondering at the remarkable identifications and transformative readings which result from this kind of comparative practice. Which, of course, is exactly how the guiding spirits of Canada's pioneering comparative programme must have hoped that we would respond.

Métonymies is the second publication in the series, *cahiers de littérature canadienne comparée*, published by the Département des lettres et communications at the Université de Sherbrooke. It follows the *Bibliography of Studies in Comparative Canadian Literature/Bibliographie d'études de littérature canadienne comparée 1930-1987*, compiled by Antoine Sirois, Jean Vigneault and Maria Van Sundert. Contributors to the present volume also include Patrick Lahey, Obed Nkuzimana, Louise Desjardins and C. E. G. Peacock who, between them, compare

Ringuet to Adele Wiseman, Robert Kroetsch to Claude Péloquin, Margaret Atwood to France Théoret and Robert Service to A. B. "Banjo" Paterson, the author of Australia's national anthem, "Waltzing Matilda." Hugh Hazelton's comparison of two nineteenth century narrative poems, *The Captive* by Esteban Echeverría and *Acadia*, by Joseph Howe, is a particularly pertinent account of the lexicon of cultural and territorial appropriation employed by the European settlers of North and South America. Although Hazelton does not frame his study in these terms, he makes a valuable contribution to this year's exploration of the theme of "Five Hundred Years of Resistance" on the part of the Aboriginal peoples of the Americas.

When the contiguous entities happen to be French and English Canadian, we are faced with that paradigmatic situation, always worth exploring again, apparently. Such is the theme of Sharon Butala's novel, *Upstream: "le pays d'en haut."* Also marked as an autobiographical fiction by its dedication to the author's father, Achille Antoine Le Blanc, the novel recounts a young woman's coming to terms with her double cultural inheritance — that of her fair, elegant, Protestant and anglophone mother, Elizabeth, and her dark, sexy, hard-drinking, Catholic *Fran-saskois* father, Marcel Le Blanc. Neither Marcel's family nor Elizabeth's was ever able to accept this marriage, which in any case ultimately failed due to cultural differences which even love could not bridge. As the novel opens, their youngest daughter, Chloe, supporting a husband who does not love her and deeply alienated from her body and her heritage, has no choice but to begin a difficult journey home.

On a visit to her father's family farm, an elderly aunt gives her an heirloom: the diary in which her paternal grandmother recounts the decision to disinherit Marcel, her oldest son, for marrying *une anglaise*.

Chloe cannot read the diary because it is written in French and, in any case, "she wasn't interested in what the diary said." She becomes lovers with François — "a patriot without a nation," as another character remarks —, a poet who lives on a farm near Batoche and who is writing the history of their people. It is her history too, he tells her, but when she tries to think about that her "emotions [were] too strong and confused to catch." When he notices the old diary, she "teasingly" asks him to translate it in a curious scene during which she combs her hair, powders her nose and applies lipstick. "Goddam it!" he says. "Learn French and read the goddam thing yourself! Have you no pride? ... Here you are ... a French Canadian who doesn't speak French, who doesn't know anything about her own history, who doesn't even give a damn about it!" This encounter serves to make Chloe considerably less silly, and, using the French-English dictionary which François lends her, she begins to read the diary herself. She doesn't learn quickly; we find her ten pages later wondering why her francophone cousin doesn't notice her "errors" in English pronunciation. She has, nevertheless, begun a voyage of discovery which eventually permits her a certain compassion for her parents and the necessary insight that François' dreams are not her own. At the novel's end, on the banks of the Saskatchewan River and not far from Batoche, Chloe "comes to herself, as if from sleep."

This novel is unfortunately complicit with well-worn stereotypes of the French and the English in Canada. It reads as a Canadian allegory, complete with francophones outside Quebec, Métis, First Nations, and "other" ethnicities, represented here by Alex and her family of Ukrainian Canadians. Alex does double duty as the supposedly liberated feminist who is, in reality, both more fragile and in much deeper psychological trouble than

the rather wishy-washy and traditionally feminine Chloe. Again, Butala seems to be working with stereotypes, and one wishes she wasn't.

In many respects, *Upstream* is reminiscent of *The Diviners*, but whereas Laurence allows several generations for the paradigm of cultural inheritance to work itself out, Butala's Chloe must resolve her problems now, in order to live her own life. It is interesting to compare the way that both novels treat the question of the Métis and the landscape of the Riel Rebellion. Margaret Laurence put the accent on the Métis as Native, but for Butala the focus is clearly on the Métis as French, and the corresponding linguistic tension is one of the most convincing aspects of the book.

In spite of my critical remarks, I must say I enjoyed this book and — perhaps more telling — I loaned it to a number of my friends, some of whom are living in situations not unlike that of Butala's protagonist. It is a big success, and is still making the rounds.

SUSAN KNUTSON

SLIM PICKINGS

DAVID HELWIG AND MAGGIE HELWIG, *91: Best Canadian Stories*. Oberon, \$29.95/\$15.95.

DOUGLAS GLOVER AND MAGGIE HELWIG, *Coming Attractions: 91*. Oberon, \$25.95/\$12.95.

RICK ROFHE, *Father Must*. HarperCollins, \$20.95.

91: Best Canadian Stories, edited by David Helwig and Maggie Helwig, contains eleven "stories" (some are sketches or syntactic patterns), all by previously published authors. Most are quick reads. Conventional family relationships — providentially not AIDS-ridden — remain a popular subject (about a third of the items). Margaret Dymont in "Owl-Girl" and Michael Kenyon in "Chaste" deal

with death and various responses to such loss. A child's coloured crayons bring back Grandpa, for a moment, in one story; in another (Kristin Andrychuk's "Seduction by Damask Flowers"), mother is remembered through the homely ritual of ironing her tablecloth, lifting flowers from its damask. These are commodious fictions.

Something new appears in Bev Daurio's "Intruders," whose heroine wants to escape death by marital suffocation (*perhaps* that is what this fascinating story is about). Daurio mixes sexual fantasies, advice from a homemaker's magazine, thoughts on the numinous, images from outside the self ("mist lies over the fields of drying corn like fine white hair snagged in a brush") and perceptions of inner turmoil ("lodged inside her chest; a boiling kettle, a sore or a large sharp piece of glass"). The significance of Daurio's counterpoint is elusive ("*no inner connexion*," author's italics); the Helwigs comment, "grim and crazy."

More metafictional, Carol Malyon writes about her Sandra's storytelling (in "The Keel Lies Underneath"), observing that all her narratives "start out the same" and end much the same: Malyon drops "ands" for the brisker ampersand. Her narrative is droll in the manner of an Anne Sexton fairy-tale; droll, too, as an aboriginal explaining an *Ur*-story, is her conclusion: "This is the way that mythology was passed on among the ancients, before there was a way to write things down."

More inventive is George McWhirter's "Aren't You Glad You're Not Vlad," about a wandering, shady stockbroker. Under the pile of allusions (Vlad likes to live in castles, believes people should be "put up on poles," has hands like "fruit bats") we spot the old impaler/count. Although Professor Wayne Booth recently assured us that writers make convivial company, McWhirter comes up with occasional Djuna Barnesish conversation

stoppers, such as: "Like the Jew, accursed for venting his rheum on the image of salvation." The story turns farcical; then loses verve and goes inert.

Quite unexpectedly, Ann Diamond's surreal "Evil Eye" begins with apparent variations on *Ulysses*'s "Nausicaa," or possibly the whole Greek-Trojan shebang of Homeric memory. Then just as the narrator is to decide whether she is Oenone or Circe, a boatload of Holocaust ghosts arrive (no kidding!) and the slippery girl turns into a big-bellied beach dweller out of Fellini. Eugene McNamara likewise begins with a bold conception and gives it substance to an extent in his "Notes Toward a Descriptive Catalogue of Immense Paintings." The story recalls how splendidly Aldous Huxley worked material seventy years ago in *Crome Yellow* and *Mortal Coils*. With ironic humour and hilarious dialogue, Thomas King's "Traplins" tells how a Native Indian father holds on ("constipated") to old ways — a totally enjoyable story.

But the trouble with many items in this collection (and in the others as well) is a failure to engage and sustain the reader's interest. Why were these stories written? Most are dull and derivative. Where the Helwigs see "the small and personal and individual," other readers might simply see the trivial.

A story above all others in *91: Best* is David Manicom's "Ice in Dark Water," which focalizes the anguished devotion and doubt of a group of nuns, living on the Montreal island, confronting each other as death approaches. Manicom moves effortlessly from the pleasantries of casual conversation to a true poetry of meditation. (Press Porcepic and Oolichan have published collections of his poems.)

Turning to Maggie Helwig and Douglas Glover's *Coming Attractions 91*, we find three new writers, none of whom, the Introduction notes, is a "careful, creative-writing-school crafter of workshop fiction

(sentimental, realistic)." If the previous book is "lapidary" art—bring on the rough-cut! Various skills are evident in this collection. Ellen McKeough, Robert Majzels, and Patricia Seaman, the new authors, "revel in raw imagery, in irony, in mixed forms, in magical (fictional) shifts of point of view"—and, we add, occasional comic overkill. Why are so many new Canadian writers ironic? The mode suggests a national psychic tic.

For instance, in McKeough's "Mildew on My Mind" (the author is a physician currently studying creative writing at Syracuse University), the casual medical student narrator tells her mother, aghast at the filthy privy in her daughter's digs: "It's only algae, Mom. Just pretend you're peeing in an aquarium." McKeough finds macabre humour in "Dying by the Rules," a tragic story of abortion and death in keeping with a barbaric ideology. Right-to-lifers should gag on this exemplum.

Robert Majzels writes movingly in "A Still Warm Ground" of a young Jew's coming to terms with his father's death-camp dreams. This story is on a par, in emotion if not craft, with Delmore Schwartz's classic "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities." Majzels' "Mariang Makiling" brings together venal officials, sexual intrigue, and a Canadian who cannot cope with anarchic Manila after dark. The author deals with Filipino legend where one would find a Graham Greene working more familiar religious material. Majzels is an imaginative writer who should become important.

Different from Majzels' sense of form is Patricia Seaman's whimsy (although the editors, Douglas Glover and Maggie Helwig, find "female poverty, anomie and outrage" as her subject). She can sound like a standup comic. She's neither uptight nor rhapsodic about sex; in "Facts About Shriners," a woman jokes with a boyfriend about panties. Pretty jejune, eh? Totally believable is the young woman

who wears a man's black overcoat and reads Lautreamont. Now there's chic! "It is my occupation to create an illusion," Seaman's waitress confesses in "Don't Call Me Honey." She gives us a sentence that is in fact *Maldoror*-ish: "Your quotidien [no italics] body is invisible and liquor appears by magic in the glow of their desire"; but the syntax and diction are more like Lautreamont out-of-control. Seaman's sketches are a quick read, like the others mentioned earlier, but they have enough sustained intelligibility and interest to invite a second glance.

HarperCollins has published a collection of stories, *Father Must*, by Nova Scotia-born Rick Rofhe, a winner of Canada Council grants who now lives in New York City. We remember his name from *The New Yorker*, where he first published "Satellite Dish" and others in this book; the stories seemed weightier there, amid the cartoons. Half are set outside Canada, but place is neither here nor there to Rofhe's admirers. After reading "Quiet," about a young deaf violinist who wins a kind of universal victory through an inspiring teacher, we want to consult a dictionary of music about Belgian-born Eugene Ysaye.

After reading the three new collections, we recall the advice Delmore Schwartz gave authors at Syracuse: write as much as you can, but publish as little as possible.

DON MURRAY



INTEGRATION

MICHAEL LUPPINS, illus. Philippe Béha, *What do the Fairies Do With All Those Teeth?*. Scholastic Books, \$13.95.

JAN THORNHILL, *A Tree in the Forest*. Greer de Pencier/Key Porter, \$14.95.

PAUL YEE, illus. Harvey Chan, *Roses Sing on New Snow*. Groundwood, \$13.95.

IAN WALLACE, *Mr. Kneebone's New Digs*. Groundwood, \$14.95.

THE CHILDREN'S BOOKSTORE on Markham Street in Toronto devotes half its second story to Canadian children's books. The browser who ascends the stairs is first struck by the shelves and shelves of picture books. Picture book publishing is generally agreed to be the fastest growing area in the field of children's literature. Picture books today are not only for preschoolers, but often for all ages. When they are successful, they can weave a subtle and balanced relationship between illustrations and text where pictures do not only illustrate, but contribute their own texture and even content to the story. The story can do many things such as explain a phenomenon, teach about nature, tell a modern fable, or bring a human face to a social issue.

What do the fairies do with all those teeth? translated from French to English by Jane Brierley, won the 1989 Mr. Christie's Book Award for best Canadian children's book illustration, and certainly, the illustrations are its strength. It sets out to answer the question posed by its title: What happens to the teeth children put under their pillows? It does so playfully, suggesting a variety of uses to which the fairies could put the teeth: do they make them into necklaces or into sets of false teeth or into magic potions? The fairies are cute, childlike, with a touch of the witch about them. The story needs very little text; so, it is perhaps not important that the writing is not distinctive.

Most fun, I think, is the subplot of the cat's responses to the events on every page. And the book is openended, inviting readers to carry its final question into their own fantasies.

Far removed from the fun and fantasy of Luppens' story is Jan Thornhill's *A Tree in a Forest*. This is the serious, finely-crafted story of the life of one maple tree from its beginnings as a key in 1763, to the rooting of a new maple seed in its fallen rotting trunk in 1990. The story is detailed and gentle, telling as much of the life of animals and plants around the tree as it does of the tree itself. Thornhill writes entirely in present tense and varies seasons from page to page creating a cyclical and almost timeless feeling in a book whose focus is the passage of time. This effect is balanced by the pictures, which, while they always foreground the tree and its immediate environment, show human change in the background as well as showing the year in the border of each picture. In 1764 two Native people pass by on snowshoes; in 1864 white settlers collect sap and boil syrup, their red brick farmhouse visible through the trees; in 1990 a black boy in a green backpack and a white girl in a Toronto Maple Leafs sweatshirt jog through the woods with their dog, an asphalt road nearby; and in an earlier 1934 picture a large factory looms, spewing smoke into the sky. Thornhill's pictures are frozen moments in the passage of time; her text is too careful of its subject matter to read entirely like a story, but a story it is nonetheless, a successful blending of science and fiction.

Paul Yee's *Roses Sing on New Snow*, advertises its role as story in its subtitle, *A Delicious Tale*. It is a fable of the New World, the tale of how a young woman, Maylin, cooks for the love of cooking and for the love of the lonely overworked men who enjoy her food, but finally wins recognition for her talent and her wisdom, triumphing over her greedy, cruel father

and her stupid brothers, although not setting out to do so. Maylin's father tries to pass off Maylin's masterpiece as his sons' before the governor of South China. But this is a feminist tale as well as one that firmly sets *New World* apart from old, for Maylin's delectable dish, *Roses Sing on New Snow*, can, like a work of art, only be made correctly by its creator and "is a dish of the New World"; as Maylin states, "You cannot recreate it in the Old." The illustrations reinforce the themes and tone of the text, especially as the story progresses. The meek girl who puts up with men's manipulation, suddenly shows her strength near the end when she "str[ides] in and face[s] the governor"; the illustration shows this strength as well as she faces the governor across the double spread and across the text, small indeed, but with jaw and fists clenched in determination. The text falls a little flat at the end, not quite rooting its final "punchline," an important ingredient in a picture book, successfully in the story; also the reader is not quite satisfied with the governor's response to Maylin's insight.

One of the more controversial picture books to come out recently is Ian Wallace's *Mr. Kneebone's New Digs*, which tells the story of a woman, April Moth, and her dog, Mr. Kneebone, searching for a new home after rats and flies drive them from their rundown room. They search all day, finally finding a cave in a park and settling down for the night. This book is complex and thought-provoking enough to be enjoyed by all ages, but simple enough to be handled by young children. Underneath the smooth surface is a gritty realism, which tries not to shirk the harder side of the lives of the homeless. But what the book does most successfully is deal with a homeless person's experience not as an issue, but as a story, both comic and tragic. April Moth is a person, not a statistic. Wallace's illustrations are power-

ful and mysterious, revealing themselves differently with each rereading. They are muted and make surprising use of shadow; often one has to search for what would normally be the most important detail in a picture, and what draws the eye is not what one would expect. The text makes careful use of sound, both in its refrains (*April Moth's* bundle buggy moves "Kerplunk. Kerplunk. Kerplunk" through the pages) and in its conversation. All characters are revealed through the music of their speech: "Whaddayawan?" booms" the first landlady, and "come back, come back, come back," sings Sweet Daddy Three Times, the one other landlord they meet, giving the reader hope that when the nights do get cold April and her dog will find a refuge. *Mr. Kneebone's New Digs* is not a profoundly moving book; it is too disjointed, strange and dreamlike for that. But it opens up the topic of homeless people's experience in a human way and, more importantly, it tells the story of a woman and her dog with perfect integration of text and illustration.

MAOGIE DE VRIES

BOWERING

EVA-MARIE KRÖLLER, *George Bowering: Bright Circles of Colour*. Talonbooks, n.p.

GEORGE BOWERING, *Urban Snow*. Talonbooks, n.p.

PUBLISHED BY TALONBOOKS in 1989, Roy Miki's *A Record of Writing: An Annotated and Illustrated Bibliography of George Bowering* indicates the remarkable diversity and volume of George Bowering's writing: 50 books and pamphlets, 203 contributions to books, 887 contributions to periodicals and 88 to 'other works,' all to the cut-off date of December 1988. Apparently unperturbed by such arbitrary endings but complaining char-

acteristically of getting nothing done, the writer continued, and continues, writing. Miki's bibliography also includes 618 works on George Bowering, published criticism which, like the writing activity upon which it is focussed, now far exceeds Miki's listings.

Offering the first book-length critical study of Bowering's work, Eva-Marie Kröller makes an important contribution not only to scholarly analysis of his writing but also to appreciation of significant literary-aesthetic-political movements in Canada during the last three decades. It is common enough knowledge (and pre-Roland Barthes) that the author is 'dead' only in a special hermeneutic sense and that acknowledgement of the 'intentional fallacy' will not preclude critical interest in biographical detail. Kröller's study places texts within contexts, presenting analyses of Bowering's writing within the comparative literary/aesthetic contexts of its production and with particular attention to his responses to Canadian painters. She provides sharp observations of 'the Vancouver scene' of the early 1960s, of the TISH group and their international interests, of poetry, painting and jazz, together with particular concentration on Bowering's *The Man in Yellow Boots* (1965) and his collaboration with Roy Kiyooka, whose collages appear in that book, and on *Rocky Mountain Foot* (1968) with its literary equivalent of the collage as a writing strategy. Her focus on intersections incorporates Bowering's time in London, Ontario, and the influence of artist Greg Curnoe's aesthetic convictions and mixed media art upon *A Short Sad Book* (1977) and of Jack Chambers upon *Autobiology* (1972). Inevitably selective, the criticism is informed, inventive and sharp in its definitions of connections. The difficulty of the thesis emerges, however, in the comparison of Guido Molinari's visual art and Bowering's *Kerrisdale Elegies* (1984) where links are tenuous

even as Kröller presents interesting ways in which the one may inform readings of the other. Limitations are also apparent in Kröller's chapter on the later novels, *Burning Water* (1980) and *Caprice* (1987), adapted from essays that precede this study. As a historical re-exploration of British Columbia, 'the *Burning Water* trilogy' remains unfinished; *Harry's Fragments* (1990) does not complete this pattern. Using Melville's *Moby Dick* and Beaulieu's *Monsieur Melville* for comparative purchase, Kröller situates *Burning Water* not only as postmodernist narrative but also as post-colonial critique, as a deconstructive collage further defined in her extended analysis of the narrator's attention to Trieste as place and as metaphor. And *Caprice* suits as land-bound second part, as an "allegory of writing and reading" and the late nineteenth-century segment in Bowering's play upon British Columbian history as cultural mythology. Visual allusions, painterly and photographic, are one important component of the texts.

Having defined patterns in Bowering's work, Kröller acknowledges its resistances to any idea of the completed system; as poet, novelist and critic, he has opposed restrictive formations of Canadian literature and culture, favouring strategies of openness and incompleteness. Confined by thesis and selective in its attention to Bowering's writing, *George Bowering: Bright Circles of Colour* is nevertheless a provocative addition to the criticism, demonstrating links between aesthetics and history, literary practice and the paradoxes of cultural politics.

With their various references to death, family experience, friends, writers, local history, travel and baseball, the poems of *Urban Snow* explore familiar Bowering territories. Formally diverse, they are also typically poignant and playful, reconfirming the dividedness and elusiveness that Eva-Marie Kröller notes in her work.

(“Thea Bowering in Oliver”)

and, last poem of twenty-one on baseball parks that acknowledge places, the game, friends and occasions:

where I still am,
and that was my real career.

(“Oliver Community Park 1948”)

Urban Snow includes other cycles — nine poems on "Berlin," four on Marilyn Monroe from the male point of view, and five under the title "Paulette Jiles and others" of which "Thea Bowering in Oliver" is one.

The quirky humour, linguistic range and details of place, experience and feeling of "Music in the Park" and "The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett's Mice," two long and finely fragmented hymns to Vancouver, make these especially memorable. With its parodic English sub-text and Australian asides, 'Music in the Park' intermingles the sounds of traffic, birds and saxophone with seasonal change, city statistics, literary reference and games (particularly baseball) in a decidedly lyrical contemplation of the lived life in its extraordinary variety — answer to the threat of urban snow. Yes, making space in Vancouver's parks, "True lovers of baseball love the saxophone" and:

Out of the saxophone bell
the small birds fly
to alight like notes
on crooked staves.

In "The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett's Mice," this fragmentation of maturity becomes a litany of names and locations and experiences, the nostalgia of remembering jazz, writers, the poets and the artists, coming together in Vancouver thirty years ago, of valuing the memories while remarking, as well, the processes of change in the cityscape, in the people. In both long poems there is the authority of knowledge and of sensibility. Openly invitational, writerly in attention, meditative and gamesome, their aesthetic is also implicit in form, in the displacements and juxtapositions of very effective literary collage.

It is easy to recommend both books. *Urban Snow* is one more indication of significant production from a major figure in Canadian writing; *George Bowering: Bright Circles of Colour* is an innovative work of criticism, a fine contribution to Talonbooks *New Canadian Criticism* series.

BRIAN EDWARDS

BOUNDARY AREAS

JANCIS M. ANDREWS. *Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Let
Down Your Hair.* Cacanadadada, \$12.95.

LILIANE WELCH. *Life In Another Language.*
Cormorant, \$10.95.

THE VOICE THAT emerges from the deceptively simple texture of Jancis M. Andrews' *Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Let Down Your Hair* is one of anger and fierce compassion: anger against the indifference and brutality of the forms of power that maim her characters, and compassion for their defiant vitality. All of the short stories in Andrews' collection (her first) are concerned with various forms of powerlessness, with the limitations from without that people struggle against, and with those limitations that they impose on themselves out of fear and necessity. The

narratives' emotional commitment is at once a strength and a weakness: while it lends a certain shimmering intensity to the stories, it also frequently moves them into the realm of the didactic. In using phrases such as "emotional commitment," I do not mean to assert that Andrews' stories are naïvely concerned with creating and judging recognizably "real" (mimetic) characters. In fact, Andrews' best stories are situated precariously on the fluid border between strict realism and mythic fantasy. Although the stories foreground character as a center of interest, the characters are often delicately distorted, tinged with magic, just this side of grotesque: realism here is transformative rather than representative. Andrews' particular ability is her control of detail, particularly those details which evoke the sensuous ugliness of "normal" life.

In "Tabula Rasa," for me the most successful story of the collection, the fantastic edge is deftly handled. "Tabula Rasa" is about a young girl separated from her family and sent to the English countryside during the second world war, an ideal setting to explore the nightmare vision and uncanny knowledge of childhood. The story focuses on one particular day at school, when the disruptive entrance of a gypsy boy into the classroom crystallizes the young girl's attempts to find a meaningful order in the monstrosity of Christianity and grown-up logic. A series of flashbacks is well integrated into the narrative structure. Andrews' ability to find the perfect simile (the teacher's correction circle "like a furious halo") and to choose precisely the necessary detail results in a powerful condemnation of the mass insanity of adult authority.

"Tabula Rasa" is the sort of story I will remember for a long time, and in fact most of the stories in the collection have this haunting quality. (I particularly enjoyed "A Sunset Touch," "Bloodlines" and the title story). But not all of them

work as well as "Tabula Rasa" does. Sometimes the machinery of the story is too obvious. In "Neap Tide," for instance, the parallels between the neighbor's treatment of his show dogs and the boy's sense of being controlled by the ambitions of his parents is too neatly drawn. In "Ballad for British Columbia," the subtle narrative is weakened by overt moralizing; its final simile (the woman "standing in all the inescapable assertion of a stain like an obscene and festering wound that cannot be rendered invisible") is heavy-handed. These stories would be more successful if their meanings were not so obviously manipulated. Despite this reservation, I find much to admire in Andrews' work and look forward to seeing more of it.

I was unfamiliar with the name Liliane Welch until I read *Life In Another Language*, her eleventh book of poetry. It was a happy discovery. This latest book is a venture into new territory for the poet: the prose poem. The pieces, usually only one short paragraph although sometimes as long as ten, provide glimpses of entire lives, distill experience into a phrase, and all as if effortlessly. The pieces fuse compressed image-patterns and philosophical speculation with narrative momentum. The result is an at times difficult but always rewarding collection. The prose poems move from the vividly concrete to the luminously metaphysical and back again, sometimes within the same piece, celebrating a life involved with books and mountains, cats and angels. I was struck by the freedom and assurance in the writing: here is an artist working at the height of her powers, finding poetry in every aspect of experience, and experimenting with a sense of exhilaration.

These poems are meant to be savoured; highly allusive and densely textured, they repay a second, a third reading. Particularly effective is "Master of Silence," which engages the Orpheus myth to con-

nect poetry, desire, silence, and harvest time in a fragile and impermanent web of associations. Its emotion is conveyed obliquely through a complex and highly private kind of symbolization, in which the dank earth with its store of potatoes recalls the underworld which held Eurydice, and where the cycle of the seasons parallels the movement of desire from songs of suffering to voiceless calm. Throughout the poems, Welch engages in a dialogue with other poets, most frequently the French Symbolists, whose work is an influence and an inspiration (she holds a Ph.D. in French Literature from Pennsylvania State). On the connection between the creative and the critical, "French Poetry Anthology" moves from satire to tribute in a reflection on public literary institutions and private reading experiences, implying that the only proper response to a poem is another poem. Welch rejects a language of closure through categorization in favour of an open-ended writing of the self which allows a connection with other writers, in poems at once playful and profound.

The book as a whole attempts to evoke "another language," symbolized for Welch by a line by the poet Alfred North Whitehead, quoted in "Dead Trees," about the destruction of the environment. "For a poet," Whitehead wrote, "a tree is a symbol for a word." In this language system, the distinctions between signifier and signified are blurred. Similarly, Welch uses language to collapse the kinds of categorization which allow human beings to destroy the forests without understanding the act as self-destruction. Here Welch's style and content merge into a feminist poetics; writing concerned, not with "woman's experience and point-of-view" as the promotional material proclaims, but rather with those exciting and potentially subversive boundary areas between human and divine, prose and poetry, art and everyday life and physical and spiritual

experience. Elegant and superbly polished, Welch's work deserves to be more widely known.

JANICE FIAMENGO

VISIONARY POETICS

ROBERT D. DENHAM, and THOMAS WILLARD, eds. *Visionary Poetics: Essays on Frye's Criticism*. Lang, \$37.95 U.S.

DAVID CAYLEY. *Northrop Frye in Conversation*. Anansi, \$16.95.

VISIONARY POETICS is the sixth book on Frye that Robert Denham has either authored or edited. Its eight essays originated in the proceedings of the 1987 MLA convention in San Francisco, where two programmes were organized specifically to honour the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. It includes six papers read at the convention, along with the text of Frye's own talk; plus one contribution each by the collection's two editors.

The short preliminary essay by Frye is followed by Thomas Willard's overly long, and, with 21 footnotes and a bibliography containing 57 items, scholastically cumbersome essay. For the most part, Willard covers familiar territory, outlining the social background of Frye's criticism and its context in the teaching of undergraduate literature. He also examines briefly the important question of the place of Frye's work in the context of modern criticism.

Frye's place in contemporary criticism is the subject of by far the most important essay in the collection: Hayden White's fine "Ideology and Counterideology in the *Anatomy*." Here, White argues convincingly that leftist attacks on Frye's "ahistoricity" or "formalism" are misled, contending that Frye's theory of modes provides a more accurate and critically practical view of history than that which informs the work of ideologists. For Frye understood, says White, that an under-

standing of modes is "critical" (in Kant's sense) to a study of history; that is, it not only "precedes" but actually *makes possible* our comprehension of historical change. Thus, for example, Terry Eagleton's objections to Frye's "formalism" can be turned directly against Eagleton: it is *his* (socialist) critical perspective which becomes "unhistorical" once it is realized that historical process is "characterized preeminently by modal relationships . . . rather than by discontinuous or catastrophic changes in . . . cultural phenomena."

The argument is subtle but tenable, making it a pity that it is expressed so poorly: White is the only contributor to this volume who is not a professor of English, and simply put, he has a wretched writing style. His essay is blemished by convoluted sentence structure, by an annoying habit of making sentences self-reflexive through excessive use of parenthesis, and by poor grammar. Try this sentence for example (and I am leaving out about half of it): "... the counter-ideological force of Marx's idea of history would consist not so much of its materialism . . . but on [sic] its insistence on *modality* as the ultimate determining instance of a specifically historical comprehension of history."

Other essays in the collection include Hazard Adams' "Essay on Frye," a terse and self-consciously odd little *étalage* which attempts to detect literary value in the *Anatomy*; a thorough assessment of Frye's contributions to Canadian literary culture by David Staines, and two very interesting short essays by the noted Frye scholars Imre Salusinsky and Paul Hernadi. In his "Frye and Romanticism," Salusinsky offers an arresting analysis of Frye's position within the history of Romanticism: he sees Frye, along with Wallace Stevens, as not only carrying the banner of Romanticism into the age of Eliot, but also raising Romanticism to a new level, making claims for the imagina-

tion greater than those made by Coleridge and even Blake. Although the success of Salusinsky's argument depends on a trivialization of Coleridge's understanding of imagination, surely he is right in saying that Frye and Stevens have together made it possible to "think about the possibility of a neo-Romantic *movement* in [contemporary] North American writing."

Hernadi's article, "*Ratio Contained by Oratio*: Northrop Frye on the Rhetoric of Non-Literary Prose," while not escaping the tendency of much writing influenced by deconstructionism to play tiresomely with words, draws deserved attention to Frye's attempt near the end of the *Anatomy* to distinguish between literary and nonliterary language. His summary of Frye's position would surely have pleased the master: non-literary rhetoric "splits person from person and fragments each person internally," while literary rhetoric "interconnects action and contemplation by splicing grammar with logic," thereby (re-)connecting the poles of emotion and intellect, or Ahanian and Urizen, as Blake called these faculties.

Visionary Poetics has been proof-read quite well, although MLA style is flaunted in most quotations and we are at one point referred to an "eleven page" segment of Frye's *Anatomy* as situated "[between pages] 326-27"; but a major objection should be made, I think, to the deceptive layout of the cover: Frye's name gets two-centimetre bold print at the top of the book, while the title, *Visionary Poetics: Essays on Northrop Frye's Criticism*, is given much smaller print at the bottom, making it far too easy to mistake this for a book *by*, rather than *about* Frye.

If I were to be asked for the best introduction to Frye's thought I knew, the second book under review here would be my choice, not only because of David Cayley's fine prefatory essay, which provides an excellent layman's account of Frye's system and its place in modern criticism,

but also because Cayley drew Frye out with good questioning — and the seventy-seven-year-old Frye was in excellent wit.

The interviews were first heard on the CBC *Ideas* series in 1990 (not 1970, the date given in Cayley's preface) and they reflect the high intellectual standard which listeners to that programme have come to expect. As Cayley admits, these interviews could "hardly claim to add anything to the Frye corpus," given the nature of the broadcast medium and the great number of books Frye has published. Still, the chance to find Frye presented "*ex cathedra*" (is Frye *ex cathedra* oxymoronic?) and addressing a mass audience does, as Cayley says, "offer the reader a summary of Frye's main ideas in a compact and accessible form." And while it is amusing to see many of the responses to Cayley's questions receiving answers which are almost word-for-word the same answers he gave to similar questions posed to him as long as thirty years ago (see the collection of interviews edited by Denham as *A World in a Grain of Sand*), these repetitions point I think not so much to a lack of progress in Frye's thought, as they do to the sincerity with which he held his convictions over his long career.

GRAHAM FORST

PARTICULARITIES

BONNIE LAING, *Marble Season*. Oberon, n.p.
F. G. PACI, *Under The Bridge*. Oberon, n.p.

BOTH BONNIE LAING'S *Marble Season* and F. G. Paci's *Under the Bridge* explore the adolescent point of view in a particular setting, with that setting shaping personality and experience. Whereas *Marble Season* contains loosely connected short stories in the mode of Alice Munro's collections, *Under the Bridge* follows one young boy's point of view and development into adulthood. *Marble Season*, set

in Quebec and frequently Montreal or its environs, examines French/English rivalries, and *Under the Bridge* presents the Italian immigrant's point of view in Ontario. Both books explore cultural schizophrenia. The two-headed beast of cultural sovereignty in Quebec meets its equivalent in the two Saults, Ontario, while the also symbolic bridge built by immigrant labourers welds old and new world generations of immigrants in the anomaly of the present, with its incumbent generation gap. The title "*Under the Bridge*" reflects not only the author's intensely psychological focus but also suggests the cliché "waters under the bridge," meaning troubled past times that are a means for the disturbed adolescent to transcend his former self. Both novels explore formative adolescent experience against the backdrop of an adolescent nation reaching into its own, culturally and otherwise.

In "First Communion" of *Marble Season*, the first person speaker from a Presbyterian background with its rigid work ethic considers the injustice of her French Roman Catholic counterpart appearing so beautiful in a white frilly dress when she lives off what Sheilagh's mother considers a decadent diet and wears Woolworth's cheap dresses not sewn to last beyond the occasion:

How could Lise's parents, whom my parents claimed bred like rabbits and were as poor as church mice, afford the white taffeta dress that radiated from her skinny frame under the influence of too many crinolines? Even her chorus line of brothers and sisters who ranged from floor level to air cadets were wearing new clothes. How could Lise Lefevre who lived on Kik Cola, Vachon cakes and pink popcorn, manage to look so beautiful? If God were a Protestant why didn't she look like a witch? This is the form a crisis of faith takes when you're seven.

In later years the grown Sheilagh moves to Toronto and sees her childhood enemy, now a supporter of the F.L.Q., on T.V.

Quite unlike her mother who had run to fat from continual childbearing, Lise is "skinnier than ever," "her long, nervous fingers fann[ing] the air as she [speaks]":

Her fairytale bride dress [has] been replaced by a loose black turtle neck sweater and she talk[s] of exploitation, the proletariat and linguistic imperatives.

The title story "Marble Season," starring another kind of working class family, presents a behind-the-scenes misfortune as perceived from a child's point of view. After bumping her stroller down the apartment steps, Mme Vidal miscarries her third child. The speaker reports overhearing a nightly ordeal in which her alcoholic labourer husband abuses her verbally, and perhaps, physically. Seen from a limited child's point of view, the story is the more poignant because of what is left unsaid. For the children playing marbles, including Mme Vidal's "pretty son," Marcel who wears "sissy clothes," the tragedy is sensed but never probed:

When the ambulance arrived, Marcel was knuckling his biggest bull's eye. All play stopped, and you parted, allowing the attendants and their stretcher to go up the stairs. There had been no siren and this silent approach made the ambulance seem more ominous. They went in the Vidal's door. Your mother came out on the balcony and to disguise her curiosity, told you dinner would be ready in 15 minutes. Marcel suggested moving over to the Lefevres' stairs. Everyone agreed, knowing they could keep an eye on the ambulance from there. That you owned less than twenty marbles seemed insignificant compared to the quiet drama unfolding before you.

With this spectacle from real life glimpsed between rounds of a game or marbles, even the children sense something is wrong.

Similarly, themes of childhood guilt and conscience underscore the story in *Under The Bridge*. The novel opens with Mark's guilt over his best friend Perry's death

after an accident on the bridge. Guilt plagues Mark, though he is not responsible but was only present during a foolish dare. To build suspense and dramatise our sense of Mark's guilt, Paci unfolds details of the accident gradually, often repeating information containing, the second time, the reverberation of Mark's obsession.

The bridge and the tragic incident itself landmark Mark's initiation into adolescence and his loss of innocence. At odds with his parents, drawn by erotica yet tormented by his acne and a feeling of foreignness, Mark turns to books. Although his father claims no respect for books — that "you don't learn from books" but from life itself — he drives Mark regularly to the library. In spite of himself, he wants his son to prosper in the foreign country, learn the language and be assimilated at some level. Little does he know that the guilty Mark indulges in pornography while he waits for him in the car outside. Like Stephen Daedalus in *Portrait of an Artist*, Mark is first brain-washed by his priest educators and then loses faith. Father Flynn, "a fleshy faced man known for his stern discipline," takes him aside and advises him to wash himself under the foreskin to clear his acne.

Books, once a source of guilt for Mark, become a means for him to overcome his former self, his guilt and small-mindedness. Just as his father regarded his wine-making art with workmanship pride, and considered its distillation semi-magical — since "the heart of the wine can turn bad on you for no reason" — Mark looks to books as an opiate. Throughout the novel the wine motif provides a matrix for interpreting the novel's intricacies. The motif is associated with dark waters under the bridge, the unconscious, blood, guilt and erotica but also the magical written "word."

GILLIAN HARDING-RUSSELL

CREATIVE FLOW

ANNIE COHEN and MADELEINE GAGNON. *Les Mots ont le temps de venir*. Québec: La Table Rase/Ecrits des Forges, \$8.00.

LOUISE DESJARDINS. *La 2e avenue*. Saint-Lambert: Editions du Noroît, n.p.

DENISE DESAUTELS. *Leçons de Venise*. Editions du Noroît, n.p. Pp. 85.

MONIQUE ST-GERMAIN. *Archipel*. Editions Triptyque, \$12.95.

DIANE CARDINAL. *L'Amoureuse*. Editions Triptyque, n.p.

FIVE COLLECTIONS of poetry published between 1989 and 1991, all by women — some very well known like Madeleine Gagnon and Annie Cohen and others not as famous: all present their poetry (whether poetic poems, prose poems, letters, thoughtful musings) as interspersed, interrelated, and mutually defined with the visual arts — designs, sketches, reproductions, photographs of sculpture. In one way or another, the poems radiate with images and commentary upon written and spoken language/words/letters and the power of the visual image. They speak of love (both heterosexual and lesbian), life, art, birth, death, the body, the elements, and violence. The poetic voices are female, reacting to their craft, to the craft of other artists, to their surroundings, to their past, to catastrophic events. The voices resonate in unison, as each finds a particular voice of her own.

"Je m'en vais au dessin quand toute parole s'est tuée et que le silence apparaît sur la feuille," says Madeleine Gagnon in the opening of her series of poetic letters addressed to Annie Cohen. Interspersed with black and white designs of a fluid, sensual, spiraling nature, these letters describe the genesis/birth of her painting and poetry as musical, sacred, childlike, and deathly. Accompanied by curious drawings, Annie Cohen's thoughts focus on the black and white, lack of color, the white

space within a design as the silence between words, as the text coming out of Mallarmean obscurity: "Du noir des ténèbres, la parole est espérée. . . . Et le sens se lira dans le blanc des mots, dans l'espace entre les mots."

Interestingly illustrated with five designs by Joceline Chabot, the poetic prose of Louise Desjardins presents the reader with pairs of pages: the left page seemingly more "straightforward" in its quoted childhood remembrances by the *je* of Françoise, Michael, and Sandra; the italicized right page seemingly recounting more contemporary scenes about *il* and *elle*. The locale is specific: the Québec of French, with English words; snow; the Parc Lafontaine. The concerns are many: childhood; death; heterosexual love; the end of a love affair; the power of words and letters. The designs deepen the meaning of the words: a woman (is it two women or one fragmented female?) waiting on a bench; the figure of a small woman with a gigantic piece of fruit beside her; a woman with an equal sized rack of dishes; a woman with an equal sized empty chair; a small woman with a huge suitcase next to her. She writes; she remembers; she experiences; she leaves: "Les lettres sont des rivages / Qui m'attirent outre-mer / Des petits navires / Inventés pour la beauté du paysage."

Denise Desautels has chosen to work with photographs of three works of sculpture by Michel Goulet that depict a group/design of chairs and metal, a line-up of shot guns, and a table filled with small objects, along with two chairs. She also quotes from authors as varied as Nicole Brossard, Eugène Ionesco, André Roy, Marguerite Duras, and Roland Barthes. Her prose poems, divided into three sections, each with twenty-three poems, speak of masks, exoticism, artifice, theatre, spectators, words, plays, childhood, life and art, Venice and Paris, and above all the power, form, and order of

sculpture and objects against which words tenderly bump before retaking flight. The central part of her collection ties these words, thoughts, and images into a reflexion on 6 December 1989, "Quand la folie se propage, / les femmes sont de trop, / quelqu'un les force à s'incliner." If the universe always repeats itself, and if behind every facade one finds life — as the poet tells us in her final poem — then violence, especially against women, is a part of life, death, and both the written and visual arts.

Violence serves as the focal point and overriding sentiment of Monique St-Germain's *Archipel*, illustrated with reproductions of paintings by Da Vinci, Botticelli, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Della Francesca, Caravaggio, Delacroix, and Magritte. Words and images clash, enclose, suffocate, rape, tear apart, bite, and give birth in blood, spasms, eruptions, vomit, and cries. The text, the body, sexuality, the elements, writing are all linked in both heterosexual (with one section in a violent male voice) and lesbian love by the treason of words, the incompleteness of drafts, death by the pen/dagger, and the birth of poetry: "Je me suis adossée au mur, bras en croix. C'est à mon écriture que je me crucifie. Mon écriture comme ratures, comme brouillons, déchets de moi-même, expulsion de mes entrailles, déchirement du ventre. Toute mon anatomie clouée, pendante, en attente du texte."

The reader returns to sensuality, lesbian love, and woman as goddess in Diane Cardinal's *L'Amoureuse*, where prose poems are interspersed and deepened by two types of designs: fluidity in black and white; images of two women or, more frequently, one woman — at times with an expression of surprise or perhaps fear — ending with a woman with statuesque/goddess-like proportions. The exaltation of love, the elements, the earth, the ocean define this collection: "Je veux t'amener dans

les profondeurs des océans / quand je m'approche de tes lèvres je me prépare à ce / rituel ... tu dances de plus belle / tu exécutes un rite magique tu te tords tu / pousse sur ton ventre ton ventre sur tes ovaires ... tu écarter la terre et tu disparais dans une spirale / magnifique chercher les plus belles légendes." It is through this magical dance and song of love that the female voice finally learns "la connaissance de ce que / je suis."

These five collections of poetic texts are part of a long history of word painting, of the interrelationship between narration or poetry and the visual arts, mutually reinforcing and resonating the pleasure of meaning, sight, and emotion. They are also part of the important history of women's writing, constantly searching for new ways to express the creative flow of ideas.

PAULA RUTH GILBERT

HOPE IN DESPERATE TIMES

HEINZ TSCHACHLER, *ökologie und Arkadien: Natur und nordamerikanische Kultur der siebziger Jahre*. Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe XIV (Angelsächsische Sprache und Literatur). Peter Lang Verlag, n.p.

JOSEPH DEWEY, *In a Dark Time: The Apocalyptic Temper in the American Novel of the Nuclear Age*. Purdue, n.p.

THESE TWO studies analyze the issue of hope in great detail from different points of view. Dewey focuses on the advent of the nuclear age and its repercussions in American literature. Tschachler is more concerned with the dichotomy of nature/culture and its impact on utopian thought in North-American culture during the seventies.

Tschachler's work is of interest to Canadianists for two reasons: first, he analyzes

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* in terms of the Frankfurt School's analysis of the dichotomy that exists between nature and culture and, second, he analyzes the portrayal of Canadian nationalism in the novel and relates it to Atwood's stance. Tschachler explains well the complexities of Adorno's thought. The critique of a task-oriented domination of nature develops in Adorno's writings into a critique (or even deconstruction) of European rationalism which to him is synonymous with instrumental reason. According to Tschachler, this critique answers current North-American questions about the exploitation of nature and about the relationship between the human being and nature. The central question here is whether "under the yoke of instrumental reason the truth of reason is still accessible." In a more dramatic way, Adorno and Horkheimer faced this question during World War II when they asked themselves why humankind entered a new stage of barbarism instead of initiating a truly human stage of development. Tschachler suggests that Atwood symbolically inscribes an answer to this question in the daughter-father relationship. The protagonist's father embodies instrumental reason, which oppresses nature so long and so thoroughly that ultimately nature can manifest its needs only in a revolt. The protagonist's experiment with the Unconscious and her reconstruction of mimetic language are such a revolt and open a new vista on reality. This personal myth, however, created in lieu of bringing about new values is treated ironically because Atwood recognizes the aporia of subjective liberation. The protagonist surfaces from her regressive ritual realizing the power of, and her own subjugation to, instrumental reason, but not without experiencing the possibility of interindividual values, such as trust or sympathy, whose existence even Adorno

acknowledged as the "ineffable of utopian thought."

Tschachler is less convincing in his analysis of Canadian nationalism which he is quick to dismiss as bound to fail. "Canada," he writes, "can only be American because the consumer society is its material and ideological basis." All attempts at thinking a Canadian identity differently — for instance, in regional terms — lead into the aporia of instrumental reason because the national identity then emerges only in the identity with or the domination of nature. The protagonist of *Surfacing* reveals in her stance towards instrumental reason the ideological nature of these nationalisms. As a consequence, Tschachler is at pains to rationalize Atwood's own nationalism; in fact he may have fallen victim to instrumental reason himself by attempting to harmonize the perceived ambivalence of Canadian nationalisms with the aporia depicted in *Surfacing*.

Dewey's *In a Dark Time* focuses on the response, in American literature, to an impending nuclear holocaust. In the introduction, he remarks that this response was slow in coming because "[t]he bomb demanded an awareness, an engagement with the human community and with human history long out of fashion during the aesthetics and word explorations of the early century's literature." His example is Gertrude Stein, whom he calls "a remnant of the ennui and convoluted, self-exhausting aestheticism that so characterized the Lost Generation." That this "self-exhausting aestheticism" could in itself be a response to the nuclear age does not occur to Dewey who is concerned with "those ethical issues [that] have been forlornly silenced by the entropic dead ends of much recent literary criticism" (jacket). His anti-theoretical stance becomes abundantly clear in his classification of the apocalyptic imagination which is entirely based upon content and ethics. He speaks,

first, of the "cataclysmic imagination," which indulges in the pessimistic ranting against the moral shortcomings of humankind, second, of the "millennialist spirit," which builds with pioneering determination the new earth and the new heavens after nuclear holocaust, and finally, of the "apocalyptic temper" which, strikes a balance between the previous two modes. As he writes in his epilogue, the apocalyptic temper "requires a literature of enormous energy, a vision that moves unashamedly toward a scale long diminished as the novel grew smaller and smaller."

STEFAN HAAG

WASTELANDS

D. F. BAILEY, *Healing the Dead*. Douglas & McIntyre, n.p.

PAUL S. SUNGA, *The Lions*. Orca, pa. \$16.95.

IT IS DIFFICULT to write novels about spiritual quests set in contemporary society which do not inevitably remind readers of T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland* journey. Although in these two novels the wastelands are in Canada not Europe, there is the same sense of spiritual dereliction, the same chronicles of loss, and similar frustrated searches for transcendent meanings amidst the urban debris. In both cases the protagonists are haunted by vestigial memories of lost myths and miracles — the Biblical story of Christ's raising Lazarus from the dead in Bailey's novel, and in Sunga's the story of the lion cubs from Punjabi folk tales together with fragmented Native Indian hunting myths of animal spirits. But here neither redemption nor a return to origins is possible, and the narratives trace pilgrimages through different kinds of living hell till the exhausted protagonists reach some point of (provisional) reconciliation or else they die.

These are bleak and disturbing novels, both of which open with sentences that promise disruption. *Healing the Dead* begins, 'The day that Brad died, Rose Sykes had been thinking about war' and *The Lions* is even more alarming, 'When Conrad Grey was a boy he saw his mother awaken from death.' Childhood experience is no guarantee of safety; rather the opposite, for nine-year-old Rose accidentally shoots and kills the neighbour's son in a game called Mob played in a middle-class basement in Toronto, and Conrad Grey the four-year-old son of a Native Indian woman, who has just witnessed his mother having sex with a stranger, is about to be removed from her shabby Vancouver cottage by white social workers. Traumatic set-pieces — deaths, fights, psychotic breakdowns — characterise both narratives, raising difficult questions which I fear neither novel adequately addresses.

Healing the Dead raises expectations of a psychological novel with spiritual undercurrents, for we have to assume in this age without miracles that it will be a case not of resurrection but of healing the living. Indeed this is what happens as the story traces thirteen years in the life of a white Canadian middle-class family whose three children have more than the usual teenage problems, having to cope with the traumatic shooting with which the novel opened. Though their mother recommends love as a kind of social religion, family love is demonstrably not enough to save Rose, David and Jayne (nor indeed their parents) from a succession of disasters in a home 'where death had a habit of coming in April.' Rose is haunted by her vision of two silver bullets which come skimming through the air towards her. She quietly becomes a psychotic who writes poems with titles like 'War Cry of the Worm' and marries a man with a divided face ('Strange. The two sides of his face didn't match.'). Jayne becomes an

unmarried mother, then feeling guilty for allowing her baby to be adopted she goes to work in a missionary hospital in the Philippines, while David the youngest locks himself behind his camera as a photographer, becoming a classic *voyeur* figure (where his position raises the interesting question of the difference between pointing a gun and pointing a camera at someone).

Roland Barthes' concept of 'traumatic photographs' would seem to be at the centre of this novel, for after all it was the boy David who caught with his candid camera the shooting of Brad, and it is only in relation to photography that words like 'true' and 'real' are used ('Pictures remember the truth' or 'make Death real'). Yet the focus keeps shifting back and forth from the photographs to the post-trauma experiences of five characters, and the novel ends with varieties of unblocking. Rose emerges from a psychiatric ward able to declare 'It's all over,' Jayne settles for survival rather than redemption, and David (his camera smashed by Rose) seems ready to confront reality in the person of his former girlfriend Sandra: 'If she looked back at him — when she turned — he would smile and call her name. Sandra, he would call. Sandra.' It is a tentative ending where the wider spiritual dimension suggested by the title seems to have been dissipated in a modern bourgeois family romance.

The Lions is in every way the opposite of family romance, being about lost mothers, broken families, and cultural disinheritance. The story is a variant on the Quest novel, this time telling of the failed quests of two main protagonists — Conrad Grey, a Native Indian from Vancouver and Jaswant Sijjer, the Canadian-born son of immigrant parents from the Punjab. Both are seeking spiritual wholeness and a sense of belonging in their own country, where they feel like outsiders. Their lives intermesh when they are

digging ditches in Vancouver and the crisis comes when together they climb the Lion mountain peaks near Burrard Inlet. Arguably this is the visionary climax of the novel for afterwards they separate, descending into the world of contingency where Grey is shot dead by the police and Sijjer is left to pursue his uncertain way to the end.

Both men are victims of the vagaries of private family histories which in turn are related to social and racial histories of dispossession. Grey the hunter becomes the hunted in an urban world where there is no place for a 'real untamed spirit,' while Sijjer's life story is also a chronicle of loss, trapped as he is between the Punjabi Sikh traditions of his family and Western culture, 'Anomaly. That's what he was.' Sunga is very good at sketching libidinal energies, and through all the random violence it would seem that the prevailing theme relates to the triumph of spiritual power. However the narrative shifts are so distracting that this theme is only realised fragmentarily, when Grey talks about the 'living rock' in the blackness of the Thompson mine or in Sijjer's vision up at the Lion peaks when he sees the ghostly cougars leaping freely into space.

Sunga's is a strange first novel, strangely powerful when describing non-human nature but very disappointing on human relationships where it suffers from a real loss of power over language. Perhaps Sunga is trying to say something about subjective experiences which transcend limits of individuality but he has not yet found the words with which to do it. The novel is crowded with unreadable signs, and Sijjer's final letter (unsent, as always, to his dead mother in Punjab) confirms nothing but the crisis of values and the failures of communication suffered by a displaced person in contemporary urban society.

CORAL ANN HOWELLS

VISITED BY ANGELS

ROBBIE NEWTON DRUMMOND, *Arctic Circle Songs*. Penumbra Press, n.p.

IQBAL AHMAD, *The Opium Eater and Other Stories*. Cormorant Books, \$12.95.

LORNA CROZIER, *Inventing the Hawk*. McClelland & Stewart, \$14.99.

ARCTIC CIRCLE SONGS is a first collection of poems by an Alberta physician who worked from 1985-87 at the Inuvik General Hospital in the western Canadian Arctic, a land the poet describes as being as empty as "the space between the stars." Although the cover blurb claims that this volume "marks a major Canadian poetic debut," Drummond's writing is much too flat and literal to qualify as "major" poetry:

Raw whale blubber arrives
arrayed in a flare pattern
on a platter of crushed ice —
a flower of pallid flakes
doused in hot sauce to disguise
its taste of pure fat.

Nevertheless, these poems work very well as a kind of verse memoir, preserving the author's perceptions of a place that "possesses you / in a single gulp" — "a ceaseless gasp / dangerous and pure." Drummond writes with an understated authority of a people and a landscape he obviously loves, using his own photographs to add a spiritual dimension to the naturalistic texture of his poetry. One series of photos shows different people who appear to be floating through the air, but who actually have been hurled upwards during the traditional game of the Blanket Toss. Their arms and legs are stretched outwards, suggesting angels' wings reaching up into the cold, pristine Arctic sky.

The Opium Eater and Other Stories is also its author's first published book, but Iqbal Ahmad writes with the verve and polish of a master. He portrays his native India in spare, laconic prose that might

have resulted in fables of his themes were not so often cryptic and elusive. Two interlocking worlds are in tension in Ahmad's fiction: "the transient one of the flesh and the permanent one of the spirit." This first world is a cruel and brutal place where parents beat their children and two thousand young female pilgrims are regularly kidnapped from their families and forced into prostitution during the "Kumbah Fair," one of India's most sacred religious festivals. Ahmad's India is more than a "chaotic and crowded assault on the senses," however, because there are inexplicable forces at work on his characters, one of whom may be speaking with authorial sanction when he comments, "I do not believe in God myself, but sometimes I do think that there must be some small corner in this infinite universe where all the prayers go."

Typically, Ahmad's protagonists are "ordinary," solitary individuals whose lives are suddenly disturbed by some mysterious element which can be neither ignored nor explained. In the title story, this element is obviously secular, in the form of a possibly insane, possibly brilliant poet. In another story the disruptive force is other-worldly: a young man travels through the countryside to be with his future bride and looks at the world "through the filter of her beauty." One evening, he is awakened by the sound of "a woman's laugh, musical like silver bells" and witnesses two long-dead lovers cavorting under the moonlight. Ahmad offers up love and faith as buffers against a world that often seems "a continual anxiety, full of fear and empty of meaning." Never dogmatic, his affirmations are compelling because they are made in spite of his belief, dramatized by his stories, that most human beings are by nature lonely and isolated creatures.

Lorna Crozier's eighth collection of poetry, *Inventing the Hawk*, is also compelling: many of its poems were written

in the aftermath of her father's recent death — "Poor human flesh, / so lost and wandering" — yet overall, this volume transcends grief to become a eloquent hymn of praise. Crozier takes her raw material mainly from her memories of her childhood in rural Saskatchewan and from her adult perceptions of this same landscape, but the world of her poems never seems in any way limited. *Inventing the Hawk* includes raunchy, but strangely moving tributes to portions of the female anatomy, a poem written in praise of pumpkins, and "Skunks," a poem responding to a neighbour's efforts to shoot what for him are the irritating little beasts who are savaging his garbage. "After dark when he waits / in the alley the smell of me / will sting his eyes," the poet boasts,

For I will have been there
before him,
driving ahead of me
these dark sisters
with their slow walk
down to the river, the white
on their backs blazing
in the moonlight,
their sweet mouths
red with jam.

The poet perceives both the human and natural worlds around her as being inhabited by "sisters" and "angels," who can perhaps be understood as being her "familiar" or guardian spirits. An entire section of poems is devoted to "angels"; one of these is the "Angel of Salamanders," who after being killed and thrown into the furnace, grew "fiery wings." "All the colours of my dreams," the poet explains, "come from that small angel." In "Angel of Happiness," the "angel" is the poet's own mother. She has not had a "happy" life, but still,

she carries with her
a certain brightness.
It magnifies the air
the way an angel would
if she walked
through your house,
light falling from her hair.

The poems most likely to be anthologized repeatedly are those like "Angel of Happiness," which was written in response to the death of Crozier's father, an event that apparently triggered in her an empowering journey through her memories. The most powerful of these "family" poems may be "Time of Praise," a long elegy in memory of the poet's uncle, who was killed in a farming accident when he was a young boy. The poem concludes with the assertion that there are only a few things the poet is "sure of":

From the bones we lay
forever in the earth
at the urging of sun and wind
something grows,
something rises to the light
and has its say.

This "something," unnameable, mysterious, and irresistible, speaks through Crozier's poetry. I loved reading her poems, so finely crafted and so hauntingly serene.

PETER KLOVAN

CANADIANS ABROAD

DAVID ARNASON, *The Pagan Wall*. Talonbooks, \$15.95.

EVEN IF THIS is a first novel, its author, David Arnason, has long been established as a poet, critic, and playwright, and above all as one of the foremost postmodern storytellers in Canada. Can a writer who is versed in postmodern short fiction also sustain his narrative momentum throughout the several hundred pages of a novel? Arnason's plot is certainly intriguing.

Richard Angantyr, a University of Manitoba professor of philosophy, is on sabbatical leave at Strasbourg, where he wants to write a book on his special research area, the German philosopher Heidegger. Unexpectedly, he and his wife,

the book illustrator and artist Lois Jensen, are drawn into a plot involving not only an international network of arms dealers but also the Hallstatt group, a secretive cultural movement active in Southern Germany and Alsatia which is inspired by Heideggerian thought and Celtic mysticism.

Sightseeing at a former Celtic sanctuary, the Pagan Wall, Richard and Lois discover the corpse of David Mann, apparently the victim of a ritual sacrifice reenacting not only Celtic rites but also the World War I myth of "a Canadian officer who had been crucified by the Germans within sight of his own lines." The adventure of the Pagan Wall haunts Richard and Lois throughout their stay in Strasbourg and even during a restless tour through France, Spain and Portugal, on which they go when Richard's Alsatian colleague, Professor Delacroix, turns out to be mysteriously unavailable for consultation. They keep running into several persons connected with the incident at the Pagan Wall: there is Alexandra, a beautiful blonde German, who turns out to have been David Mann's girlfriend but is also more than willing to respond to Richard's interest in the Hallstatt group and in herself. There is also the resident CSIS agent in Paris, with whom Lois has more than a professional liaison while Richard goes on a fishing trip to Iceland together with Professor Delacroix and M. Kessler, the archetypal French inspector.

Convinced by the two that it is impossible for a non-native speaker of German to write a book on Heidegger, Richard changes his sabbatical project to a novel on the Canadian experience of the world wars. But even doing field work at Dieppe and on the battlefields of the First World War, where the myth of the "crucified Canadian" originated, Richard and Lois are attacked. Naively infatuated with Alexandra, he even gives away their hiding place and is kidnapped. Although

Alexandra succeeds in liberating him on the eve of a major ceremonial meeting of the Hallstatt group and asks him to flee with her, Richard heroically withstands this temptation. Instead, he barely escapes being ceremonially slaughtered and thus destroys any hopes police and secret service had of intercepting an important arms deal. Understandably, Lois and Richard are sent back to Canada immediately.

This is a suspense story, but it is also a run-of-the-mill mystery. All the clichés are there, ranging from the French inspector who knows as much about Heidegger as he does about modern art to the secret service agent who is great in bed. Arnason indulges in these stereotypes, but he goes a step further, weaving a net of clichés, allusions and citations into a parodic whole. Readers will find literary allusions on almost every page, and readers can also indulge in another kind of 'intertextual' reference, whether it be to the Canadian arms dealers called Hutcheon and Fawcett, or to the surprising 'fact' that Professor Angantyr is not aware that one of the novels he has brought along to read in Strasbourg was written by one of his fellow professors at the University of Manitoba.

In this fast-paced story which moves from Frankfurt to Strasbourg and on to Paris, Barcelona, Madrid, the Atlantic Coast in Portugal, Dieppe, Amiens, Arras, Vimy, Trier, and elsewhere, even those readers unfamiliar with postmodern intertextuality will maintain interest in the characters and their development. "Written in the tradition of Umberto Eco and Manuel Puig," the back cover says, but in its ironic passages dealing with the inscrutable French and German university systems seen from the point of view of the Canadian professor on sabbatical, this entertaining book owes a fair due to the campus novel popularized by David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury.

MARTIN KUESTER

PAIN & DISORDER

KATE STERNS, *Thinking About Magritte*. HarperCollins, n.p.

FRANÇOIS GRAVEL, *Felicity's Fool*. Trans. Sheila Fischman. Cormorant, n.p.

KATE STERNS' lyrical and quirky first novel has been, rightly, much acclaimed both in Britain, where she now lives, and in Canada, where she was brought up. As a Canadian woman novelist of calibre, Sterns is predictably compared to Atwood and Munro although *Thinking About Magritte* has much more in common with the work of Jane Urquhart and Susan Swan than with that of Canada's two 'establishment' women writers. The delicate suburban realism of Munro's *Jubilee* bears little resemblance to Sterns' *Limestone*, with its acrobats and freaks who hold casual conversations with ghosts, and who are haunted by phantom pregnancies and internal aquatic and reptilian life.

Sterns creates damaged characters who occupy the city of Limestone. She promotes a strong sense of the place, with its 'five prisons, three hospitals, one mental institution and one university,' where 'inhabitants of the place grew up thinking it natural one way or another to enclose and protect people.' But the protagonists do not quite fit in any of these institutions, and they all remain painfully vulnerable as they drift through streets, donut shops, and closed-down beauty parlours in their searches for those things they hope will make them whole.

There's Frank, scared of forever being 'a cookie in a Loony Tin,' who rides around on a bike with a myriad of mirrors that restructure his vision of the world. Frank's need for a child is temporarily assuaged by his belief in his pregnancy. Ultimately he finds the loyal Savage, a wild boy who catches birds in the park and alternately whispers and yells, and who finds 'his way to Frank's despair,'

promising with a tenderness belied by the vicious words 'I'll be the fucking baby if I have to. I'll cry and wet my pants and suck on his tit.'

There's Cowboy, a hydrocephalic kid who has never grow up and who is searching for Lily, his mother. Cowboy lives with the fantasy of fish swimming in his head, and dreams of reuniting families by pressing his forehead against the ice on the lake where some of the fish remain frozen close to the surface. Cowboy loves Maxine and selflessly participates in her desperate search for her lover and torturer, Old River, not knowing until too late (like the novel's reader) that this is one quest that is doomed to failure.

Despite the fear, pain and hostility of the underculture of Limestone, this is a novel about love. The love that exists between these strange figures, between Frank and Savage, between Cowboy and Maxine, between Maxine and Old River, is as bizarre, varied and incomplete as the characters themselves. But as Lily sagely comments to her son, 'Love doesn't need a shape, Cowboy . . . What can be held can also slip through your fingers.'

The St. Jean de Dieu, a nineteenth-century hospital run, despite Government opposition, by an order of nuns, more than compensates for the psychiatric institutions that fail to offer refuge to the inhabitants of Limestone. Here, under the firm manipulation of Soeur Thérèse, the middle-aged Bernard Dansereau is permitted to investigate methods of promoting happiness amongst the patients through the unorthodox combination of hydrotherapy and magnetism.

Dansereau, driven by nineteenth-century medicine's typical desire to find the key to the mystery of humanity, seeks a tangible cause for happiness in the fern-shaped cells he finds in the brains he has purloined from the morgue at the hospital. But at the outset, he senses the absurdity of his mission and asks of himself: 'what

if your decision to come and work at the asylum is simply an old fool's whim, the craze of a rich man who finds repentance difficult? What's this idea of seeking happiness where it's least likely to exist?"

Dansereau's successful procedure for inducing happiness brings him the reward of many letters from his ex-patients, although not the scientific recognition he desired. Such acclaim is accorded rather to the unpleasant Dr. Paquette, whose experiments with ECT strike terror into the placid patients at St. Jean de Dieu, but whose meaningless mathematical formulae impress the academic establishment.

Gravel's novel touches on battles between religion and medicine and on their influence on the disturbed souls who are cared for in their thousands in Soeur Thérèse's institution. However, the conclusion suggests that institutions, whether religious, medical or academic, do not hold any answers to fulfilment: Paquette is exiled to the United States where the hold of the Catholic Church is less strong, and his mistress Florence ministers to and manipulates the benign Dansereau.

Eventually, Dansereau buries his initial self-questioning in brandy and experimentation. Whereas *Thinking About Magritte* leaves one blinking in bewilderment at the pain and disorder that constitute the world for Sterns' marginalised characters, *Felicity's Fool* invites the unkind assessment that Bernard is a rather pathetic old man, tinkering with the lives of those he cannot hope to understand, especially as he has lost what little insight he had into his own.

JILL LEBIHAN



FAR EAST

MARSHA WEIDNER, ed., *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting*. University of Hawaii, US\$35.00.

STEVEN HEIGHTON, *Flight Paths of the Emperor*. The Porcupine's Quill, \$12.95.

FLOWERING IN THE SHADOWS is a collection of essays meant, to some extent, to provide greater scholastic depth to two previously published exhibition catalogues: Patricia Fister's *Japanese Women Artists 1600-1900* (Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1988), and Ellen Johnston Laing and Weidner's *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300-1912* (Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1988). Weidner provides a general introduction, followed by five essays each for China and Japan. One in each section is a general essay on "Women Painters in Traditional" China or Japan, both of which essentially bring together and sum up the findings of the more narrowly focused case studies.

In the Chinese section, Julia Murray discusses *The Ladies' Classic of Filial Piety* and its illustrations; Shen C. Y. Fu introduces a Mongol princess who was an influential art collector during the Yüan dynasty (1280-1368); James Cahill attempts to delineate the *oeuvre* of the "courtesan" turned literati painter, and literatus' wife, Liu Yin (1618-1664); and Weidner writes on yet another *literata*, if I may coin the phrase, Ch'en Shu (1660-1736).

In the section on Japan, Maribeth Graybill presents an adaptation of a major article by Akiyama Terukazu on women court painters during the late eleventh to late twelfth centuries; Karen Brock provides a partial synopsis of her doctoral dissertation, which suggests a powerfully new, gendered, way of looking at a well-known religious picture scroll of the early thirteenth century, commonly known as

the *Kegon engi*; Stephen Addiss writes on three female poet/calligrapher/painters — grandmother, mother, and daughter — from eighteenth century Kyoto; and Patricia Fister discusses the female *nanga* artist and Meiji loyalist Chô Kôran (1804-1879).

As Weidner states in her Introduction: "the approaches taken by the volume contributors [are] . . . largely innocent of the more extreme methodological experiments currently enlivening feminist debates in Western art historical circles," or literary or cultural studies circles, in either the West or the East, for that matter. In fact, few of the authors draw out the theoretical ramifications of the concrete instances they examine. But perhaps these will be explored in a future volume; in the meantime, the essays present useful biographical and historical information, leavened with some fine analyses of specific visual works.

Such, then, is the situation on the scholarly front. Heighton's collection of short stories and vignettes might be taken to represent the status of Asians or, more specifically, Japanese, in current Canadian fiction. At first glance, things look very enheartening: apparently the general reading public is so well-informed about Japanese culture that the author and his publisher can assume that readers will make sense of lines such as "... calligraphic scrolls, a *tokonoma* containing an empty *maki-e* vase, *bonsai* and *noren* and several framed, original *sumi-e* prints." But then one looks closer: does "bonsai" really need to be italicized, or the diacritical marks included in "Tôkyô"? Why, then, are the diacritical marks regularly omitted from *bushidô* and *sumô*? And just what would an "original *sumi-e* print" actually be? In short, as these examples of misplaced erudition suggest, in the realm of fiction the news is, unfortunately, less than encouraging. Heighton's Japanese characters never progress beyond

caricature. In fact, the overwhelming impression one gets, in reading though what on the surface appears to be a wide variety of situations and experiences, is that Japan still essentially "means" the Second World War and that the Second World War still "means" Hiroshima. This clichéd reductionism is particularly puzzling from an author born in 1961. Indeed, one person states "I wasn't there. My father wasn't even there" — in fact, the character's father was eleven years old in 1945. Nonetheless, the narrators of these tales return again and again to the Pacific War, singing a refrain of "This was how it must have been." The explanation for this blinkering obsession appears to be as follows:

For young Jews and Germans, History is alive, an organic, groping thing, tentacled and inescapable. For Japanese youth it is largely forgotten — a fabulous nightmare from which their parents shook themselves awake. Economic success as a wholesome amnesia . . . "Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it, sure, but those who dwell on and in it make it present again for the rest of us. Make a present of it to the rest of us."

Such appears to be the author's self-appointed task, a task undertaken presumably for the sake of his peers, who were even denied the nightmare of the Vietnam war.

But one must question whether fiction, or at least this kind of fiction, is the appropriate medium for this project. In Heighton's writing, historical specificity is blurred by a poet's fascination with homology: bombers are baseballs and birthday-cake knives; restaurant proprietors have surnames made out of haiku by Bashô ("Mrs. Yumeta"), which run as leit-motifs through several stories; and an elementary knowledge of the Japanese language pretends to tell us what the Japanese are *really* saying, as in "... *sayonara* — though the old word does not really mean 'goodbye,' but *Well, if it must*

be so, so be it." To which one can only respond: "... goodbye, though the old word does not really mean 'goodbye,' but *God be with you.*" Sayônara.

JOSHUA S. MOSTOW

GUIDED FANTASIES

MICHAEL J. CADUTO and JOSEPH BRUCHAC, *Keepers of the Animals: Native Stories and Wildlife Activities for Children*. Fifth House, \$22.95.

DOREEN JENSEN and CHERYL BROOKS, Eds., *In Celebration of Our Survival: The First Nations of British Columbia*. UBC Press, \$16.95.

CADUTO AND BRUCHAC'S book is a beautiful collective enterprise, with a foreword by Vine Deloria, Jr., and photographs and drawings by a variety of artists, including John Kahionhes Fadden. Visually attractive to readers of any age, the book also contains a wealth of written information (from Native lore and insights about animals to current scientific data on both animals and the environment) that is of interest to children and adults alike. A two-part work (complete with a separate teacher's guide), *Keepers of the Animals* offers "ideas and suggestions for facilitating the use of stories, guided fantasies, puppet shows and activities [for both indoors and outdoors], as well as procedures for caring for animals in captivity" and for understanding animals in the wild (xviii). Important "discussion" sections in the book provide essential information for teaching Native stories in their appropriate cultural contexts. This book is an ideal choice for teachers who are especially dedicated to cross-cultural education.

There are twenty-seven animal stories included in the book. Particularly valuable is the way in which the text shows how so many traditional Native beliefs — frequently treated as merely fanciful or

mythical — are in fact based on careful observation of nature. Much of what environmental science has recently "discovered" has been known by Native peoples for hundreds of years. Like its predecessor, *Keepers of the Earth: Native Stories and Environmental Activities for Children*, this new book in the "Keepers" series stresses the importance of understanding the web of relationships connecting all creatures on earth. Many of these connections have not been perceived or understood within the Eurocentric view that has, so far, treated nature primarily as a material commodity.

Indeed, *Keepers of the Animals* teaches children about "the cycle of giving and receiving" that is "fundamental to Native North American culture." The opening story, a Cree tale about "How the People Hunted the Moose," confronts the subject of hunting from the point of view of the moose. Neither endorsing nor condemning hunting, but discussing it as a fact of history, Caduto and Bruchac take the opportunity this Cree story affords, to teach children the difference between hunters with the proper, respectful attitude toward the hunted, and those whose careless, insensitive practices have turned out to bear widespread, environmentally destructive consequences.

Caduto and Bruchac's book conveys serious lessons about values and human behavior toward the earth, but it is also great fun to look at and read. It would make an excellent gift for a "child" of any age, as well as a valuable addition to any classroom curriculum. An abundance of illustrations, from line-drawings to photographs to diagrams, grace nearly every page and are as appealing to the eye as the Native stories are to the imagination.

In Celebration of Our Survival, edited by Doreen Jensen and Cheryl Brooks, likewise combines attractive visual material with several types of discourse on the history of the First Nations of British Colum-

bia. The book contains fifteen essays by a diverse group of Native authors, poems by Ron Hamilton, and visual art by Walter Harris, Ron Hamilton, and David Neel (whose striking "Life on the 18th Hole," is reproduced in colour). The volume is written, compiled, and edited entirely by First Nations people. Contributors represent "individuals from all walks of life who [are] recognized by their own people for their knowledge and experience. The contributors were simply asked to tell their story and to write about what they felt was important in creating a portrait of their people."

The essays cover a range of topics stressing both past injustices and hope for the present (and future) as some of these injustices are apparently (following the long-overdue advice of the country's articulate and increasingly outspoken Indian population) beginning to be addressed by Canadians in general. Though much remains to be done, the authors in this collection suggest that, indeed, the past twenty years or so of Indian activism are at last producing a better life for Indian people.

For instance, British Columbian educational policy concerning Indians is the subject of R. Richard Atleo's "A Study of Education in Context." Based on a "context theory" of education, Atleo concludes quite sensibly that Native students succeed much more frequently when they attend schools where they are not minorities, or cultural outsiders. Fortunately, many of today's Native British Columbian students, unlike their immediate predecessors, attend schools governed and operated by Native people, frequently even by friends and extended family, in keeping with tribal rather than Western bureaucratic "reality." A second article by Atleo reports moderate success on another front — museum policy concerning repatriation of Native artifacts and property. Atleo drafts a set of guidelines for establishing

a productive relationship between museum officials and Native people making repatriation claims; the guidelines derive from traditional Native values of "generosity and respect."

Despite the progress that has been made, however, many problems between Native cultures and dominant Canadian society remain. Emphasizing the frequently problematic effects of even the best-intended government policies is one of the most compelling essays in Jensen and Brookes's collection — Shirley Joseph's "Tools for Assimilation: Then and Now." Joseph argues that "Bill C-31, A [1985] Act to Amend the Indian Act" of 1976, has resulted in new kinds of discrimination against Native people, though the Bill was intended to end "one hundred and sixteen years of legislated discrimination." Bill C-31 has introduced additional bureaucratic distinctions making four, rather than the earlier two, categories of status and non-status Indians in Canada. Joseph stresses the obvious problems involved in the dominant culture's attempting to tell Native peoples who is, and who is not, "Indian."

Readers will learn much from each of the fifteen essays in the collection, but most significant is the fact they learn it from Native people themselves rather than from non-Indian sources. Ron Hamilton's poems, interspersed among the essays, speak volumes about the anguish, anger, and hope of the current generation of Native Canadian artists striving to make their voices heard. The poetry and art, together with the essays, are indeed a fulfillment of the editors' proclaimed hope that readers will not only learn "a lot of new facts," but also "acquire a greater insight into intangibles such as the spirits, hopes, and dreams that are an integral part of aboriginal life . . . in British Columbia."

CATHERINE RAINWATER

FEMINISMS

SUSAN CREAN, Ed. *Twist and Shout: A Decade of Feminist Writing in This Magazine*. Second Story, \$15.95.

ARLENE RAVEN, Cassandra Langer, Joanna Frueh, Eds. *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*. IconEditions, \$20.00.

IF ANYONE STILL needed to be assured that the feminist movement speaks a multitude of voices and opinions rather than taking a uniform and conformist stand, *Twist and Shout* and *Feminist Art Criticism* re-produce the rich polyphony of feminisms in journalism and the art world that is the strength of the feminist movement in North America. Both anthologies share a commitment to giving space to "marginals and seekers after alternatives," as Crean writes, to social justice, and to the pursuit of knowledge, commitments that involve a re-visioning and re-reading of the past in order to promote social change.

Twist and Shout is a collection of essays published to mark the thirteenth anniversary of *This Magazine*; "the magazine's most important function has been to publish voices and stories that otherwise wouldn't be heard or seen," as Crean puts it. The collection of "stories" re-defines the genre of magazine journalism, thereby establishing "creative documentary" as an aesthetic of its own. The complex tapestry weaves together diverse issues, forming a rigorous examination of patriarchal discourse as it is revealed in science, history, politics, medical discourse and mass media images of women, pointing out not only the problems that women and other marginalized voices face, but also the achievements that have been made and possible directions for the future. And above all, the collection reveals the strength, energy, and commitment of Canadian women to voicing their experience. Maggie Helwig, in "Hunger," sums up the project of the

book when she cries "Until we find new ways of saying it and find the courage to talk to the world about the world, we will speak destruction to ourselves. We must come to know what we are saying — and say it."

"It" proves to mean a variety of things for the 28 female and 2 male voices who speak in the collection about issues as diverse as Iceland's electoral system, sex selection technology, peace issues, women in sports, women in Pakistan and the (now former) Soviet Union, pop culture icons like Rambo and Batman, and Canadian Family Farms. For example, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias and David McLaren speak of the history of the First Nations of Canada in order to critique the Free Trade agreement between Canada and the United States, warning that the "apocalypse" which Native cultures suffered is the likely future of Canadian cultural sovereignty as well. The comparison, made in 1987, finds continued currency in the wake of Canada's signing of the NAFTA just weeks after the collection was released. In fact, it is the continued currency of these pieces that make the collection so stimulating. For example, Susan Crean's "Post-Feminism and Power Dressing" uncovers the link between "post-feminism," a movement that "is not an extension of feminism, as some try to claim, [but] a denial of it," and the patriarchal discourse that invented the term to make "feminism safe for the fashion industry."

And the currency of Lee Lakeman's remarkable and controversial critique of media coverage of the 1989 Massacre in Montreal, "Women, Violence and the Montreal Massacre," was brought home at the Collection's unveiling at the 1992 Vancouver International Writer's Festival where audience members were handed misogynistic hate literature by an inconspicuous male "poet" at the entrance to the event. Lakeman's and the other wo-

men in the book face this kind of discrimination head-on, deconstructing its power by unmasking the myths about women that our culture continues to propagate in order to promote social change. Indeed, the 30 voices of the Collection do twist and shout, but the chorus doesn't just "complain" (18 of the articles come from the magazine's popular "Female Complaints" section), it suggests solutions that are practical and revolutionary at the same time.

The 13 articles in *Feminist Art Criticism*, written between 1970-1988, seek to present the history of women and Western art; the collection contains essays that were ground-breaking for feminist art scholarship, such as Maryse Holder's "Another Cuntree," but unlike *Twist and Shout*, the essays are more interesting as early documents of the feminist art movement than for their continued currency in 1992. The editors selected the articles for the diversity of concerns they raise, including sexuality, the representation of women in art, the connections between theory and action, women as art makers, ethnicity, art history and art criticism. The essays are chronologically arranged in order to show that feminist art discourse "is clearly a [developing] discourse," but while the articles begin the dialogue about the (essential versus constructed) nature of women, and work towards re-visioning of the canon of Western art, the collection only begins the discussion of representations of woman and the role of women artists. Many of the essays repeat each other, undercutting the development that the editors announce in the introduction and making the collection as a whole less interesting.

Among the essays that work towards establishing an agenda for feminist art criticism is Judith Barry and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis' "Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Making," which rejects the "glorification of an essential art

power" that is the focus of Holder, Fernan Orenstein, and Roth's pieces, seeing this strategy simply as an inversion of the hierarchical binary thought characteristic of Western patriarchal discourse. Reclaiming the female body as a subject of discourse (rather than a silent object), while a necessary first step, does not begin the more important project of developing a theory of representations of women. Rather than simply uncovering a hidden canon of female art or seeing women artists as being outside of the patriarchal order (2 other streams of the feminist movement that they identify), Barry and Flitterman-Lewis suggest that female artistic activity must be seen as a textual practice that is part of the culture's discourse. Indeed, while the collection is less accessible and current than *Twist and Shout*, it does outline and articulate new directions for art criticism. Perhaps Raven and Frueh's exciting experiments with the essay form itself hint at the myriad of possibilities for the future of feminist art criticism.

JULIE WALCHLI

DISTANT MIRRORS

ANTOINE SIROIS, *Mythes et symboles dans la littérature québécoise*. Les Éditions Triptyque, n.p.

FRANÇAIS DU CANADA — FRANÇAIS DE FRANCE,
ACTES DU DEUXIÈME COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL DE COGNAC DU 27 AU 30 SEPTEMBRE
1988, CANADIAN ROMANICA, Vol. 6. Niemeyer,
n.p.

IN CHOOSING as his point of departure Eliade's concept of myth ("Le mythe raconte une histoire sacrée; il relate un événement qui a eu lieu dans le temps primordial, le temps fabuleux des 'commencements'"), Sirois lifts Québécois literature from its temporal-geographical confines to place it within the greater realm of eternal-universal artistic expression. Focusing essentially on Greco-Roman

and biblical mythology, Sirois establishes his objectives as showing the diverse relations which might exist between an ancient text and a contemporary one, illuminating the understanding which the former brings to the latter; and discussing modern authors' adaptations of early works. The study is clearly influenced by Jungian concepts of archetypal imagery as well as by various approaches of myth criticism (Campbell, Graves, Durand, Albouy and White, among others, appear in the bibliography). On a more specifically Québécois note, the bibliography lists ten articles and books dealing with some aspect of myth criticism as it relates to an author or group of works (from Jacques Blais' *Saint-Denys Garneau et le mythe d'Icare*, published in 1973, to Victor-Laurent Tremblay's recent contribution to myth analysis, *Au commencement était le mythe*, which appeared in 1991). There are extensive endnotes as well, which refer the reader to additional sources.

Sirois' analysis is divided into ten chapters. The first, "La Terre-Mère: D'Homère à Zola, à Ringuet," builds on Ringuet's admiration for Zola to compare and contrast *Trente arpents* and *La Terre* from the standpoint of the authors' use of chromatic palates and earth-related imagery (water, the tree, the pit) within a biblical-mythological framework, showing that the desire to possess the Earth Mother (a force which rules the destiny of the rural inhabitant in both Ringuet and Zola) is treated differently by each author. "Babylone contre Eden: Romans canadiens-français et canadiens-anglais du terroir" sets out to establish a common grounding in the rural-urban dichotomy as it emerges in Québécois and English Canadian rural novels from the beginnings of the genre up to the Second World War. The objective is awesome (Sirois counts thirty-two Franco-Canadian and twenty-nine English-Canadian novels in this cate-

gory) and, consequently, many of the works receive cursory treatment at best. The next chapter again deals with rural-urban dynamics but, perhaps because it is limited to one novel (Potvin's early twentieth century *Restons chez nous!*) is much more to the point. Here Sirois applies Campbell's interpretation of the mythic journey to Potvin's expression of the flight from country to city, ultimately linking *Restons chez nous!* to the expulsion from Eden. The short stories and novels of Gabrielle Roy are briefly explored in "De l'idéologie au mythe de la nature" wherein Sirois mentions the post World War II shift to viewing nature with nostalgia as expressed in the mystic rapture of Roy's emotive style. In "Parques et muses au Plateau Mont-Royal," Tremblay's self-avowed fascination with Greek tragedy forms the basis for an exploration of mythic elements in *La Grosse Femme d'à côté est enceinte* and *Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Anges*. Sirois aptly shows the transposition of the three Fates and their mother, the Night, to four women knitting on a balcony in the working class district of Montreal in the first novel, and subsequently illustrates how the second represents both a continuation of and a departure from it (the modern-day weavers of Destiny take on characteristics of the Muses initiating a "happy few" to beauty and the arts). "Une Médée américaine" is a comparative study (on the basis of composition, narration, time, space and character development) of *New Medea*, Monique Bosco's 1974 novel, and the Euripidean tragedy. Sirois concludes that Bosco uses the Greek model, along with other Greek and biblical traditions to create a text in which Jason becomes a prototype for the conquerors of America and Medea illustrates the destructive effects of absolute passion.

Anne Hébert's *Héloïse* is the subject of a chapter which studies echoes of the

Orphic myth in the symbolic and, more specifically, spatial components of Hébert's novel. The Orphic myth again forms the basis of an interrogation of Jacques Ferron's *Le Ciel de Québec* in which Hébert herself is cast in the role of Eurydice opposite her cousin, Saint-Denis Garneau as Orpheus. In both instances, Sirois concludes that the authors have integrated the original myth into a vaster mythic context in which the opposition of the forces of life and death is more strongly felt. *Le Cercle des arènes* by Roger Fournier is analyzed largely from the standpoint of its affinities with the Cretan Minotaur archetype. In the final chapter, Sirois returns to Anne Hébert for an examination of biblical inspirations and subtexts in a selection of her novels.

This volume contains many pertinent observations yet at times falls short by remaining on the surface, pointing out literary allusions to myths and similarities of characters and plots to mythic archetypes without following through to reveal the deeper complexities established by his marriage of the modern text and an ancient predecessor. Perhaps this work's greatest merit lies not so much in what it accomplishes but rather in its premise of viewing Québécois literature through the distant mirror of antiquity; thereby, one would hope, it will encourage future studies where this approach will confirm and redefine the place of Québec's creative force in the vast and timeless collective unconscious.

The sixth and most recent in the series *Canadiana Romanica* is a compendium of the presentations, round tables and commentaries which composed the second *Français du Canada-Français de France* colloquium, held in 1988 in Cognac. As stated in the opening address by the colloquium's co-president, Kurt Baldinger of the University of Heidelberg, the central theme of the colloquium was comparative dialectology. The first

section, devoted to maritime vocabulary, includes six presentations which explore the influence of the sea and the fishing industry on a variety of socio-linguistic realities in France and French Canada. While it would appear obvious that in light of their highly specialized orientation, these analyses should hold the largest appeal for linguists working on related topics, the general reader will find interesting and amusing facts here as well. One example among many is Gaston Dulong's discourse on the figurative use of maritime vocabulary in French Canada which points out the nautical origins of such colorful expressions as *une mère amarrée à la maison*, *avoir le nez comme un épissier*, *une femme bien grée*, and so on.

The volume's second edition is formed entirely of Marie-Rose Simoni-Aurembou's brief but probing revelation of "mirages génétiques," a term which Simoni-Aurembou has adapted from Gillieron's "mirages phonétiques" to refer to the omission of the Ile-de-France region in research related to the genesis of French in French Canada. The colloquium's round table on current research and projects is reproduced in the third section. Among those present who spoke of their ongoing research were Louise Dagenais ("La diphtongaison dans l'ouest de la France et au Québec"), Isabelle Bagnieux-Chadefaux, ("L'expression acadienne dans l'oeuvre d'Antonine Maillet"), and Patrice Brasseur and Jean-Paul Chauveau who have recently completed a *Dictionnaire des régionalismes de Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon*.

The final section, entitled "Comparaisons morphologiques et syntaxiques," contains eight presentations dealing with morphological and syntactical manifestations, similarities and divergences in France and French Canada. As in the other sections, ample graphs, notes and references are provided. Again, while all eight discourses will provide useful in-

formation for specialists, a few will also hold the interest of the lay reader. Two of the more accessible and interesting are Liliane Rodriguez' "De l'Atlantique français à la Prairie canadienne: aspects morphologiques et syntaxiques du parler franco-manitobain" and Hans-Josef Niederehe's "Quelques aspects de la morphologie du franco-terreneuvien." Rodriguez shows how, in her words, the same tenacity which marked the history of the French implantation in Manitoba modeled the language in the form of persistent linguistic elements and "dialectalismes" previously brought to Canada. Niederehe explores Franco-Newfoundland morphology and folkloric traditions, and discusses the founding of a small Acadian colony in Newfoundland after the "grand dérangement."

CONSTANTINA MITCHELL

IDÉOLOGIES

Yvan Lamonde, en collaboration avec Gérard Pelletier, "*Cité Libre*." Une anthologie. Stanké, n.p. Robert Giroux, *Parcours*. De l'imprimé à l'oralité. Tryptique, \$29.95.

L'EFFICACE DES idéologies se mesure peut-être à leur faculté de conserver leur caractère diffus longtemps après leur disparition. Tel semble être le cas de *Cité libre*, une revue dont on ne laisse de souligner l'importance dans l'histoire du Québec contemporain, bien souvent sans l'avoir lue, ou à tout le moins, sans toujours être en mesure d'en définir les orientations véritables. L'anthologie d'Yvan Lamonde projette quelque lumière sur cette zone d'ombre bien que son objectif premier ne soit pas de démystifier l'entreprise citélibriste, mais plutôt d'en restituer le sens en rassemblant sous neuf chapitres thématiques une quarantaine de textes représentatifs des débats qui ont marqué la vie intellectuelle du Québec. Grâce à la minutie archéologique

de Lamonde, le lecteur est cependant amené à évaluer la valeur intrinsèque de cette revue, à se demander si dans son combat pour les libertés civiles et l'épanouissement culturel du Canada français, *Cité libre* a été le forum ouvert que l'on a décrit et si elle a fait la promotion d'idéologies en voie de formation ou en voie d'éclatement.

Dans la première phrase de la revue (1950-59), une seule véritable ligne directrice se dégage: l'opposition au duplisme et à la doctrine traditionaliste héritée du XIX^e siècle. Ce flottement idéologique favorise pour un temps la coexistence entre ceux qui, pénétrés du personnalisme d'Emmanuel Mounier, recherchent la liberté dans la Cité, à l'intérieur de l'Église et de la Constitution et ceux qui cherchent à redéfinir sociologiquement et à promouvoir la nation canadienne-française. Malgré cette diversité, une constatation s'impose: mis à part certains textes de Fernand Dumont, Marcel Rioux et Pierre Vadeboncoeur, où s'articulent les premiers éléments d'une méthodologie, un discours théorique susceptible de rendre compte d'une réalité québécoise en mutation, *Cité libre* est beaucoup moins revue de réflexion qu'un lieu où s'exprime un certain sens de l'action, personnifié par Trudeau et Pelletier, ces derniers s'avérant par ailleurs des critiques lucides de l'actualité politique.

L'année 1960 marque le début de la querelle autour de l'idée d'indépendance et une augmentation considérable du tirage de *Cité libre*, dont l'auditoire était demeuré jusque-là très limité quoique l'impression contraire subsiste encore aujourd'hui. Gérard Pelletier, dans l'interview qui fait figure de préface à l'anthologie, ne voit aucun lien entre les deux phénomènes. C'est pourtant parce qu'elle a brièvement ouvert ses pages à des idées anticitélibristes que la revue a pu rejoindre un public plus vaste et plus jeune. Mais on connaît la suite: la démission

forcée, pour cause d'hérésie nationaliste, de Jean Pellerin et Pierre Vallières et l'éclatement de la revue. C'est sans doute dans ces chapitres consacrés au débat *Cité libre-Parti pris* et au nationalisme que le lecteur prendra le plus grand intérêt. On y retrouve les textes les plus connus de Pierre Elliot Trudeau, chez qui, malheureusement, les injures, les généralisations abusives à propos des Canadiens français et les affirmations gratuites tiennent souvent lieu de pensée. C'est également dans ces pages que Gérard Pelletier raille cette affirmation prophétique de Raymond Barbeau: "Ou bien *Cité libre* deviendra nationaliste, ou bien cette revue disparaîtra." Sa récente résurrection, dans le contexte de l'Accord du Lac Meech, révèle peut-être plus que toute analyse savante son idéologie essentiellement réactionnaire: s'opposer à la reconnaissance du Québec comme nation.

S'il est donc permis de mettre en doute la représentativité de l'aventure collective que fut *Cité libre*, il en va tout autrement de l'ouvrage de Robert Giroux dont le *Parcours* particulier, à titre de professeur et critique, est révélateur des types de métadiscours littéraire pratiqués au cours des vingt dernières années, des idéologies qui ont régné sur la République des lettres.

Ainsi les analyses thématiques et sémiotiques qui figurent en tête de recueil nous rappellent l'hégémonie de l'immanence dans les années soixante-dix. Ce qui ne veut pas dire qu'elles aient perdu de leur impact critique (on signalera au passage les études consacrées à François Hertel et à Jean-Aubert Loranger); au contraire, le mérite revient à l'auteur d'avoir évité le discours tautologique ou le surcodage méthodologique. Cependant, pour qui s'intéresse à définir les critères du littéraire, la "vérité," au début des années quatre-vingt, se trouve à l'extérieur des oeuvres, dans l'approche institutionnelle. Giroux entreprend donc, dans quelques

articles qui à mon avis forment la part la plus intéressante du recueil, d'explorer le champ littéraire québécois. Dans "Notion et/ou fonction(s) de la littérature nationale québécoise de 1930 à 1975," le critique démontre, en comparant deux enquêtes réalisées auprès d'écrivains en 1939 et 1977, comment on continue d'occulter la fonction sociale de la littérature au Québec. Dans "Le statut social de l'écrivain" et "Le statut (fictif) de l'écrivain" l'auteur arpente la scène canonique de consécration et met en évidence, en s'appuyant sur des faits et des chiffres d'édition précis, la nature arbitraire du littéraire.

Ayant le sentiment d'avoir "fait le tour de la littérature," Robert Giroux se tourne ensuite vers cette autre pratique culturelle qu'est la chanson, champ de recherches jusqu'ici peu exploré par la critique québécoise. Ce qui s'annonce comme une série de "Réflexions sur la chanson (et le) populaire ou l'oralité dans le social" déçoit quelque peu car on n'y retrouve qu'un seul véritable article, le reste ne rassemblant que des recensions de biographies, d'anthologies ou de disques d'intérêt inégal. Entre le chapitre sur l'imprimé et ce dernier chapitre sur l'oralité, l'auteur entend s'interroger sur les mutations et les enjeux de la culture, mais là encore le propos théorique s'efface devant le commentaire (de textes de Lévy, Finkelkraut, Bloom, etc.).

La présence massive du compte rendu nuit à l'unité déjà quelque peu fragile d'un ouvrage qui réunit une cinquantaine de textes parus dans des publications très différentes (collectifs, revues savantes, magazines culturels, journaux). Il aurait mieux valu élaguer ces quelques 500 pages et ne retenir que les écrits qui ont véritablement ponctué le parcours théorique de l'auteur, de façon à ne pas interrompre le dialogue (auto)critique. Dans un article daté de 1989, Robert Giroux voit un indice de la crise de la littérature québécoise

dans le fait que "les professeurs regroupent de plus en plus en volume leurs articles éparpillés ici et là." On pourrait donc en conclure malicieusement que la crise perdure; mais ce serait là négliger l'apport de ce *Parcours*, la rigueur d'un observateur passionné de la culture francophone qui résume avec beaucoup de clarté les postures et impostures théoriques des vingt dernières années.

ANDRÉ LAMONTAGNE

*** *Belonging: The Meaning and Future of Canadian Citizenship*, ed. William Kaplan. McGill-Queen's, \$24.95. This collection of essays is a useful and interesting survey of how Canadians thought and think of themselves and their country, written by historians, lawyers, and various other people, including one authentic writer. But the title — *Belonging: The Meaning and Future of Canadian Citizenship* — suggests the basic dichotomy of the book and its approach. For citizenship is really a technical and legal matter concerning who can live in a country, enter and leave it freely, and may be liable for various duties: jury duty, for example, and military service in many countries. But "Belonging" is a different and more emotional issue, and the true correlative here is not citizenship so much as patriotism. Patriotism is not automatic; it does not relate necessarily to the time and place of one's birth. I, for example, have many Welsh ancestors and am perhaps closer to Wales than to any other country. Yet Wales has no citizenship because it has had no political autonomy since the Plantagenet conquest. To be a Welsh patriot is to regret the past and hope for the future and meanwhile to love the land that is there. Patriotism — belonging — is older than the nation-state, and can attach to quite different objects than those valued by the nationalist. And so while in my historical mind I am a Welsh patriot, I am also one of those many Canadians who are devoted to what the Spaniards call their *patrias chicas* (little fatherlands) and at times shock Torontonians (but never Montrealers) by declaring themselves British Columbians first of all, and only afterwards Canadians. Canada is too vast and various for many of us to love it equally and entirely; and since I cannot in the present dispensation be

a citizen of British Columbia, my sense of belonging has a minimum relation to what my passport says.

G.W.

*** MARTIN ROBIN, *Shades of Right: Nativist and Fascist Politics in Canada: 1920-1940*. U. Toronto P., \$16.95. According to Martin Robin in his latest book, *Shades of Right*, there were no less than 25,000 members of the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan in the 1920s. True, they did not ride at night in hoods and cloaks, they did not go in for lynching and rarely burnt a cross, and their hatred was directed against Catholics in this province with a minuscule black population. But their very presence emphasized the level of prejudice in Western Canada's small towns, where most of the Klansmen lived. The KKK faded away, and by the end of the 1920s was a negligible presence, but a number of quasi-Fascist groups, inspired partly by Mussolini's success and later by that of the Nazis in Germany, did emerge, the most important being Adrien Arcand's National Socialist Christian Party. In addition, there were the efforts of German and Italian consular officials, who left Canadian citizens to the fringe parties, but themselves helped to organize Italian and German citizens into Fascist or Nazi cells or fringe organizations.

In numbers, related to the Canadian population, these fascists and quasi-fascists were few and mostly led by ineffective neurotics like Arcand. The chances of their profoundly affecting Canadian affairs was slight, since they were not trained for the sabotage that became the role of real Fifth Column, and their presence was more a flowering in a new way of old Canadian prejudices than a real importation of totalitarian structures. Like good clowns, they offered us mirrors of ourselves, or at least of our forebears.

Of all this Martin Robin writes with condemnatory zest, as well he might, though, as in his past books, he does tend to be a little obvious in his terms of abuse, a little heavy in his sarcasm. Surely these sad people speak for themselves and their actions.

G.W.



THE CALENDARS OF "AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE"

OVER THE FIFTY YEARS since the publication of Sinclair Ross's *As For Me And My House*¹ in 1941, critics have suggested that Ross is vague about the time frame of Mrs. Bentley's diary entries. Ross's use of dates heading each entry is seen as simply establishing the novel's diary form. The purpose of this paper is to briefly indicate how those dates correspond to very specific years and to show that, in some instances, they have been carefully selected by Ross as a structural device.

In his introduction to the 1957 edition of *As For Me And My House*, Roy Daniells says,

Although *precise dates, places, and historical events are avoided*, there is no doubt that these pages present the prairies of the drought and the depression, the long succession of years between the two wars. [My emphasis]²

Horizon, the town where the Bentleys spend the thirteen-month period of the novel, could be, as Donald Stephens states, "any place on the prairies in the thirties; yet again, it can be anywhere at any time." [My emphasis]³ More recently, Frank Davey comments,

Although the amount and decline of Philip's salary and the five consecutive years of adverse climate suggest the 1930 depression years, no mention appears in the text of other than local economic factors.

[My emphasis]⁴

Some suggest the diary is intended to be a spiritual journal, as kept by Puritans,

reflecting on the day's events as they might pertain to the development of the soul.⁵ Diana Brydon says that "the diary format lends immediacy and intimacy to the narrative."⁶ Paul Denham, after explaining how the novel differs from a true diary, concludes:

Were it not for the dates at the head of each entry, it might be more satisfactory to think of the novel as an interrupted interior monologue.⁷

In her recent "Feminist Re-vision" of Ross's novel, Helen M. Buss "contend[s]" that the diary offers an excellent form to express such a consciousness ["nonrepresentative, dispersed, displaced subjectivity"].⁸

The critics have seen that each entry provides the date and day of the week — making the text a diary — but not the year — making the story appear more universal (although the 1930s is accepted as firmly established by events and lifestyle). What critics seem to have missed, however, is that the correspondence between certain days of the week and dates is a *fingerprint to a particular year*. April 8th of the first year is a Saturday; the same date the following year is a Monday, making that second year a leap year. The first year's January 1st is a Sunday, the second year's a Monday. Leap years which begin on Monday occur only every twenty-eight years. Reckoning⁹ establishes that in this century the two calendars Ross uses followed each other only in 1911-1912, 1939-1940, 1967-1968, and they will again in 1995-1996. The novel was first published in 1941, and it is possible that Ross, wanting dates to map out his story, took them from calendars available at the time he started writing: the first year's entries would correspond to dates in 1939, and the second year's entries to dates in 1940.¹⁰

If I suggest that Ross has *mapped out* his story, it is that the dates of the entries indicate a certain amount of deliberation

in their choice — even the very number of entries is not random: for those who appreciate symmetry around a turning point, Ross has Mrs. Bentley make forty-two entries in Horizon, six at the ranch, and forty-two again in Horizon after the vacation. As to the dates chosen, consider, for example, the entries for the months of April and May in both years of the diary: no dates are duplicated. The single May entry of the second year has an even chance of not duplicating a May date of the first year (15/31), but the story for the April entries is different. There are four entries in April of the second year; the probability that, by chance, none of the twelve April dates from the first year will be used again the second year is approximately one in nine ($18/30 \times 17/29 \times 16/28 \times 15/27$). The non-duplication of dates happens intentionally eight out of every nine times. This strongly suggests that, at least in some cases, Ross has chosen specific dates quite deliberately.

On May 12th, the diary's final entry, Mrs. Bentley records: "What an eventful year it's been, what a wide wheel it's run" (164). Calendar watchers can appreciate the irony of the date baby Philip is born. In the entry of Wednesday, April 10 of the second year, Mrs. Bentley writes that "Judith's baby was born Monday night [April 8], a month before its time. Judith died early Tuesday morning [April 9]" (161). April 8th, one year to the day after Mrs. Bentley starts the diary and expresses the desire for a son, baby Philip is born. And Judith West dies from exhaustion, having walked through "fields [that] were soft and sticky" (161).

Such an odd coincidence — weary, you know, comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, meaning to walk across wet ground. (9)

It cannot be an "odd coincidence" that Ross has Mrs. Bentley record Paul Kirby's etymology of "weary" April 9, one year to the day before Judith's death. By avoid-

ing duplicate dates on the entries, however, Ross has created an irony so subtle it seems to be his personal, private joke.

That Ross has used calendars for 1939 and 1940 does not in itself set *As For Me And My House* in those years. Yet knowing the actual years corresponding to the dates — not just sometime in the 1930s — makes it more feasible to find out whether there are links between specific world events and personal events which Ross could have (consciously or not) worked into Mrs. Bentley's narrative.

NOTES

- ¹ Sinclair Ross, *As For Me And My House*, intro. by Roy Daniells (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1957). Page numbers referring to this edition appear directly in the text. Quotations from Daniells's "Introduction" (pp. v-x) are noted, and also refer to this edition.
- ² Daniells, ix.
- ³ Donald Stephens, "Wind, Sun and Dust," *Canadian Literature* 23 (Winter 1965): 17.
- ⁴ Frank Davey, "The Conflicting Signs of *As For Me And My House*" (1990), in *Sinclair Ross's As For Me And My House: Five Decades of Criticism*, David Stouck, ed. (Toronto, Buffalo, London: U Toronto P, 1991) 187. In his acknowledgements, Stouck thanks "John Moss and the University of Ottawa Press for permission to print the essays by Frank Davey and Helen Buss. These essays," Stouck adds, "will be published simultaneously by University of Ottawa Press in the proceedings of the 1990 Sinclair Ross Symposium." (Stouck, xi).
- ⁵ See Robert D. Chambers, *Sinclair Ross & Ernest Buckler* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1975) 89; Ryzard Dubanski, "A Look at Philip's 'Journal' In *As For Me And My House*," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 24 (1979): 89; Lorraine McMullen, *Sinclair Ross* 2nd ed., rev. (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1991) 46.
- ⁶ Diana Brydon, "Sinclair Ross" in *Profiles in Canadian Literature* 3, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath (Toronto and Charlottetown: Dundurn, 1982) 98.
- ⁷ Paul Denham, "Narrative Technique in Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*,"

Studies in Canadian Literature, 5 (Spring, 1980): 120.

- ⁸ Helen M. Buss, "Who Are You, Mrs Bentley?: Feminist Revision and Sinclair Ross's *As For Me And My House*" (1990), in Stouck, p. 203.

- ⁹ My reckoning to establish the calendars Ross used was confirmed in *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1990*, Mark S. Hoffman, ed. (New York: Pharos, 1989) 266-67.

- ¹⁰ The tone of Ross's novel, however, suggests that the years 1911-1912 should not be wholly discounted as they correspond to when the very young Sinclair Ross's parents initially separated (See Lorraine McMullen's "Biographical Notes" 1).

MAXIANNE BERGER

*** *Rethinking the Future*, ed. Patricia Elliott. Fifth House, \$16.95. There is nothing very new about this book, for it is a collection of previously published essays, and some of them very familiar, like Northrop Frye's "The Rear-view Mirror," with its highly pertinent statement that "we move in time with our backs to what's ahead and our faces to the past, and all we know is in a rear-view mirror." This essay, though it comes at the end, in fact sets the tone of the book. The individual pieces; some brilliant and some bad, tend to have more specific subjects, but whether they deal with technology rampant, or perilous advances in genetics, or gender problems, or the decay of education, they are mostly less than optimistic; many of them openly attack the myth of progress by which we have lived so long, and it is quite clear that futurism is now discredited. All this is salutary reading for those of us who realize that we have to construct our future out of the debris of past and present, and can have no idea what shape it will take though we realize that it is hardly likely to conform to our hopes.

a.w.

**** DOUGLAS FETHERLING, *A Little Bit of Thunder*. Stoddart, \$24.95. In spite of the recommendations of Royal Commissions and the views of individuals interested in the maintenance of good newspapers, the buying up and homogenization of local publications by the great chains has gone on to the extent that in Canada there is no longer a paper of the quality of the Kingston *Whig-Standard*. With the acquisition of the *Whig* by the Southam chain in 1990, the species "good newspaper" became virtually extinct in our country.

But while it lasted, and particularly in its last two decades of independence, the *Whig* burnt with a "hard gemlike flame" of its own, and Douglas Fetherling has written an appropriate threnody in *A Little Bit of Thunder*. Fetherling speaks from practical experience and on-the-spot research, for he served for a period as the *Whig's* "writer-in-residence," a post probably unique in the newspaper world, and did his own bit towards providing the mixture of excellence and originality, of daring and understanding that existed at the *Whig* while Michael Davies (Robertson's nephew) and the leading Libertarian, Neil Reynolds, were running it.

Fetherling takes us into the newsroom and the other departments of the *Whig* during the years he worked there. Then he follows the historical trail, beginning with the bogus and eccentric "physician" E. J. Barker, who founded the *Whig* in the 1830s, and showing how, throughout its career and even before it came into the possession of the Davies clan, the paper was eccentric even in the context of Upper Canadian publishing. Reading it in Vancouver during the 1980s I found it greatly superior (both for its newsmen's instinct and its prose) to the great *Globe* itself.

Why, in a country with anti-combine laws, can our papers be encoiled in the chains in which they quickly die? The matter is important, though perhaps irredeemable, for with the independent press departs one of the defences of free speaking and free thinking.

a.w.



BOOKS RECEIVED

1) Anthologies

- ROSS FIRESTONE, ed., *Man in Me*. Harper/Collins, \$15.00.
 MICHAEL MACKLEM, ed., *The Oberton Reader*. Harper/Collins, \$5.95.
 MARK ANTHONY JARMAN, ed., *Ounce of Cure*. General, \$14.95.
 PATRICIA CRAIG, ed., *The Oxford Book of English Detective Stories*. Oxford University, \$27.95.
 PHILIP MEAD and JOHN TRANTER, eds., *Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry*. Penguin, \$19.95.
 J. R. (TIM) STRUTHERS, *The Possibilities of Story: Volume One*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, np.
 J. R. (TIM) STRUTHERS, *The Possibilities of Story: Volume Two*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, np.

2) The Arts (incl. Music)

- DANIEL L. BOORSTIN, *The Creators*. Random House, \$37.50.
 LUCY LIPPARD, LAWRENCE ALLOWAY, NANCY MARMER and NICOLAS CALAS, *Pop Art*. Thames & Hudson, \$17.95.
 MARA R. WITZLING, ed., *Voicing Our Visions*. Women's Press, \$22.50.

3) Children's Literature

- JEAN-MARIE POUPART, *Des Pianos Qui S'Envoient*. Courte Echelle, \$7.95.
 CHRISTIANE DUCHESNE, *L'Été des Tordus*. Courte Echelle, \$7.95.
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 BERTRAND GAUTHIER, *Panique au Cimetière*. Courte Echelle, \$7.95.
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- JUDITH MCCOMBS and CAROLE L PALMER, *Margaret Atwood* Macmillan, \$60 00
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- JERI DAWN WINE and JANICE L RISTOK, eds, *Women and Social Change* James Lorimer, \$24 95
- JANE RENDALL, *Women in an Industrializing Society* Blackwell, \$8 95
- *** CARMAN MILLER, *Painting the Map Red Canada and the South African War 1899-1902* McGill-Queen's, \$44 95 It's important to read a book for what it intends, and as this book intends to be military history (by which it means a record of battle strategies), its meticulous detail and its clear maps have to be applauded. Personally, I think military histories need to be contextualized a little more, though this book is strong on data. Approximately 270 died of the 7,368+ Canadian soldiers who went to the Boer War, and with the soldiers went 16 nurses and a bunch of "artificers" (blacksmiths, saddlers, wheelwrights, a butcher), there's mention of John McGrae, but no account of art or literature in relation to the war except for Wilfred Campbell's banal enthusiasm for the returned soldiers "Canadian heroes hailing home, / War-worn and tempest smitten, / Who circled leagues of rolling foam, / To hold the earth for Britain" Miller does make some effort to explain his title (the map would be held only by the spilling of blood), to examine the source of Canadian enthusiasm for the war (in Grant, Parkin, Denison, and the Upper Canada College crusaders, not surprisingly) to analyze the

early commanders' extraordinary incompetence and their colonial fawning to British authority, and to pay due attention to the realities of enteric fever, boredom, looting, and unsanitary water supplies. Curiously, the critique of Britain is undermined by a persistent faith in the honesty of British political intentions in South Africa, and in regards to the home front, the word "radical" is repeatedly used to dismiss anglophones who opposed involvement, whereas Quebeckers, even the conservative Jules-Paul Tardivel, are merely classified as Catholics whose opposition demonstrated simple "moral revulsion." As the book proceeds, moreover, the text starts to use words like "hero," "chase," and "warrior" with gusto, as though the Boers were a legitimate Canadian enemy and war were a neutral sport. They weren't. It wasn't.

W N

**** GARMAN CUMMING, *Secret Craft: The Journalism of Edward Farrer*. U Toronto P, \$45.00. An Irish journalist who emigrated to Canada in the 1870s, who edited the *Toronto Mail* after 1885, and who became associated with the American annexationist movement in the 1890s, Edward Farrer is little celebrated by Canadian historians. Known as an ungentlemanly anticlerical Catholic who encouraged racial and religious rivalries in Canada so as to help break the country apart, he has appealed neither to those who have championed national independence nor to those who have aspired conservatively to cultural eminence. He was a renegade, a "mischief-maker" who would sell his pen to both Grit and Tory, a backroom policy maker who covertly had close connections with Sir Wilfrid Laurier and perhaps also advised the American presidential candidate James Blaine, among others. At the same time he was an effective writer and satirist whose plain language and rhetorical skills markedly changed the character of Canadian journalism. Cumming's book (well illustrated with *Grip* cartoons that feature Farrer prominently) is less a biography than an account of the interaction between journalism and politics in the years 1882-1916. It is also a cautionary tale, one that warns provocatively against accepting too readily the objectivity of the press, and that calls for readers/watchers/listeners to distinguish sharply between reportorial motive and reportorial zeal.

W N

LAST PAGE

SEVERAL WORKS relating to African literature have recently arrived on my desk — a reminder of the range and richness of the continent's writing. Jane Tapsuei Creider's novel *The Shrunken Dream* (Women's Press, n.p.) is a further reminder that African writing sometimes takes account of Canada, and that cross-cultural interests do not always work one way. Creider's novel is a family saga, probing the changes that take place in Kenyan pastoral values, over time and in response to the changes that take place in family members after their contact with Canadian life.

Several other novels are preoccupied with the Nigerian Civil War — its military violence and the civil disruption it both caused and perhaps continues to cause in the wake of peace. Festus Iyayi's stylish *Heroes*, Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, and Amu Djoletto's *Hurricane of Dust* (all in Longman's African Classics series, \$13.95, and reprinted respectively from 1986, 1976, and 1987) tell of a journalist who discovers the realities of war, six characters who become prisoners of circumstance, and a revolution that goes nowhere. Iyayi's work becomes a testament to ordinary people who, more than the generals, deserve honour, in Okpewho's novel, anger, excitement, and inertia overlap, as a soldier deals with his own role in delivering death. Djoletto's novel concludes, suspended between acceptance and despondency: "Someone generates, some uses, someone creates, someone shares."

Africa World Press (\$9.95 each) has also released five books by the Nigerian fiction writer Flora Nwapa, in its African Women Writers Series, together with the Ghanaian writer Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor's *Comes the Voyager at Last* (\$7.95). Awoonor's novel interleaves a meditative narrative about the voyage into slavery with a contemporary narrative about an American black man whose renewed contact with Africa permits him to face the USA again. Nwapa's novels and stories — *Never Again*, *Women are Different*, *One is Enough*, *This is Lagos and other stories*, and *Wives at War and other stories* — deal with a variety of subjects, from girls at school to marriage to human misery and loss. *Never Again* and *Wives at War* again return to the Nigerian Civil War, probing the desire to participate in conflict as well as various kinds of resistance to it, there are wars with tradition, wars with bureaucracy, and wars with men as well — the women in these stories lose their children, have their homes destroyed, and encounter desecra-

tion of various kinds. If hope also persists, there are different ways to read it: as escape, for example, and as moral model for the future.

In addition, several works that deal with African writing examine a range of topics from traditional paradigm to the stylistics of current use. The essays in J. M. Coetzee's *Doubling the Point* (Harvard, n.p.), for example, deal with Beckett, popular culture, the problem of using romantic liberals as examples of post-1976 Black writers, and (in an absorbing essay) the "bestiary of grammar" and the function of the passive voice. Derek Wright's *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah* (Three Continents, \$16) assembles essays on the Ghanaian writer's use of rites, politics, and history. Romanus N. Egudu's *African Poetry of the Living Dead* (Edwin Mellen, n.p.) is an anthology of Igbo masquerade poetry, with translations and commentary. Chris Dunton's *Make Man Talk True* (Hans Zell, \$85) surveys Nigerian drama in English since 1970, commenting descriptively on the historical dramas of Ola Rotimi, the satire of Kole Omotoso, and others. Flora Veit-Wild's *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (Hans Zell, \$65) is a larger book; it provides valuable contextual data in a particular field that has to this point been less documented. Her account, generation by generation, of the role of nationalism, urbanisation, newspapers, the education system and its absorption with the English canon, leads into a commentary on the generation of the 1970s ("between protest and despair"), the politicization of schools, and the demythologizing of independence — all of which provides an informative frame of reference against which to read four of the most interesting writers of contemporary Africa: Charles Mungoshi, Dambudzo Marechera, Shimmer Chinodya, and Tsitsi Dangaremba.

Sandra T. Barnes' anthology of essays, *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New* (Indiana UP, \$19.95), examines the function of the West African god of iron as ritual warrior and as "ideal male," and goes on to examine the way the Ogun religion continues to prosper in Brazil and North America, and in other places where people are trying to cope with social and psychic tensions. The book also concerns the function of a deity in any culture: "it can be said that Ogun is a metaphoric representation of the realization that people create the means to destroy themselves. He stands for humans' collective attempts to govern, not what is out of control in nature, but what is out of control in culture."

Eileen Julien's *African Novels and the Ques-*

tion of Orality (Indiana UP, \$25), which looks primarily at francophone African examples (to which it adds the Marxist work of the Kenyan playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o), argues that the search for orality (which has no value apart from intention) constitutes a search for "continuity and authenticity." Such terms are not themselves neutral, of course, and Gay Wilentz's *Binding Cultures* (Indiana UP, \$10.95), subtitled "Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora," reads in part as though it were written to answer Julien. Looking at the work of three African writers and three Americans (Flora Nwapa, Efua Sutherland, Ama Ata Aidoo; Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall), Wilentz declares herself to be Marxist, feminist, and Afrocentric, discovers "cultural bonds" between Americans and Africans (at this point the argument begins to sound Amerocentric), and argues that the mother-daughter bond — communicated through "orature" (the storytelling forms that permit, among other things, the discovery of "origin") — represents the power of continuity to a culture and a gender that have been disrupted by the experience of diaspora. While Wilentz easily accepts the notion that English is "a language of domination," the politics of this perspective becomes clear when her book is contrasted with Adewale Maja-Pearce's account of Nigerian novelists of the 1980s, *A Mask Dancing* (Hans Zell, n.p.). This title comes from an Igbo proverb: "The world is like a mask dancing; if you want to see it well you do not stand in one place." Maja-Pearce does criticize English — but not as a language: as a social mask, rather. She criticizes the use of language as "camouflage" — insisting that when a writer declares, "I write in English, therefore I partake of the modern world," then that writer is not looking inward enough to examine the present for the need for change. Maja-Pearce considers the way the now-elder-generation (Achebe, Emecheta) dealt with the past, independence, and the Civil War, then goes on to look at the "abyss" (Eddie Iroh, Omotoso) and the way the new generation (Iyayi, Ben Okri) is examining decolonization, the brutalization of a society, and the continuing hunger for wholeness. Historical settings, she argues, are metaphors of mental landscapes. They are also, as her book and Flora Veit-Wild's in particular make clear, precise images of the social conditions of specific places and times.

W.N.



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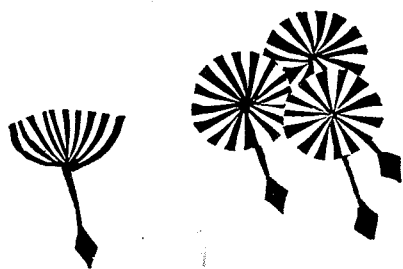
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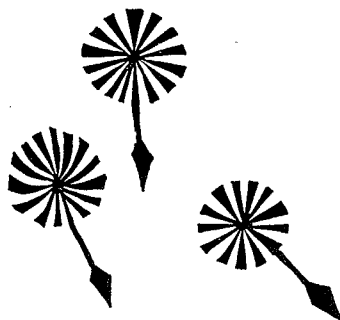


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