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Present
Future

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Facing the Future

With this issue, *Canadian Literature*, now in its 35th year of publication, acquires a fresh look. Since 1959 the journal has appeared in the letterpress format that Robert Reid shaped so elegantly when the journal was founded. His worthy successor is George Vaitkunas, who has designed a stylish computer-set page for the 1990s and the next decades. The journal's working categories remain the same—*Articles, Poems, Books in Review, Opinions & Notes*—and the new page size maintains the visual effectiveness of preceding issues. The new paper, however, is recycled as well as acid-free. In addition, the new layout—in a combination of Minion and Univers fonts—emphasizes authors' names in the Reviews section, and moves reviewers' names forward, increasing clarity and the ease of access to information.

Visually, the new design highlights the shape of language—through a series of strong horizontal and vertical patterns—in contrast to the previous design, which employed block format and initially used coloured inks as an ornament to words. In some ways the new emphasis on vertical and horizontal can also be read metaphorically. The journal has always been committed to a wide *range* of subjects that relate to literature in Canada; it has also provided space for treating in *depth* a great variety of ideas, texts, writers, and critical and social questions. As always, it depends for its contents primarily on submissions. The “emphasis” in each issue derives from current trends in commentary and current interests among members of the writing community. With a fresh face for the future, *Canadian Literature* will continue to be a forum for current critics—and for current critics who are interested in the past and present as well as those who wish to express their cautionary warnings and hopeful aspirations about things to come. w.n.

Another Lesson in Economics

There he goes
 dressed in denim
 looking strong
 as a tractor
seeding my street
from a cloth sack
 of flyers
the same kind of sack I wore
as a kid when everyone else
who wore one
 was a kid
and men like this
 drove tractors
 worked lathes
stepped in and out the couplings
of boxcars
 with a wrench
a rag and an oilcan

He bends to his direction
like time is money
takes no breaks
 to trade cards
 or pet a dog
like he's as conscious of his place
on this afternoon sidewalk
as a kid playing hookey from school
like it's an honest job
 and his right to work
and to challenge him you'd be a fool
and to let him see you
 watching him
without a good excuse
you'd be less
than a fool

The Publication of Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*, 1st Series

What is known today as Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker* series began as a group of sketches entitled "Recollections of Nova Scotia." This series of twenty-one sketches appeared anonymously in the *Novascotian, or Colonial Herald*, a weekly newspaper published in Halifax by Joseph Howe. The weekly instalments of "Recollections of Nova Scotia" ran from Wednesday, 23 September 1835 to Thursday, 11 February 1836. The *Novascotian* was published on Wednesday "for the Country" and on Thursday "for the Town." Each sketch appeared in both the Wednesday and Thursday printings of the weekly. The sketches in the *Novascotian* were incorrectly numbered one through ten and twelve through twenty-two: number eleven was omitted from the sequence. This error applied strictly to the numbering of the sketches; it did not indicate the absence of a sketch.

Complete archives of the separate Wednesday and Thursday runs of the *Novascotian* do not exist in Canada or elsewhere. The excellent holdings at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia and the standard Canadian microfilm copy combine both Wednesday and Thursday printings. There is neither an extant manuscript of the first twenty-one sketches nor of the twelve additional sketches, which were published collectively by Joseph Howe in January 1837, although dated 1836 (Nesbitt 95), as *The Clockmaker; or The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick, of Slickville*. "Recollections of Nova Scotia" represented slightly more than sixty percent (approximately 43,000 words) of the first edition of *The Clockmaker* (Nesbitt 93).

The only surviving communication between Haliburton and Howe which referred to “Recollections of Nova Scotia” appeared in a letter written on 15 November 1835. Haliburton cautioned Howe: “Mind the spelling of Slicks [sic] nonsense, the dialect is half the wit, the last lost a good deal” (Davies 78). This admonition confirmed Haliburton’s authorship as well as his interest in the proper transmission of his sketches to an emerging audience. Quick to realize that Sam Slick’s local appeal lay in his Yankee dialect, Haliburton warned his publisher against corrupting the original text. This was the first of such cautionary statements made by Haliburton throughout the publishing history of *The Clockmaker* series.

In the same letter Haliburton asked to “borrow Jack Downing? for a few days” (Davies 78). Seba Smith’s *The Life and Writings of Major Jack Downing of Downingville, Away Down East in the State of Maine* (Boston: Lilly, Wait, Colman & Holden, 1833) made similar use of Yankee vernacular. Haliburton’s request to borrow the book indicated his professional commitment to his craft and his recognition that he was adapting a convention of American writing.

On 17 December 1835, with the appearance of the thirteenth sketch, Howe proclaimed “*The Clockmaker*... a universal favourite.” He noted the favourable reception of “Recollections of Nova Scotia” in the Province and New England:

Several of these letters have been republished in the Yarmouth Herald, the Boston Courier, and other American and Colonial papers—and we are happy to have it in our power to announce, that there is a goodly supply of Nos. in reserve; and that we shall have the means of keeping our readers merry, not only through the Christmas holidays, but till the very heart of this abominable winter is broken, though the snow should come ten feet deep. (*Novascotian* 376)

Howe’s comments revealed the early exposure of an American audience to Slick and his antics and foretold the timely appearance of an American edition of *The Clockmaker* in 1837. It is doubtful whether Haliburton received remuneration for the twenty-one sketches of “Recollections of Nova Scotia” but the character of Sam Slick clearly brought him literary renown. Despite anonymous publication, Haliburton’s vital personality and public position as First Justice of the Inferior Court of Common Pleas encouraged recognition of his authorship throughout Nova Scotia.

The twenty-first sketch of “Recollections of Nova Scotia” appeared in the *Novascotian* for 11 February 1836. The same number included an address to the “Gentle Reader” by the anonymous author of the series:

During four months I have had the honor of presenting you every week with one of these sketches—I now appear before you for the last time, to make my bow and retire. In doing so permit [me] to thank you for the reception you have been pleased to give them; a reception as much above my expectation, as I fear it is beyond my deserts. Mr. Howe informs me it is desirable they should appear in a more durable form... So flattering a request I could not decline; and have therefore placed at his disposal the remaining part of the series, that the whole may be included in one volume. (41)

Since the focus of this paper is bibliographical rather than editorial, it omits a comparative textual analysis of the twenty-one sketches that appeared first in the *Novascotian* and later in Howe's edition. Similarly, a textual comparison of sketches in the *Novascotian* with the same sketches that appeared subsequently in other newspapers, such as the *Yarmouth Herald* and the *Boston Courier*, remains outside the scope of this paper. Suffice it to note that Haliburton's revisions to "Recollections of Nova Scotia" included changes in punctuation, spelling, and typography. Textual emendations included additions, deletions, and substitutions. These revisions were evident in the British North American edition of *The Clockmaker*.

As Bruce Nesbitt suggests, although Howe's first edition was dated 1836 there are reasons to believe that it actually was published in January 1837. First, Sam Slick's letter to Joseph Howe, which prefaced the volume, was dated Pugnose's Inn, River Philip, 25 December 1836. It was highly unlikely that the British North American edition of *The Clockmaker* was produced within the six remaining days of 1836, the festive period between Christmas and New Year's Day. Second, there was an eleven-month delay between 11 February 1836, the date on which the twenty-first sketch of "Recollections of Nova Scotia" appeared, and 25 December 1836, the date of Slick's letter. The delay was explained, in part, by Haliburton taking time to revise the twenty-one *Novascotian* sketches prior to book publication. It was, however, the time-consuming task of writing twelve additional sketches which likely accounted for the lengthy hiatus between newspaper and book publication. Despite Haliburton's claim that he had placed "the remaining part of the series" at Howe's disposal, it would seem that the final twelve sketches had not been written and submitted to the publisher by 11 February 1836. And third, Richard Bentley's first British edition was published on 27 March 1837 (Bentley, May 1894). The three months between January and late March 1837 accurately accounted for travel time overseas and the production of a British edition (Nesbitt 95-96).

Hence, most likely in January 1837, under his own imprint, Joseph Howe published the authorized, first and only British North American edition of *The Clockmaker*, a series of thirty-three sketches that detailed the adventures of Sam Slick of Slickville, a travelling salesman of clocks, whose “wise saws” and “soft sawder” ensured his instant popularity with his readers. The author had chosen to remain anonymous.

George Parker estimates the production run of the first edition of *The Clockmaker* at 500 to 1,000 copies, “the size of other Howe imprints of the 1830s” (1979, 146). Haliburton did not receive payment in connection with this edition. In the *Novascotian* of 28 January 1836 he stated: “if there be any little emolument, it belongs of right to him, who has already had the trouble of publishing a great part of them [i.e. ‘Recollections of Nova Scotia’] gratuitously” (31). In the same number of the newspaper, Howe announced that he would publish *The Clockmaker* “on our own account solely” “in a neat little volume of about 200 pages. Price in boards, 5s” (31).

Although *The Clockmaker* was British North America’s first best-selling work of fiction, Howe later wrote Haliburton the following, dated Halifax, 2 January 1841: “Clockmaker, No. I you gave me, considering it of no value. I published it at my own risk and for my own benefit. It brought you reputation—plate—Books—the means of earning thousands, a handsome sum in subsequent arrangements with Bentley, and it brought me about £35” (Howe, vol. 33).

Howe’s edition was published with a single error in pagination. The correction of this error resulted in a second state, also dated 1837. Unfortunately for Howe, his edition was not protected under British or local copyright. The British copyright act of 1710, which required the registration of a title at Stationers’ Hall prior to publication of the book itself, did not ensure protection for a colonial publication. Further, Nova Scotia did not pass its own copyright act until 1839. As a result, Howe was without legal recourse against Richard Bentley, whose 1837 British edition of *The Clockmaker* he viewed as a piracy of his own edition. Howe’s precarious position as a colonial publisher of native works became increasingly evident as the complexities of *The Clockmaker* story unfolded.

Despite a strong desire to foster his Province’s cultural awareness and his successful promoting of literature and authors in the pages of the *Novascotian*, Howe encountered difficulties as a publisher of books. He mismanaged his

financial affairs and was a poor negotiator with foreign publishers. Well aware of the contemporary economy of the Province, he nonetheless overestimated the Nova Scotians' interest in books of local concern (Parker 1985, 87). Over time, Haliburton and Howe's relationship became increasingly strained as the author, without consideration for his colonial publisher, encouraged and facilitated foreign publication of his work.

The difficulties between Haliburton and Howe signalled a pattern which characterized the former's publishing career. The relationship between Haliburton and Richard Bentley, his British publisher, was similarly marked by periods of turbulence. Their connection began with Haliburton accusing Bentley of having pirated the British North American edition of *The Clockmaker*, first series. In fact, the success of *The Clockmaker* resulted in many unauthorized printings of each series. Increasingly, Haliburton was concerned with securing financial benefit from what he viewed as clear-cut instances of piracy. He was untrusting of publishers who would disregard an author for the sake of profiting by his work. As the surviving correspondence shows, in his relations with publishers, Haliburton was a cautious negotiator who was increasingly motivated by personal ambition.

In early 1837 a copy of Howe's edition of *The Clockmaker* was brought to Bentley in London by an acquaintance of Haliburton's, Colonel Charles Richard Fox, an officer of His Majesty's forces who, in 1836, was stationed at Halifax and to whom the second series of *The Clockmaker* was dedicated. Until his relationship with Bentley was firmly established, Haliburton communicated through Fox, his old friend Charles Dickson Archibald, lawyer and businessman, and a recent acquaintance, Egyptologist James Haliburton, who had resumed the use of his full surname after his father had shortened it to Burton.

It was on the recommendation, however, of Richard Harris Barham, literary adviser to the publisher and author of *The Ingoldsby Legends or Mirth and Marvels* series (London: Richard Bentley, 1840; 1842; 1843), that Bentley published *The Clockmaker*. On 23 March 1837 Barham urged Bentley to "Lose no time but get it into type *at once*, if that cant be done immediately, *have it transcribed forthwith*... Print it at once if possible" (Berg). Four days later, on 27 March, the first British edition was published. It sold for 10s 6d (Bentley, May 1894). Without Haliburton's knowledge, therefore, and within three months of British North American publication, Bentley had brought out an unauthorized edition of *The Clockmaker*, first series.

Slick's popularity among British readers was soon established. This was confirmed by the timely appearance on 24 June 1837 of *Sam Weller; A Journal of Wit and Humour*, which falsely named Sam Slick as its editor. Four weekly numbers of *Sam Weller* were published by W. Strange and printed by Peter Perring Thoms of London.

Volume fourteen of *Bentley's Miscellany*, dated 1843, included an unsigned article entitled "Notions of Sam Slick." The article presented Bentley's version of the events which led to the British publication of *The Clockmaker*:

The first volume was placed in the hands of a London publisher, who, justly conceiving that the sketches, which were allowed to be faithful transcripts of human nature in America, would, as such, be favourably received in England, decided on the experiment of publication. With this view, he made a communication to Mr. Halliburton [sic], who is a British subject, for the purchase of the copyright, which terminated in an arrangement. At the same time, however, being doubtful how far the work might succeed,—for there is a fashion in literature as in everything else,—he brought it out in the least-expensive form, with no flourish of trumpets to herald its publication, or to draw attention to its humour and originality... he work was left to make its own way with the reading community. (81)

The author of the article referred to the inexpensive binding of the first British edition, which was brown paper boards with a paper label pasted onto the spine.

No arrangement "for the purchase of copyright" was mutually agreed upon by author and publisher. In all likelihood, by the time of British publication, Haliburton and Bentley had not corresponded. This possibility was supported by an inscription on a silver salver which Bentley, at the suggestion of Charles Fox, presented to Haliburton as a gift in lieu of payment for the British edition of *The Clockmaker*, first series. The salver, which Bentley purchased for £31 14s (Add. ms. 46,676B, f. 26) and sent to Haliburton in late December 1837 (Add. ms. 46,640, f. 183v), was conspicuously misinscribed, "To Thomas D. Halliburton Esq' The gifted author of The Clockmaker" (Anslow 6).

The correspondence between author and publisher reveals Haliburton as a careful negotiator throughout their professional relationship. Bentley was generally held to be self-motivated in his dealings with authors and Haliburton appears to have kept this knowledge foremost in mind throughout their alliance.

On 18 May 1837 Howe's reaction to the British publication of *The Clockmaker* appeared in the *Novascotian*:

The *Clockmaker* has been republished in London, by Bentley, and is enjoying great popularity, selling freely at 10s. sterling a volume...

Though it is gratifying to us in the extreme, to find any book issuing from The Novascotian Press republished in England, and to hear of the popularity of our friend Slick in the great world of letters, still we are not quite sure that we shall not bring an action against Mr. Publisher Bentley, for pirating the copyright, and printing an edition without our leave. However, we shall avail ourselves of his exertions, when the Squire has the next volume ready for the Press. (154)

Contrary to his claim, Howe had not secured the copyright for *The Clockmaker*, nor was he in any position to take legal action against Bentley.

The issue of piracy, which so consumed Howe and raised his ire, is not of great concern here, for two reasons. First, in the unique case of *The Clockmaker*, first series, the unauthorized texts are at once important and as bibliographically interesting as the relatively few authorized texts. Throughout this discussion, the use of either piracy or unauthorized is generally avoided and a book is referred to as either an edition, an impression, a reissue, or a variant state. Second, since contemporary copyright law did not protect colonial works, the charge of piracy would be difficult to substantiate, as Howe himself soon had to acknowledge. In fact, the absence of copyright protection reduced the accusation of piracy to little more than a muffled complaint. Hence, this analysis of the publishing history of *The Clockmaker*, first series treats authorized and unauthorized texts as equal in bibliographical significance.

In the *Novascotian* for 8 June 1837 Howe noted the success of Bentley's edition of *The Clockmaker*:

We learn, from letters received by the Packet, that the London edition of this work has had such a run as to make another edition necessary. Should this be the case, it will have run through four editions, in the short space of six months—a degree of popularity rarely attained by any modern work, and we believe never by a Provincial one, having a local application merely. The extensive circulation of this book... cannot fail of being both of essential services to the Province, and the reputation of the author. (182)

Howe's reference to three existing editions of *The Clockmaker* was inaccurate. In actual fact, by June of 1837 the British North American edition, a second state, and what ought to be called the first British edition had appeared.

With the exception of one notice, throughout 1837 the Nova Scotia press did not carry independent reviews of *The Clockmaker*. Rather, the contemporary practice was adopted of citing reviews which first appeared in British publications. On 8 June and 10 August 1837 the *Novascotian* included excerpts from laudatory reviews in the *London Weekly Dispatch* for 13 April, the *Globe*, the *True Sun*, the *Sun*, and the *Courier*. Significantly, the single Nova Scotian reviewer wrote a scathing assessment of *The Clockmaker*. The wrath of Julian, a possible pseudonym of Alexander Stewart (Chittick 212), was spurred by “reading the puffs of the English press...” Julian condemned *The Clockmaker*, whose

Author is evidently ignorant of the People whose domestic manners he has attempted to exhibit, and to ridicule, and of much of the country he has chosen for the theatre of his hero’s adventures. His local characters are over wrought and false to nature, and the language which they are made to express themselves in, such as is unknown among them. (*Acadian Recorder* 10 June 1837)

Howe’s response was to call the reviewer “a descendant of Dame Partington’s, who tried to sweep back the Atlantic with her broom” (*Novascotian* 15 June 1837: 190). Julian, however, was the exception rather than the rule. With the stamp of approval from the motherland, Nova Scotians could feel secure in their praise for Haliburton’s genius.

Bentley’s success with *The Clockmaker* was a continual source of aggravation to Howe. In a letter written to Bentley, dated 16 October 1837, Howe requested “compensation for the appropriation of my property” and proposed a possible agreement between the two publishers:

...I was preparing to publish an Edition in London or Edinburgh when I found that you had already put the work to press. I presume that this step was taken on your part, without any intention to trespass on my private rights—either under the impression that the Colonies were not protected by the Copyrights Act, or that the work (as was stated in some of the papers) had first appeared in the United States. If I am right in this conjecture I presume that you will see the propriety of making such compensation for the appropriation of my property—the loss and disappointment occasioned—as may be fair and honest under all the circumstances, without putting me to the necessity of seeking redress before the tribunals of our common country... the *Clockmaker* seems to have secured a singular measure of popularity, and the sales, from the best information I can obtain, have been very large. Under these circumstances a verdict would probably bring with it handsome compensation, but I would prefer an amicable arrangement, dictated by your own sense of justice.

It is probable that another vol. of the *Clockmaker* will soon be ready for the

Press, and in that case, should the affair which forms the subject of this letter be arranged to the satisfaction of all parties, you may become the publisher in England of that also. An early answer will oblige. (Howe, vol. 32)

Whether Howe received “compensation” from Bentley for the first British edition of *The Clockmaker* is doubtful. It is evident, however, that by 1838 the two publishers had come to an agreement regarding *The Clockmaker*, second series. The double imprint on the title page of the first British/British North American edition of *The Clockmaker*, second series attested to that fact. The imprint read as follows: “London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street; and Joseph Howe, Halifax, Nova Scotia.” ([1]) The publication of *The Clockmaker*, second series is a complex matter that forms the subject of a separate paper.¹

On 27 December 1837 Bentley wrote to Haliburton’s friend Charles Archibald in Halifax. In his letter, Bentley suggested that Haliburton write a *Clockmaker* work in three volumes. Bentley offered £250 for 1,000 copies or £300 for the copyright (Add. ms. 46,640, f. 183v). In a subsequent letter to Haliburton, dated 26 February 1838, Bentley reiterated his offer and proposed an alternative: if he were to provide the publisher with only two volumes, Haliburton would receive £150 for 1,000 copies (Add. ms. 46,640, ff. 190-91v).

On 10 January 1838 Haliburton for the first time corresponded with Bentley directly. Apparently, Haliburton had not yet seen Bentley’s letter to Charles Archibald nor had he received the “very elegant piece of plate” (Davies 94) which had been forwarded in late December 1837, “as a token of the estimation in which my talent is held in the motherland” (Davies 94). In hand, however, was a copy of the British edition of *The Clockmaker*, brought overseas by Archibald. No doubt the edition pleased Haliburton for, in his letter, he offered Bentley *The Clockmaker*, second series: “I am now writing the 2d. series, would you like to have it if so, and supposing it to be equal to the first, what will you give for it, reserving the right (to republish here)” (Davies 91). Haliburton readily accepted the fact of a British edition and involved himself in the distribution of copies: “I sent a copy to my friend John Stephen Esquire, Craigs Court Charing Cross London, but it was lost at Liverpool, may I beg the favor of you to send him a copy with a note saying it is from the author” (Davies 91). From this early point on, Haliburton encouraged and facilitated British publication of his work.

Nonetheless, he felt he had “reason to complain of... [Bentley’s] republishing... [*The Clockmaker*] without permission, as you cannot but be aware that it is a British work and not an American and therefore private property, under the protection of laws” (Davies 90–91). This was the first and only time that Haliburton objected to the British publication of his work and it was a muted objection at best. With the Bentley edition in his possession, Haliburton could and would do little else than begin to enjoy his notoriety.

On 24 March 1838, in a letter to Supreme Court Judge Robert Parker of New Brunswick, Haliburton noted that his “book has had a prodigious run. In ‘Blackwoods Magazine’ for November [1837], under the title ‘The World We Live In,’ you will see a remarkably flattering notice of it...” (Davies 94). The article in *Blackwood’s* was, in fact, full of praise:

So much for Nova Scotia and its impracticabilities. The writer of the volume is evidently a capital fellow. We want such to throw a new life even into European literature. Our writers are sinking into insipidity... We say, let the writer of Slick’s aphorisms try his powers on a subject adequate to their capacity. Let him leave Nova Scotia and come to England. Caricature of the most cauterizing kind never had ampler opportunities than in the public life of our parties. Let him take in hand the sullen vulgarity of our ambitious rabble of legislative tinkers... The fund would be inexhaustible, the impulse manly, and the service beyond all praise. (677)

It was no surprise that Haliburton would take pleasure in this review of *The Clockmaker*. To have his talents praised as worthy of British subject matter was the highest commendation he could hope for. In fact, in his letter to Judge Parker, Haliburton had declared his intention “to go home” with the manuscript of *The Clockmaker*, second series and to “see it through the press myself” (Davies 94). The Judge would have liked nothing better than to leave Nova Scotia for England, where his true sympathies lay. On 25 November 1839 he wrote the following to Bentley: “I have nothing and see nothing in this damned country, this ‘dead sea,’ would to God I could live in dear old England, which is the only country this side of paradise worth living in” (Davies 109). Haliburton was obliged, however, to wait eighteen years before he could remove to England permanently.

Haliburton, Howe, and Bentley met in Britain in June 1838, during Queen Victoria’s coronation celebrations. Whether the two publishers had communicated between 16 October 1837, the date of Howe’s letter to Bentley, and June 1838, the date of their subsequent meeting in England, is doubtful. By then, Haliburton had agreed to publish the second series of *The Clockmaker* with Bentley. Relations between Howe and Bentley grew increasingly

strained. Howe rightly felt that he was the only party to suffer as a result of the British publication of *The Clockmaker*, first series. While Haliburton acquired a reputation abroad as well as at home, and Bentley profited by the venture, Howe lost sales as well as Haliburton's loyalty. In a letter written to Haliburton, dated Halifax, 25 December 1840, Howe revealed that Bentley had tried his patience: "...with regard to Bentley, he has treated me so ill, that I shall certainly never write him again, except to draw on him for some 20 Sovereigns he owes me" (Howe, vol. 33).

The British North American edition was eclipsed by the British books which were soon widely available. For example, bookseller Clement Horton Belcher's advertisement in the *Novascotian*, dated 30 May 1839, announced: "Sam Slick's Works. Received by the Queen from London,—The Clockmaker, *First and Second Series*, 2 vols. illustrated" (6 June 1839: 184). By 1838 Bentley was producing elegant books. Abandoning "the least-expensive form" (Notions 81) of the first British edition, his books were now printed on quality paper, attractively and sturdily bound in purple vertically ribbed cloth which soon became their signature in Britain. Despite Haliburton's complaint on 20 February 1849 that "the English books have been so expensive" (Davies 148), he evidently favoured British over colonial and American publication.

Publication by Bentley held obvious advantages for Haliburton. As Parker notes, Bentley gave Haliburton welcome press in his *Miscellany*; reviews of Haliburton's work in the *Athenaeum*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, and the *Times*, which encouraged international notice, were arranged by Bentley; Haliburton met other well-known, literary persons through his association with Bentley; and finally, the British books were far more attractive than those produced in either Halifax, Philadelphia, Boston, or New York (1985, 89-90).

Although Slick's dialect was generally viewed as "uncouth—so barbarous—so full of transatlantic slang—as in many instances to be wholly unintelligible" (*Sun*), *The Clockmaker* was well received in Britain. The *Spectator* praised it as "a decidedly *clever* book" (306). The *Athenaeum* noted the "very considerable humour running through the pages, and... [its] strong under-current of good sense" (262). And the *Globe* called it "one of those genuinely original works, which carry their own letter of recommendation, and are every where relished, in spite—or perhaps in consequence—of the differences of natural manners, which cast so strange a colouring over the matters conveyed." The *Times*, however, best represented the British

response to *The Clockmaker*. Haliburton's sketches were "fruitful in wholesome laughter" and "Mr. Slick is a very well-meaning fellow, if we make allowance for a certain irresistible, we must not say national, temptation to overreach in a bargain... [He] exhibits a very vigorous understanding, except where his nationality sets him vain-boasting" (3).

A second edition; first, second, and third reissues; and a third edition of *The Clockmaker*, first series appeared in 1838. A reissue of the third edition was brought out in 1840. Each book sold for 10s 6d. The first reissue of the second edition appeared on 26 October 1838. The third edition, dated 1839, actually was published on 8 December 1838 (Bentley, July 1894). Bentley's imprint appeared on each of these books.

The first reissue of the second edition included four etchings by Auguste Hervieu, for which he received £28 remuneration (Add. ms. 46,612, ff. 280-83). The reissue included a notice from the publisher, dated 24 October 1838, which informed "the Purchasers of the previous Editions of 'The Clockmaker'... that they can be supplied with the Illustrations, now published, at the Price of One Shilling and Sixpence for each Series [i.e. first and second series], on application to their respective Booksellers." Not all subsequent Bentley books included the four etchings by Hervieu. Only the first and third reissues of the second edition, the third edition of 1838, and the reissue of 1840 included the etchings.

Bentley used three printers to produce *The Clockmaker*, first series. He began with Thomas Curson Hansard, who printed Britain's *Parliamentary Debates*. Later he used the printing houses of his brother, Samuel Bentley, and of Adolphe Schulze and Company.

Curious changes were evident in the Bentley books, the most obvious of which was the progressive anglicizing of the text. Haliburton often regretted "the errors of the London press which are most numerous" (Davies 149). In a letter to Bentley, dated 1 September 1840, he complained that "Every succeeding [sic] edition of Slick has been *more anglicised* [sic] than the last—*Pray have pains taken in this particular*" (Davies 119-20). Examples of such tinkering with the text was the substitution of the word "feller" for "fellow," "larfter" for "lafter," and "swallers" for "swallows." Ostensibly, such changes were made in the hopes of pleasing the ear of an uninitiated readership, which was doubly removed from the character of Slick. Slick's Yankee speech increasingly became the hybrid product of a British North American author and a British publisher.

Unfortunately for Joseph Howe, publication of *The Clockmaker* outside of Nova Scotia was not restricted to Richard Bentley. In November 1837 the first, unauthorized American edition of *The Clockmaker*, first series was published by Carey, Lea & Blanchard of Philadelphia, “the first modern American publishing company” (Shuffelton 72). The edition was bound inexpensively in blue paper boards with a paper label pasted onto the spine. Since they share textual similarities that were not reflected in Howe’s edition, I support Nesbitt’s claim that the first British edition was the source of the first American edition (100). Unlike Bentley, American publishers did not manipulate a text which already appealed to a vast readership in the United States. One thousand copies of the first edition cost \$464.96 US to produce (Kaser 231). In December of the same year Carey, Lea & Blanchard reissued 2,000 copies at a production cost of \$706.00 US (Kaser 232).

No record of Howe’s response to the American piracy of *The Clockmaker* exists. In fact, he was without legal recourse against the Philadelphia publisher, just as he had been vulnerable to Bentley seven months earlier. The American copyright act of 1790 provided that nothing would prohibit publication within the United States of any book written, printed, or published by a person who was not an American citizen, outside of the jurisdiction of the United States. As a colonial publisher of native works, Howe was defenseless against both British and American publishers who appropriated colonial material for their own use. There was no law in British North America, Britain, or the United States to bar such appropriation. Howe negotiated with the Philadelphia firm the terms of publication for the subsequent series of *The Clockmaker* while Bentley’s reaction to American publication remains unknown.

The earliest surviving letter written by Haliburton to Messrs. Lea & Blanchard was dated 18 May 1843 and concerned his later work, *The Attaché; or Sam Slick in England*, first series (London: Richard Bentley, 1843). The familiar tone of the letter suggested that Haliburton and the American publisher corresponded prior to this late date. In fact, as early as 8 July 1838 Haliburton requested that a copy of *The Clockmaker*, second series be sent to “Carey and Lee [sic] [formerly Carey, Lea & Blanchard] of Philadelphia, the copies sent to me for that purpose being too inaccurate for any reprint whatever” (Davies 99). And in December of that year Haliburton asked Bentley what he thought of the “almighty superfine everlasting partikilar damned rascals Carey & Lea?” (Davies 102). Whether Haliburton and the

American publishing firm communicated before publication of their first edition is doubtful. What was likely, however, was that Haliburton welcomed and later facilitated American publication of his work, as he had done several months earlier with British publication. The numerous impressions which followed the first edition attested to the favourable reception in the United States of Sam Slick and his adventures.

A second American edition appeared in 1838; a first reissue and another impression in 1839; a second reissue in 1840; and a third reissue of *The Clockmaker*, first series in 1841. Carey, Lea & Blanchard's imprint appeared on each of these books. Haswell, Barrington & Haswell printed the first edition. The reissue of 1837 lacked a printer's imprint. Subsequent books were printed by T.K. & P.G. Collins and the plates were stereotyped by J. Fagan, all three of Philadelphia.

A fourth reissue of the second Carey, Lea & Blanchard edition of *The Clockmaker* was brought out in 1843 by Burgess & Stringer of New York. It sold for 18 and three-quarter cents us. In all likelihood, Burgess & Stringer purchased Carey, Lea & Blanchard's stereotype plates, for they used the plates to produce their reissue.

As early as 1838 Benjamin B. Mussey, "an obscure Boston publisher" (Dzwonkoski 324), brought out what should be designated as the fourth American edition of *The Clockmaker*, first series. Mussey's books constituted the second line of American piracies, published coincidentally with the Carey, Lea & Blanchard books. Between 1838 and 1839 the Mussey edition was reissued four times. Mussey's imprint changed from Benjamin B. Mussey, to William White & Benjamin B. Mussey, to Israel S. Boyd & Benjamin B. Mussey. Both White and Boyd published out of Concord, New Hampshire. Mussey's books were printed at the Concord Stereotype Foundry.

The publishing history of *The Clockmaker*, first series, as outlined here, situated Haliburton and his work within an international context. It is within this context that Haliburton's significant contribution to Canadian letters must be considered. In 1837 Haliburton's popularity resulted in the publication of three first editions of *The Clockmaker*, in British North America, Britain, and the United States. Rarely has a Canadian author enjoyed a similar success. Canadian writers have often lamented their small native audience and, not until recently (with a few exceptions like Ralph Connor, Gilbert Parker, Stephen Leacock, and Lucy Maud Montgomery), have they acquired a readership outside the country. Writing in the early

nineteenth century, Haliburton did not encounter such obstacles to success. In 1835 "Recollections of Nova Scotia" established his audience and popularity in his native Province, and in 1837 *The Clockmaker*, first series ensured his unprecedented international appeal.

NOTE

- ¹ See Ruth Panofsky, "The Publication of Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*, 2nd Series," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 30.2 (Fall 1992): 21-37.

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Time Over Earth

Above bank after bank of cloud
and the sudden open hole for rock or snow,
his seat partner
wrestles newspaper into a fold,
and in the cockpit the first officer
fights ennui and gazes into the round faces
of his instruments as they cast upon him
their evening glow, their eagerness
to serve. The steward from first class
offers comments from the passengers
on the delicacy of the flight,
the sureness of the surge, the persuasiveness
of their arc in and out of heaven.

Meanwhile in seat 16A
the view slips
into darkness once more,
forcing the eyes back from the vista.
His worries resurface
in this airy world
of alloy and wine, foam seats and hard-eyed
understanding focused in the one-brain
of the crew. A beam, he thinks, will soon
pick them up and lead them down,
and they will stay fastened
to this hope.

They rush to smell the new city—or the same one
returned to, which he re-enters
unchanged by time over earth; he knew
the thin light reaching into black
had not touched him
when he swept through revolving doors
in no less hurry
than other earthling friends.
Now asleep in his bed
his body still floats
across space, trying to arrive
on time, not caught
by the trees reaching up
to tear and throw him open.
Motionless under quilt, on pillow,
his eyes repeat all he has seen
and feared to see, each breath
hanging out of his body
in the worst kind of silent air.

The Critic in the Attic

Religious Doubt, Mind, and Heart in the the Fiction of Robert E. Knowles

Between 1905 and 1911, the Galt clergyman Robert E. Knowles (1868-1946) wrote seven novels that were very successful in their day, though they are virtually unread now. Their fame spread beyond Southwestern Ontario. According to the lists published monthly by *The Bookseller and Stationer*, Knowles' first novel, *St. Cuthbert's* (1905), was the leading seller in Canada in December 1905. Though subsequent novels never quite duplicated this feat, *The Undertow* was the third most purchased book across the country in January 1907, and *The Web of Time* fourth in January 1909, temporarily ahead of *Anne of Green Gables*.¹ The books also had an international readership: they were published initially in New York by the evangelical publisher Fleming H. Revell, who then arranged for publication in Britain by Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, and for distribution in Canada by Henry Frowde. They received generally favourable reviews in prestigious journals such as the *Athenaeum*, the *Bookman*, the *Nation* of New York, and the *New York Times' Saturday Review of Books*. The *Bookman* of London went so far as to contend that a certain scene in *The Handicap* was "as fine and dramatic as anything Nathaniel Hawthorne ever wrote in *The Scarlet Letter*."²

These novels are not, however, neglected masterpieces shunted aside by a shift in sensibility. By any reasonable criterion, they are flawed and amateurish, and their defects—sententiousness, excessive rhetoric, creaking plots, naive messages of moral uplift—outweigh Knowles' humour and his sometimes shrewd observation of manners. But they are representative of a little-

known period in Canadian fiction, and they yield insight into the culture of the time. Knowles' handling of the question of religious doubt, for instance, reveals not only the intellectual climate of Canadian society, but also, self-reflexively, some of the attitudes to reading and fiction that accounted for the popularity of the novels.

Between the years 1880 and 1920 the religious novel was in great demand; Knowles' publisher Revell assured him that "the more real the religious note in a story, the bigger its sale and the longer its vogue."³ A flourishing sub-genre portrayed the struggles of ministers. Knowles' fellow-minister, the popular novelist Ralph Connor, encouraged Knowles to try the genre both by his example and by practical aid and encouragement.⁴ Knowles began by using a Presbyterian minister as narrator of *St. Cuthbert's*, the story of a Scottish-Canadian Presbyterian congregation much like his own. He subsequently wrote two other novels with minister-heroes: *The Undertow* (1906), and *The Attic Guest* (1909), on which I shall focus. In addition, *The Singer of the Kootenay* (1911) deals with a young man who at the end finds his vocation in the ministry.

The unsettling power of the "new theology" appears first in *The Undertow*. The story concerns a minister, Stephen Wishart, a clever lad, but somewhat selfish and sensual, and excessively ambitious. His study of advanced theology is partly a sign of an inquiring intellect, but partly an affectation—it will help him to obtain a fashionable urban congregation. The dialogue in which Stephen tries to explain to his pious Scottish father why he needs to study in Edinburgh begins as a humorous illustration of the generation gap, but ends on a sombre note:

"It's like this," Stephen went on, "...new theories come with new light; and it's our duty to welcome truth, come from what quarter it may.... You remember Copernicus?"

"Eh?" said the old man, suddenly. "Remember wha?"

"Copernicus," repeated Stephen, "Copernicus and the sun, you know."

"I canna mind on him," said the father, ransacking his memory in vain—"but I'm no' sae guid at mindin' names as I used to be. And of course I wadna ken the son; a man at my age isna sae ready at takin' up wi' the young folk. What like a man was he? Did they gang till oor kirk?" ...

"I don't mean those personal matters, father—not at all—I mean opinions about truths, doctrines, and matters of that kind. For instance these men have given us new theories of the creation, and of authorship—the book of Isaiah, for instance—and a more modern interpretation of the Atonement. It's only—"

But now Robert Wishart was on his feet, for vague rumours of this very feature

of the new theology had already reached him; "Did I understand ye richt? `the Atonement; the Atonement,' Stephen! Has it gone sae far ben as that? Wad they fumble wi' the heart o' God Himsel'? ...My God, laddie, keep yir hands aff the Cross; it's a' I hae; and I'm an auld man, near the grave and the Judgment Seat,—and a' the world has naethin' left forbye the Cross."⁵

Events overtake Stephen and the potential problems of modern theology are not pursued, though the general resolution suggests that the truths of the heart are more important than the truths of the intellect. But in *The Attic Guest*, the clash between the old faith and the new theology becomes the central theme.

Atypically, in *The Attic Guest* Knowles uses a woman narrator, a southern belle named Helen Randall. In the first and most vivid part of the novel she describes how she was courted by a visiting Scottish minister, Gordon Laird, who scandalized the southern white community by his liberal views on the Negro question. Gordon is forced to leave the South after he tries to save a Negro from a lynch mob. Eventually, Helen marries him and joins him in his new parish in Canada, where she faces a colder climate and a more austere theme, her husband's gradual loss of faith and the hardships it entails.

The novel of religious doubt, and particularly clerical doubt, has an honourable history in English literature, but Knowles' greatest debt is to Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888), a novel that sold phenomenally in North America. Like *Elsmere*, Gordon Laird loses his faith in a supernatural Christ and feels constrained to resign his ministry; like *Elsmere* too, he takes up missionary work among the poor, practising a social Christianity though he has ceased to believe in its theology. And, as in Ward's novel, his wife is a pillar of orthodoxy.

Knowles' novel does not aspire to the intellectualism of *Robert Elsmere*, which debates the credentials of Christianity to the point of weariness. Since Gordon's struggle is seen almost entirely through the eyes of his wife, the attractiveness of the new theology remains unexplained and unrealized. Still, the novel hints at the outlines of Gordon's intellectual history. Early on, he is troubled by the conclusions of the "higher critics,"⁶ those mainly German theologians who applied secular textual criticism to the Bible, and were led to dispute the traditional authorship and dating of the Pentateuch and other Old Testament books.⁷ Gordon's first open breach with his orthodox father occurs when he applies their naturalistic canons to the Bible and refuses to "expound" a text in Isaiah as a prophecy of Christ (281).

Helen also overhears two clergymen discussing Gordon's "unsound views." Among the unorthodox positions enumerated are doubts about miracles, doubts in the power of prayer to influence events, and, most important, a drift towards the idea of "a merely ethical Christ" (257-8). The divinity of Christ is the central question in most novels of Christian doubt. The intellectual climax of *Robert Elsmere* occurs when Robert, after affirming his belief in God and in Christ as symbol, asks himself whether he believes in "a wonder-working Christ, in a risen and ascended Jesus," and has to conclude that he does not: "Every human soul in which the voice of God makes itself felt, enjoys, equally with Jesus of Nazareth, the divine sonship, and '*miracles do not happen!*'"⁸ What Robert concluded from the squire's history of human testimony, Gordon learned from the works of Adolf von Harnack, the liberal theologian who through his study of the history of dogma became convinced that much of Christian belief was an alien growth of post-Biblical times. We are not told the title of the book by Harnack that Gordon lends Helen (250), but his most widely-read work was *What Is Christianity?*, based on lectures delivered at Berlin in 1899-1900. Here Harnack argued that Jesus preached a simple gospel of love and the fatherhood of God. The notion that Christ was the divine logos incarnate, and the doctrines concerning his resurrection and his atoning function, were unnecessary accretions of a Hellenizing church: "the Gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only and not with the Son."⁹ Gordon's increasing emphasis on helping rather than on saving people, as his wife describes it (283), is consistent with this late nineteenth-century interpretation of Christ as a merely human example.

The resolution of *The Attic Guest*, however, differs sharply from that of *Robert Elsmere* and, indeed, of most late Victorian novels of religious conversion, where the general pattern is for the hero to pass from orthodoxy through a period of doubt to some new unorthodox position, agnostic or religious.¹⁰ *Elsmere*, for instance, founds a New Brotherhood based on his changed understanding of Christ. In a Canadian example of the genre, Albert Carman's *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury* (1900), the young Embury loses his faith to the extent of joining the Free Thought Club, but is re-inspired by Henry George and embraces a "living Jesus of the gospels," whom he sees as a social activist.¹¹ But in *The Attic Guest*, Gordon's doubts evaporate as if they had never been, and he recaptures his old faith in all its particulars. His reconversion, as described by Helen, is an affair of the heart,

brought about by the suffering Gordon experiences when his beloved son steals money from a bank and flees from home:

It began, I think, with the crushing weight that fell upon our hearts in the loss of Harold and in all the shame and anguish connected with it. That was God's way, I have always thought, of teaching Gordon how much a father's heart can suffer—and the inevitable outcome of that is the Cross itself if God our Father be. How could His love escape love's inevitable pain, any more than ours? (336)

A chapter written by Gordon himself at Helen's request, describing how the majesty of Christ possessed him at a death-bed, reinforces the impression that (as, for instance, in *In Memoriam*) personal experience provides a more compelling proof of God's love than intellectual argument.

This non-intellectual resolution of the theme of doubt is reinforced by several images and motifs based on Luke:15, with its parables of the lost sheep found and the prodigal son returning.¹² As a lost sheep, Gordon is sought both by God and by his father, an actual shepherd from Scotland. After he regains his faith, he returns to the very pulpit and manse that he had left, and is reconciled with Helen's southern uncle. It only remains for his son Harold to return to the fold, which he does in a melodramatic and artlessly symbolic manner. The Lairds are in New York, watching a performance of *The Old Homestead*, a play which is itself a modern version of the story of the prodigal son.¹³ The son appears on stage at last, a tattered penitent—and the actor is the Lairds' son Harold! Their reconciliation is followed by a trip to Virginia, and a visit to the attic where the saga began. To reinforce the theme of Paradise Regained, the last chapter is entitled "Eden in the Attic."

The outline of these events suggests the stuff of the most conventional novel. From Victorian melodrama and the popular story weeklies, Knowles had inherited a circular plot in which lost surface, estranged sons return to be forgiven, illegitimate offspring reappear, and sins reach out from the past to exact retribution. In the comedic version of these plots, reconciliation and return form the invariable ending. Knowles' use of such stock devices seems at first sight regrettable in a novel that attempts to deal seriously with contemporary experience. But Knowles knew what he was doing, and *The Attic Guest* contains within itself a rationale for stories that are highly patterned rather than naturalistic, and which sacrifice probability to a parabolic shape.

In the world of the novel, texts and books are an integral part of daily life.

The Bible of course has primacy: it is “the Buik” itself (322). The Biblical text is marked, learned, and pored over, not just by Gordon as a minister, but also by the congregation, as an aid to living. The Psalms provide lessons and inspiration for every occasion (395), and the promises of scripture are a comfort at the novel’s three death-beds. But the Biblical text is not isolated. A whole continuum of literature, from hymns, sermons, and prayers to ordinary secular works, co-operates to the same end of embodying moral truths. Thus when Helen’s uncle recommends *The Homestead* he urges that “It’s the purest play I ever saw in my life...; it’s as good as a sermon” (385).¹⁴ With his whispered comment in the audience, “Isn’t that true to life, eh?” he refers not so much to the events themselves as to the emotions represented. For Helen and Gordon, “the great emotions of a parent’s love and loneliness were set forth in terrible reality” (387). The coincidence of real and fictional prodigal sons, at first sight so ridiculously unrealistic, allows Knowles to present emblematically the relation of fiction to life. While he emphasizes the make-believe of the theatrical representation—backstage the fictional father is thrust aside by the real, “the unreality swallowed up of Life” (391)—he also, more importantly, suggests the immediate applicability of fiction to life’s concerns. The drama literally acts out the truths in the hearts of its audience, and, by implication, of Knowles’ readers.

Simple parables true to the heart: such a literature naturally tends to the formulaic. Its validation comes from the generations of readers who have found it answering their emotional needs. A discussion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* early in the novel suggests the extent to which the readers of this kind of popular literature must share a culture. To Helen’s southern uncle, who belongs to a community with very different values from those of the author, the novel is unreadable: “It’s a pack of Yankee lies, sir” (157), he tells Gordon. But within a given community, formulas appealing to the heart gather meaning as they are repeated. Such is the case with a popular love-song which, artless in itself, gathers significance for Helen through frequent recollection, until at the end it has come to have great emotional resonance. Similarly, the prayers taught by parents to their children have more significance than their words would warrant because of the community of values they express.

From the point of view of the reading and interpreting community in the novel, the activities of the Biblical critics are irrelevant. The higher critics’

investigations into strands of authorship, and Harnack's seeking to find how the gospel message was read originally, strip away what these texts have come to mean to the community they sustain. "Higher critics," Helen proclaims, "are the highway robbers of the soul" (311). They may be valid in the domain of scholarship, but for Helen a minister's business is not with scholarship but with the human heart:

I verily believe as many preachers are spoiled by books as are helped by them, for they often grow less human while they're growing more profound. The Bible and the daily paper—truth and human life—some great preacher pronounced his two main books, and I'm inclined to agree with him. (250)

Thus the suffering servant of Isaiah stands as a type of Christ regardless of speculations as to whether the author (or authors) of Isaiah could have had miraculous foresight; for Helen such speculations are inappropriate. By extension one could argue that the popular literature being read throughout the novel should not be judged by inappropriate standards—certainly Knowles does not so judge it—but by its appeal to the heart and its usefulness in daily life.

Knowles' choice of a female narrator becomes more comprehensible in the light of these concerns. In the narrative voice there is much to interest the student of women's life and its fictional representation—though also, at first glance, much to irritate her. Helen's character is determined largely by her sex; she paints herself as the eternal feminine in such phrases as "simple womanly pride" (303) and "the cross-currents that trouble a woman's heart" (307). Repeatedly she defers to the male world. The narrative conceit of the novel is that Helen wrote her story and handed the manuscript over to the worldly-wise Knowles to publish. "I urged her to send the book forth with her own name on it," says Knowles in the Foreword, "but this she firmly refused. She shrank from the publicity it would involve, she said, as must any Southern lady." (10) At the moment when Gordon proposes to her, Helen declares, in what rhetoricians will recognize as a cunning *occupatio*,

I forgot that he was stronger than I, and greater, and nobler; forgot all about the strength of intellect that I had felt as a gulf between us; all the difference, too, of life's aim and purpose was sunk and forgotten now. (139)

But the novel partly overturns this ostensible hierarchy. For all her self-proclaimed limitations Helen is obviously a better writer and reader than her husband. She is at home with emblems and types and uses them liber-

ally; thus two birds in a magnolia tree form a vignette of married love (41). Life for her is a re-enactment of Biblical prototypes, so that she describes Gordon as going through his “Gethsemane” (387), and uses Biblical phrases such as “the Voice of Rachel” to title her chapters. Her reading of life is reflected in her writing of literature, for the book she has longed to write since childhood turns out to be the story of her own life. She writes it because it is both typical and useful—typical, as the story of a woman’s love for husband and children (10), and useful in that it shows hardships overcome: “I write it gladly for the comfort of some like stricken soul” (338). In accordance with Knowles’ conception of the womanly, Helen naturally emphasizes the emotional and the dramatic over the discursive, the anguish of doubt over its intellectual content. Her “woman’s heart” seizes the truth when superior masculine intellect passes it by.

There is nothing arcane about this reversal, based as it is on the familiar Biblical notion that the last shall be first and the first last. The title of the novel plays upon the notion of a hierarchy overturned, for the minister is lodged in a humble servant’s room in the attic, yet he proves himself to be the spiritual superior of his hosts, and his lodging is “nearest heaven” (402). Conversely, the wealthiest parishioner of St. Andrews is the least worthy: Mr. Ashton the factory-owner and pillar of the church grinds the faces of the poor. The higher critics fall into this pattern, thanks partly to the fortuitous associations of their name. Originally the word “higher” in “higher critics” was used neutrally, to distinguish those who considered questions of the historical origins of texts from the “lower critics” who established the text itself.¹⁵ But one can hardly escape the connotations of “higher,” by which it appears that these critics are lofty souls, more exalted than their brethren, or, to extend the metaphor, capable of taking a longer and more inclusive view. They, too, are implicated in the condemnation of the mighty, “robbers” no less than Mr. Ashton of the poor and simple. And in so far as the attic is equated with Gordon’s head, as it is jokingly (74), they need to be dislodged from that citadel.

This account of the novel as a defence both of simple faith and of simple, helpful didactic fiction perhaps suggests that Knowles himself was excessively conservative and anti-intellectual. The reality is more complicated. Little is known about Knowles’ inner life during the period, though it is known that he suffered a nervous breakdown (generally attributed to the results of a train crash), that he stopped writing novels after 1911, and that he

left the ministry in 1915. *The Attic Guest* draws on autobiography (Knowles' courtship of his southern wife), and conceivably the doubts expressed in the novel are also autobiographical. At any rate, when he resumed active life as a journalist in the 1920s, it was as a religious liberal who argued consistently for a new interpretation of old truths. His articles and interviews for the *Toronto Star*, while not denying supernaturalism, condemn fundamentalism and narrow orthodoxy, and welcome all earnest seekers after God in a changing world.¹⁶ But the novels he wrote when he was a minister show less of this flexibility. He saw them as extensions of his ministry, and he chose a form which would speak immediately to his readers in patterns they could recognize. Here lies one of the reasons, perhaps, why today Knowles's novels are themselves likely to be found in the attic. They have only a historical and scholarly appeal now that the believing community they so particularly addressed has passed away.

NOTES

- ¹ *Bookseller and Stationer* 22:1 (Jan. 1906): 41; 23:2 (Feb. 1907):23; *Canadian Bookman* 1:1 (Jan. 1909):13.
- ² Review of *The Handicap*, *Bookman* 39 (Jan. 1911): 204. See also the *Athenaeum's* review of *St. Cuthbert's of the West* (the British edition of *St. Cuthbert's*) Jan. 6, 1906: 12; the *Nation's* review of *The Handicap* 92 (Feb. 16, 1911): 168; and the review of *The Singer of the Kootenay* in the *New York Times Review of Books* Dec. 17, 1911: 840.
- ³ Knowles, interview with Nellie McClung, *Toronto Daily Star* Mar. 12, 1937: 3.
- ⁴ Ralph Connor took the ms of Knowles' first novel to George H. Doran: "My First-Born of the Pen," *Star* Apr. 18, 1933: 6.
- ⁵ *The Undertow* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1906): 59-62.
- ⁶ *The Attic Guest* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1909): 80. Subsequent references to this edition appear in parentheses in the text.
- ⁷ Robertson Smith was a Scottish representative of this school (194).
- ⁸ *Robert Elsmere*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987): 332.
- ⁹ Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders [first English ed. 1901], 4th ed. (London: Williams and Norgate; New York: Putnam's Sons, 1923): 125.
- ¹⁰ Rupert Scheider, "Loss and Gain? The Theme of Conversion in Late Victorian Fiction," *Victorian Studies* 9:1 (Sept. 1965): 33.
- ¹¹ *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1900): 229.
- ¹² Ironically, the latter was the very parable that Harnack used to illustrate the fact that an

incarnation and atonement were superfluous: “Does the God who forgives sins, the God of mercy, require an indemnity? Did the Father in the parable of the lost son demand expiation before he forgave his son?” (Harnack, untitled contribution to *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, 3rd. ed. [London: James Clarke, 1907]: 17).

- ¹³ The typescript of this play, by Denman Thompson, is reproduced in the Readex Corporation microprint edition of *English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century*, under “American Plays, 1831-1900.”
- ¹⁴ A similar point is made in *The Undertow*, when Stephen and his friend see *The Bells*, Erckmann and Chatrian’s story of retribution for a murder. The play is seen as an illustration of the Biblical text, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (92-4).
- ¹⁵ Robert Sinker, *Higher Criticism* (London: James Nisbet, 1899): 1-2.
- ¹⁶ See, e.g., “Dr. Alington’s Opinion,” *Star* Nov. 10, 1933: 6. In the *Star* of June 24, 1930: 6, Knowles argues that God values the kindly heart no matter what the theological beliefs—an opinion that causes Gordon Laird to be branded a heretic (251-52).

Bringing in the Horses

One by one they're caught, pulled
from that last long mouthful
of grass, lingering into the barn,
slow stepping past radio sounds,
the distant rumbling
of tractors turning another harvest.

It's late
summer but the sky says fall:
clouds thick with rain, stripes
of turquoise where the sun appears
momentarily sketching light
on leaves shimmering in a warmth
that forgets the wind.

The diminishing herd wanders
down towards the gate grazing
closer to thoughts of sleep.

In dark
corners of their stalls, fields
end to end unfenced yield more
than what's tugged from the earth.

Mutton birds*

It might have been the moon
rising pallid as bone china
from the final patina of sea
that sent them screeching
into the dusky sky above us.

Or my infiltrating a frame
where cattle nod off into grassy
hemispheres of their dreaming
unable to arouse into metaphor
such premeditated tones of grey.

No blood spatters my forehead
as they strafe on, silhouetted
by the lucid moon, no feathers
of proof parachute to the earth.
Only these postcards to send home.

**Lord Howe Island*

The Ambiguities of Love in Morley Callaghan's *Such is My Beloved*

1. Introduction: Callaghan's "Certain Perceptions"

Someone, alluding to the title of a famous book by William Empson, once remarked that in this century there are as many types of ambiguity as there once were deadly sins. And the late Allan Bloom, in his indictment of American moral relativism in *The Closing of the American Mind*, stated that the comparative simplicities of falling in love had been supplanted on college campuses by the inherently problematical phenomenon of "having a relationship." Even before postmodernism further complicated such ambiguities as love Morley Callaghan was illuminating its obscurities and making more nebulous its received certainties. But Callaghan's own position on this particular inherent ambiguity of the human situation can be clarified. For it is time to reassess and specify some of the basic mooring points of Callaghan's view of life, especially his basically Catholic and neothomist outlook, once an accepted mainstay of Callaghan criticism, though never as deeply investigated nor as fully supported as it might have been. A consideration of *Such Is My Beloved*, Callaghan's best-known novel, elucidates these bases of his thought, illustrating as well the relationship of his fiction to the biblical tradition exemplified in the Song of Songs,

In the 1960s a critical consensus prevailed about Morley Callaghan's "certain perceptions about human life" to which he claimed a writer inevitably returns (Weaver, 134). Such commentators as F. W. Watt, Desmond Pacey, and Victor Hoar agreed that Callaghan's fiction until the end of the 1920s had shown the strong influence of naturalism or determinism. Whether

attributed to the influence of Hemingway (with whom he had a friendship in the 20s) or to the impact of the social sciences or to the Freudian or Marxist account of the individual's place in society, Callaghan's earliest work was seen as displaying people at the mercy of forces larger than themselves. But there was also agreement that by the time of *Such Is My Beloved* Callaghan "gave up," as Pacey put it, "the negative futility that marked the early novels... and concentrated upon the spiritual lives of his characters rather than upon their physical appetites" (691).

Watt and Pacey especially contended that Callaghan turned to what is variously referred to as individualism or personalism or Christian humanism. As Hugo McPherson had earlier maintained, Callaghan "became, in short, a religious writer" (Conron, 60) who explored the relation between two worlds, one empirical and the other spiritual. In this vein Pacey claimed that Callaghan portrayed the individual soul as defeated or destroyed on earth, but nonetheless achieving a triumph not of this world. As Jacques Maritain, whose thought was highly regarded by Callaghan, wrote, society is indirectly subordinate "to the perfect fulfilment of the person and his supra-temporal aspirations." Each person transcends the common good of society: "A single human soul is more worth than the whole universe of bodies and material goods. There is nothing above the human soul except God" (*Rights of Man*, 11).

By the late 1970s, however, what had previously been so readily a matter of consensus began to be called into question. D. J. Dooley stated that other evidence in the novels of the 1930s mitigated this theme of the individual in opposition to society. Turning to *The Loved and the Lost* (1951), Dooley maintained that Callaghan had written "a very paradoxical novel," leaving us "reflecting on questions rather than answers" (77). Larry McDonald went further. He argued that "Callaghan criticism is mired in the slough of Christian personalism" (77) and that the dualistic metaphysic that many critics had foisted on his work must be rejected. After a close examination of Callaghan's earliest fiction, McDonald suggested that the focus was on the fulfilment of human potential developed in and through time, not on Christian redemption: "there are no values or visitations of grace from outside of time" (84). For Callaghan, human nature is monistic; in his view of life there is "no such thing as an opposition between the spiritual and the carnal" (83).

What critical agreement remains includes recognition of Callaghan's novels

of the 1930s as his finest achievement. Among them *Such Is My Beloved* (to cite the jacket copy of the 1989 New Canadian Library edition) “is widely considered Callaghan’s finest novel.” It has also been generally agreed that beginning with that novel of 1934 a change took place in Callaghan’s fiction, usually attributed to the influence of Jacques Maritain, who was teaching in Toronto at that time (see Kernan, 88-89). In 1951 Callaghan recounted his excitement at Maritain’s presence at Toronto’s Medieval Institute almost two decades earlier: “I went around saying, ‘Jacques Maritain is in town,’ with a beaming smile” (“It Was News,” 17). But Callaghan, only recently returned from Paris, was dismayed that his enthusiasm was largely unshared in Toronto: “Maritain was a world figure everywhere but in my home town” (“It Was News,” 18). Callaghan had learned of course that the mind and spirit of Thomas Aquinas had shaped the thinking of Joyce and Dante. But he was keen to discover more about the neglected thirteenth century, almost obscured in Ontario education by claims made about the Renaissance.

The terms of Callaghan’s admiration for Maritain are lavish and unrestrained. He claimed that Maritain’s presence had put the Medieval Institute “on the world stage intellectually,” citing T. S. Eliot’s comment that Maritain was “one of the great intellectual forces in Europe” (“It Was News,” 17). The dedication of *Such is My Beloved* states in simple homage: “To those times with M. in the winter of 1933.” And, until the new edition of 1989 dropped it, the New Canadian Library edition supplied the clue for M’s identity by printing on the back cover Maritain’s comment: “I have been profoundly touched by the absolute sincerity of this very moving book.” The French philosopher apparently held the Canadian writer in equal esteem. The two men, and a few others (in particular, Manny Chapman, a convert to Catholicism from Judaism), met frequently during 1933 to eat together, drink wine, and socialize at the Callaghan apartment on Avenue Road.¹

2. The Two Conflicting Realms

In his memoir *That Summer in Paris*, renowned for its accounts of his associations with Fitzgerald and Hemingway in Paris in 1929 (and especially for Callaghan’s “boxing match” with the latter), Callaghan comments that “Christian artists were finding new dignity and spiritual adventure in the neo-Thomism of Jacques Maritain,” perhaps having in mind Maritain’s *Art and Scholasticism*, originally published in Paris in 1920.² He continues: “My own problem was to relate a Christian enlightenment to some timeless

process of becoming" (94), thereby suggesting his (at least intellectual) attempt to reconcile dualities, and perhaps the two conflicting realms of the temporal and the eternal. Regardless of whether Callaghan as a man actually wrestled with opposing dualisms, or having wrestled with them, resolved them, his fiction implies an author whose fiction, far from presenting a monistic view of harmonious human nature, deals with precisely such opposition and conflict.

Even if the implied author views the effort to resolve this struggle ironically, his protagonist in *Such Is My Beloved*, Father Stephen Dowling, attempts to harmonize the opposition between eternity and time, church and world, divine and human. His final failure to achieve a reconciliation on earth may be an otherworldly triumph, however ironically portrayed by the impersonal narrator. But even without making any assertion about whether Callaghan as author believes in an ultimate metaphysical dualism, it is still possible to quarrel with McPherson's judgment: "Thus though Father Dowling has failed by all temporal standards in his quest, he has, in the best sense of the Christian faith, triumphed" (67). For there remains something troubling and problematic in a view that dictates the continuation and opposition of two realms, unable finally to be harmonized.

George Woodcock remarked that "a whole essay could be written on the significance of the cathedrals which appear at crucial points in every novel that Callaghan wrote" (75), and went on to state that the "ambiguous symbolism of the Cathedral, particularly in *Such Is My Beloved*, extends this dichotomy [between moral man and immoral society] into the world of religion" (82). A part—though not the "whole"—of this present essay examines Father Dowling's changing view of the Cathedral in the novel as indicator of his changing attitude towards the church in the world, and its relation to the transcendent.

Put in the terms of H. Richard Niebuhr in his classic book *Christ and Culture*, Dowling begins, in his unchallenged idealism and innocence, in something like the position of the "cultural" or "synthesist" Christian who sees no opposition between Christ and Culture, no strain or tension between God and the world. One of the great virtues of Niebuhr's typology lies in its setting forth a range of possibilities between the extremes of monism and dualism. His "Christ of Culture" position (that of the "cultural" Christian) has it that Christian life is simply the highest expression of life in culture; the "Christ Above Culture" type (the "synthesist") views God

as ordering both the natural and the supernatural such that the two realms are harmoniously related in a hierarchical structure. Niebuhr describes Aquinas as “probably the greatest of all the synthesists in Christian history” (128), while claiming that the neothomist synthesis sought by Leo XIII and others “is not the synthesis of Christ with present culture, but the re-establishment of the philosophy and institutions of another culture” (139). This, he declares, is Christianity “of the cultural sort,” while the synthetic answer is absent from modern culture because of the prevailing understanding either of Christ or of culture.

At the outset of the novel, as Dowling returns to the rectory from a pastoral visit, he is planning the next Sunday’s sermon, “another powerful discourse on the building of a society on Christian principles” (4). Dowling smiles to himself as he sees the crowds coming out of the theatres. He turns the corner “mechanically,” not bothering to look up to see the Cathedral spire, taking for granted the place of his church within society. The cathedral, both unimpressive to visitors and unknown to most inhabitants, is undistinguished in relation to its surroundings—“it was really a Protestant city.”³ The parish has become poor, while the church “had been in that neighbourhood for so long it now just seemed a part of an old city block” (37). From any perspective, the church is integrated into the city, neither in conflict with it nor standing apart from it.

After first meeting the prostitutes, Midge and Ronnie, Dowling returns to his room, continuing to think of these “two girls in my own parish and in a hotel I could almost see from my window” (7). When he thrusts his face against the window pane in the attempt to see “the place where he knew the hotel was,” his vision is blurred by “the water that had streamed down the window.” Later the same night, returning home again after visiting the hotel room, Dowling sees this time the Cathedral spire as well as the building itself, “hemmed in closely by office buildings and warehouses and always dirtied by city soot, and with the roof now covered by snow and moonlight shining on the white slope” (15). His reaction to this juxtaposition of the church with the other city buildings is a feeling of “fresh full contentment.”

Some days later, after Dowling’s second visit to see them, one of the prostitutes, Midge, looks out through the frosted glass of her hotel window after midnight, thinking of the priest. But his domain remains inaccessible to her: “The church was just on the other side of the block. But no matter how she strained her neck she could not see the spire” (30). At the same time Midge,

having chased away a college boy who asked her to dance for him, thinks that the priest would have been pleased by her reaction, making it “more likely that he would give her money the next time he came he came to the hotel” (30). She lacks his sense of the connection between the church and the rest of the world, while he misinterprets what, from her perspective, is implied in giving her money.

On the next visit Dowling, with twelve dollars borrowed from his Marxist friend, Charlie Stewart, hurries along the street, engrossed in a prayer of thanks as he goes: “as he looked up eagerly at the stars he passed right by the Cathedral and kept on going around the block to the hotel” (45). Dowling slips the money under a cloth on the dresser, “with a strangely diffident apologetic nod” (47), and alone in the room with Midge, falls asleep with her. Though we are told that Midge is lying on the bed, hoping that Dowling will “come over here and sit beside me,” we do not know where he ends up after he leaves his chair to put the money on the dresser. Callaghan leaves it in doubt as to whether he joins Midge on the bed, or whether he returns to the chair.

After hearing the confession of the university student who fears the loss of his faith, and who has twice been to one of the neighbourhood prostitutes, Father Dowling thinks of “how united was all the life of his congregation, students, the mothers and fathers of students, prostitutes, priests, the rich and the poor who passed girls on the street and desired them” (76). He goes on to attribute a purpose to the lives of the girls, in a typical naively idealistic (or outrageously sexist) justification, because “it was certainly better for that boy to have been with Ronnie or Midge than some pure young girl” (77). While making his way from his house to the hotel in the spring he is filled with fond thoughts: “He felt he would rather be here in the city and at the Cathedral than any place else on earth, for here he was at home in the midst of his own people” (58). Father Dowling’s collision with his Bishop is brought about by his attempt to carry out and act on this conjunction of his church with the prostitutes’ lives, an effort to unite the whole of what he understands to be his parish. In his misguided enthusiasm Dowling hopes that by taking Midge and Ronnie to the Robisons’ house he will enlist his wealthy parishioners’ sympathy for them and raise their prospects. The fiasco ends with angry words, bringing Dowling’s recognition of the incommensurability of the social and economic (and spiritual too) worlds of the Robisons and the prostitutes. His disillusionment with these parishioners,

up to now taken by him as exemplary Christians, causes a revised attitude to the church, evident in his changed reaction to the Cathedral's spire:

Even when he reached the sidewalk, he kept glaring back at the [Robisons'] house, and as he walked, his anger and disgust alternated so sharply that he did not realize he was back at the Cathedral till he looked up and saw the spire and saw, too, the cross at the peak thrust up against the stars and felt no sudden affection but just a cool disgust, as if the church no longer belonged to him. (94)

Back in his room Dowling looks out over the city at the buildings and the crowds, thinking of Midge and Ronnie. The chapter ends: "He felt full of love for them and sometimes he looked up at the stars" (96). By now, in Niebuhrian terms, Dowling has moved away from his earlier "cultural" or "synthetic" Christianity with its uncomplicated relationship between church and world to a more radical or dualist position, similar to Niebuhr's "Christ Against Culture" type where the clearcut tension between God and world leads to a withdrawal from an ungodly culture. Earlier the church among the office buildings signified the redeeming presence of God in a world seen as potentially sacred in all its aspects and into which the church is fully integrated.

Initially Dowling had no need to look beyond the world for a symbol of sacred transcendence. The church spire is taken for granted as a temporal symbol of the sacred, fitting as it does so comfortably amidst the surrounding warehouses and office buildings. Later the Cathedral is seen as part of the temporal realm, separate from the eternal. Now Dowling searches beyond the temporal for a correlate of the sacred, most often finding it in the stars, whether generally symbolizing, as is common to mythology and folklore universally, the spirit and the eternal, or representative of human souls.

3. The Song of Songs: Love and the Sacred

Whether read straightforwardly as an instance of the pre-1960s genre "Catholic novel," even when that means "informed by Catholic sensibility or vision which is not easily restated in terms of doctrine" (Gerhart, 188), or as an ironic depiction (perhaps reminiscent of Kafka or Camus) of the impossibilities of conventional religious faith in the twentieth century, still *Such Is My Beloved* shows a collision between two realms rather than a monistic vision. For the contemporary reader it may be no more than the exemplification of Herman Melville's dictum that anyone who tries to apply

literally the teachings of the New Testament ends up in the jail or the psychiatric hospital. Or, as the author himself has suggested of his work in general, *Such Is My Beloved* may be read as an investigation of the plight of innocence, the partial subject of his talk with Robert Weaver:

Innocence has always fascinated me. There's a very thin borderline between innocence and crime... there's a very thin line there because the saint in his own way has a kind of monstrous egotism. And the great criminal has a monstrous egotism. The saint pits himself against the whole world... which he calls, of course, usually the work of Satan. But the great criminal also puts himself against the world and the laws of society.⁴ (135)

Callaghan made a similar comment about his entire oeuvre in a television program in 1971: "The whole point of all my work, in a sense, has been a kind of rejection of the conception of innocence" (Harcourt and Price). At the same time he made another generalizing declaration about the theme of love in his fiction: "All [my] stories are love stories—short stories or novels, they deal with some aspect of love, or the failure of love—I suppose mainly about the failure of love." In some respects what Callaghan does in *Such Is My Beloved* is to move the priest's initial concern for the salvation of the souls of Midge and Ronnie into an adjacent realm where love becomes the transcendent value to be preserved in a hostile environment. In this connection to examine the Song of Songs from the Hebrew Scriptures, whether as used by the author as an epigraph for the novel, by the protagonist as a text for a sermon, or by a commentator as an heuristic device for interpretation, is instructive and illuminating. In fact, the place of that pagan hymn to love within the canon of the Bible and the question of what hermeneutic to employ upon it is not unlike the problem presented by Callaghan's novel itself. The uncertain relation of human love to the sacred—or better, the possibility of sacralizing human love—is (clearly) at issue in either case.

After Midge and Ronnie have been run out of town, and Easter passes, Dowling withdraws increasingly into an interior world—"he heard the noises from people moving in the house, but these sounds now did not interest him at all" (139)—as he meditates on love, planning his commentary on the Song of Songs. Dowling wears an "expression of detached sadness" during a visit from Charlie Stewart; his eyes are dulled by "that detached, depressed, heavy stillness" (140-41). His disengagement from society is complete when he is sent to the psychiatric hospital by the lake. With the patients sitting in the sun as if they were guests at a garden party

waiting to be served, there occurs a bitter parody and reversal of the pastoral imagery of the Song of Songs where the garden is a refuge from the world. At the hospital, held “by an absolute stillness within him” (142), Dowling continues to pray in this idyllic setting as he looks at “the new ploughed land” and the “rich brown fertile soil.” Unable to do anything more to affect their material condition, Dowling concludes by offering up his insanity as a sacrifice for the souls of the girls. In the novel’s concluding lines three stars appear above the water: “His love seemed suddenly to be as steadfast as those stars, as wide as the water, and still flowing within him like the cold smooth waves still rolling on the shore” (144).

Callaghan’s epigraph for his novel is the Song of Songs 8:7: “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it [i.e., he] would utterly be contemned [i.e., despised].” Francis Landy comments that this verse, especially its latter half, is “ironic”: “In the eyes of the world, to give one’s entire fortune for love is folly; from the perspective of the Song, in which riches are ultimately worthless, it is folly” (Alter and Kermode, 318). The double meaning here is, first, that the lover who forsakes wealth for the sake of love is regarded by the world as a fool and, second, that the rich person cannot purchase love—as the title of the Beatles’ song put it, “Can’t Buy Me Love.” From the perspective of the wealthy Robisons, Father Dowling is delusional, someone who throws everything away for the sake of a couple of prostitutes. And, in the view of his Bishop, about to launch (with compounded incongruity) what is termed a “Charity Drive,” and fearful of the church’s reputation if a scandal should erupt, Dowling’s course of action is not expedient. From the viewpoint of Dowling, where love is manifest in the concreteness of relationships, materialism is more spiritually imperilling than prostitution: “All around us there are all kinds of people prostituting their souls and their principles for money” (132).

The title, *Such Is My Beloved*, is also taken from the book in the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Song of Solomon, the Song of Songs, or the Canticle of Canticles. The Douay translation of the last verse of chapter five has the words “Such is My beloved” (whereas the King James and Revised Standard versions have “This is my beloved”). Both epigraph and title make explicit the connection between the novel and the scriptures, inexplicably not much examined by critics. Given these two quotations from the same biblical book, to say nothing of other thematic connections, as well as Dowling’s use

of the book, the relations between Callaghan's novel and the Song of Songs need attention.

The phrase "such is my beloved" occurs in the Song at the end of a chapter in which a bride has described her Beloved to a group of bystanders. She tells them, in a complete catalogue of his physical features, ranging all the way from head to toe, about his hair, his complexion, his eyes, his cheeks, his lips, his hands, his belly, and his legs. She concludes: "His conversation is sweetness itself, he is altogether loveable. Such is my beloved, such is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (5:16). Since here the words are spoken by a woman of the man she loves, probably the line is most applicable to Midge's attitude towards the priest who befriends her and Ronnie, Father Stephen Dowling.

Like the woman of the Song of Songs, Midge (whose name means "gnat" or, more positively, "tiny person") is referred to several times in the novel as "dark": she is "the little, dark one with the round brown eyes" (9); she is "the little dark girl" (13); and as Dowling describes her to Charlie's girlfriend, Pauline, Midge is "dark with brown eyes" (55). Like the woman in the Song of Songs who is "dark and comely" (1:5), and therefore probably from the country, Midge is an outsider in Toronto. Her darkness is the antithesis of the conventional fair beauty of the city. As a recent commentator on the Song explains:

In the Pastoral, courtly tradition, darkness of skin is ambivalent, while the conventional beauty is fair.... A white complexion is delicate, unspoilt; and readily merges with the symbolism of whiteness as purity. The unspoilt, delicate girl is virginal, carefully raised within society to await her husband. The dark girl—whether Theocritus' "sunburnt Syrian," Virgil's Amyntas or Menalcas, or the "nut brown maid"—is available, and consequently less idealised and more enticing. (Landy, 144)

The conventional beauty of the city is perhaps represented in James Robison's "two fine daughters" (39), or, even more, by Robison's wife, who is contrasted with Midge and Ronnie so dramatically when Dowling takes the girls to their home. On that occasion, Mrs. Robison is described as having "slender white hands," "beautiful white streaks in her hair," and skin that is "soft and pink" (90). By contrast, Midge is a working-class girl from Montreal, one of a dozen children, and of French-Canadian background, to say nothing of her being a prostitute and not the wife of a prominent lawyer.

Like the bride in the Song of Songs, Midge catalogues her "Beloved's"

features, recalling Dowling's face, hair, lips, and hands, while she sits in her prison cell following her arrest:

And at last there floated into her thoughts the face of Father Dowling. She liked to think of his face now, his thick hair, and the gentleness in his smile. She began, too, to think of his big, soft strong hands as if they might hold her and strengthen her even as these thoughts were strengthening her. (112)

Callaghan's use of the phrase "such is my beloved" in his title echoes the New Testament pronouncement at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).⁵ That Father Dowling may be like Jesus is suggested in his presiding at a "last supper" of wine and sandwiches the night before the "betrayal" of Midge and Ronnie by Robison (Judas) to the Bishop (Pilate). The title phrase may also imply that Dowling is Christ-like in his befriending two prostitutes for whom he sacrifices himself. Bishop Foley comes close to stumbling on the nature and origins of Dowling's love for the two women. After his interview with Father Dowling Bishop Foley feels that the priest's love for them became "too concrete." While musing about this, and searching for "the conception expressed in the image," he seeks a suitable abstraction by which to grasp the problem: "From the word to the flesh, the word to the flesh, from the general to the particular, the word made flesh, no, no, nonsense" (135). At this moment the Bishop almost forces himself to conclude that his priest's love for the two prostitutes is like God's love for all humanity, made particular and concrete in the Word become flesh, as described in the opening words of the Fourth Gospel. But he backs away and negates it, effectively denying the very good news he is supposed to uphold and proclaim.

In the same CBC television program mentioned earlier Callaghan expressed his own doubts as to whether you "can love generally, without loving concretely." Maritain, in his *True Humanism*, describes what he terms theocentric humanism, "the humanism of the Incarnation." Quoting from his own earlier work Maritain continues to the effect that the saint cherishes other creatures "as loved by God, and made by Him as fair and worthy of our love. For to love a being in and for God is not to treat them as a mere means or a mere occasion for loving God, but to love and cherish their being as an end, because it *merits* love..." (*The Degrees of Knowledge* [1937], as cited in *True Humanism*, 65).

Throughout the novel Father Dowling becomes increasingly an apologist for divine love, especially through his own meditation and preaching on the

Song of Songs. Early in the novel he believed that “his feeling for the girls was so intense it must surely partake of the nature of the divine love” (16), perhaps an instance of dangerous naivete. Perhaps he is only confusing erotic intensity with religious devotion; perhaps he is sacralizing human love; or, perhaps Dowling recognizes that he cannot love merely instrumentally—that love must be end and not means. In the endeavour to love Midge and Ronnie “for themselves,” as he puts it, Dowling is an example of incarnational humanism. After the collision with his bishop and parishioners that kind of love becomes a transcendent value.

Reading his Bible Dowling “understood some of the secret rich feeling of this love song, sung so marvellously that it transcended human love and become divine” (78). When he preaches on the Song he makes it a song “of a love that all people ought to have for one another” (78). And, closing that sermon, he quotes the same words that Callaghan inscribes at the outset of the novel: “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” Awaiting his Bishop’s decision about the nature of the discipline to be imposed on him, Dowling determines to write a commentary on the Song of Songs with the purpose of showing “how human love may transcend all earthly things” (139). At the end, as he watches “the soft rise and enormous flow toward him” of the waves of the lake, one assumes that his own love has not been quenched, however broken and disordered his mind might be.

Even in the brief concluding chapter, after Dowling realizes and accepts his “insanity,” he still hopes for periods of clarity in which to go on with his commentary on the Song of Songs. Here, at the hospital outside the city by the lake, amidst vistas of “a wide lawn with new green spring grass,” of patients talking and bowing to each other “as if it were a great garden party to which they had all been invited,” and adjacent to “new ploughed land” with its “rich brown fertile soil, heavy and dark and moist,” Dowling has moved, like the lovers in the Song of Songs, from the city to the countryside (see Song of Songs 2:8, 5:1, and 6:2). Francis Landy writes perceptively about what he terms “the process of fusion and differentiation” in the Song of Songs. He describes the theme of the Song as “the paradise that only exists in the world through being inaccessible to it, or is only accessible outside its limits, through imaginative transcendence” (272). As he points out—and Callaghan’s theme bears similarities—love is as strong as death, but love is also like death, threatening dissolution and desolation. Whatever psychic or spiritual or amorous union or integration the priest achieves with the two

women is accompanied by his exile from the church and the city—those two communities he sought to unite and serve—and by the disintegration of his reason.

4. Conclusion: Incarnational Humanism

Three months before his death St. Thomas Aquinas had a powerfully transformative experience, resulting in his abandoning the writing of his great *Summa*: “Such things have been revealed to me that everything I have written seems to me rubbish” (Maritain, *Angel of the Schools*, 26). At times Aquinas was dazed, and was generally unable to teach or write. It has been variously suggested that he suffered a nervous breakdown, a stroke, or exhaustion. It may have been that he experienced, either as cause or result of his physical condition, a mystical experience. During his final two weeks, when it was known that his death was near, Thomas was asked for a memorial. Accordingly, he dictated to the monks at Fossanova a brief commentary on the Song of Songs (Maritain, *Angel of the Schools*, 27; cf. Weisheipl, 326). Though this deathbed commentary has not survived, this poignant account of its origins, in part derived from William of Tocco, has been described by Aquinas’ most influential biographer as “a persistent view” (Weisheipl, 326).

Stephen B. Boyd has conjectured that “his preoccupation with the erotic imagery of the Song” may be connected with Thomas’s “disillusionment with his intellectual work.” Aquinas had previously “believed that the repression of sexual energy/passion was necessary to vitalize one’s intellectual life.” But his climactic realization, a vision of God that infused him with erotic passion, Boyd suggests, was “a glimpse of a different kind of sexuality and its possibility to enrich life and draw one to God” (8). Other recent commentators on the relationship between sex and religion have gone further. James B. Nelson in *The Intimate Connection*, drawing on Paul Ricoeur, argues that we are now experiencing a renewed sense of the spiritual power of sexual expression. No longer is spirituality to be thought of as something transcending sexuality. Instead there is, exactly as Father Dowling’s incarnational humanism would have it, the possibility for human love to become divine love. For Nelson states that “in the depths of friendship with another human being, I literally do experience the friendship of God.” More emphatically, he declares that this experience, not just analogous to an experience of God, or even embodying divine love, “is God.” The situation of Thomas’s last days, especially as elaborated in Boyd’s interpretation of it, is

strikingly close to that of Father Stephen Dowling at the end of *Such Is My Beloved*. Both of them experience the tremendous power of some transcendent force, perhaps of love, to overturn one's taken-for-granted world, leading to the abandonment of life as previously lived and known. In addition to whatever else he might have learned from Jacques Maritain's neothomism, Morley Callaghan through his acquaintance with Maritain might have been (in fact, probably was) prompted towards imagining fictional parallels to the life of Thomas. After all, Maritain had published his biography of Thomas in Paris in 1930, just three years earlier, with the translation into English following in 1931. Given the frequency of their meetings and the interest Callaghan showed in Maritain's ideas, Aquinas' life and thought would have been a likely topic of conversation between them.⁶

While Maritain's influence was widely accepted in Callaghan criticism a generation ago, recent commentators have not much heeded the direct impact of Maritain's ideas on Callaghan or his specific borrowings from Maritain's work.⁷ But the two men obviously had shared interests in the perils and possibilities of sainthood, a subject that comes up frequently in Maritain's writing. Callaghan amply demonstrates here and in his other fiction his own capacities not just to use the thought of someone like the Catholic philosopher Maritain but to project himself imaginatively and prophetically into the mind of a saint or an innocent. In *Such Is My Beloved* (and in *A Time for Judas* too) Callaghan shows how new light can be shed on an ancient biblical text by a modern author's imaginative reflections. *Such Is My Beloved*, now more than a half-century old, takes on fresh meaning when viewed in terms of contemporary scholarship on the Song of Songs, on the life of Aquinas, and on the relationship between human sexuality and spirituality.

Finally, attempts to disengage Callaghan's literary imagination from the basic tenets of an essentially Catholic and neothomist outlook, nourished in particular by Jacques Maritain's influence, are misguided. To ignore or disclaim the significance of Callaghan's probing reflections on biblical materials (at least to judge from the authority of the Song of Songs for *Such Is My Beloved*), is likewise erroneous. But Callaghan's great achievement, it seems to me, is to employ these various resources neither towards the ultimate dichotomization of two conflicting realms (an absolute dualism) nor towards the utter collapse of these two domains—the profane and the sacred, the temporal and the eternal, the carnal and the spiritual—into a

harmonious but exclusive monism of either radical immanence or total transcendence. Somewhere in the ambiguous territory between these extremities Morley Callaghan stakes out the possibility of an incarnational humanism envisaging a more sophisticated and redemptive relationship between the two realms.

NOTES

- ¹ I am indebted to Professor Gary Boire of Wilfrid Laurier University, author of a forthcoming biography of Callaghan, for generously sharing information about Callaghan's Catholicism, his relationship with Maritain, and the Toronto background to Callaghan's fiction.
- ² The revival of Thomism began in 1879 with an encyclical by Pope Leo XIII. In 1914, with the approval of Pope Pius X, twenty-four propositions were published embodying the essential points of Thomas's philosophy, including characterizations of the immortal soul as capable of existing apart from the body and as the source of life and perfection (see *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8, 114).
- ³ This "Protestant city" of the novel is of course recognizable as Toronto, though Callaghan nowhere explicitly states it. Possibly the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the story is modelled on St. Michael's while the psychiatric hospital by the lake is based on the private institution that once existed west of Toronto on Lakeshore Boulevard. One of this journal's assessors for this essay in manuscript form suggested—though I think these possibilities less likely—St. Basil's Church on Clover Hill and the psychiatric hospital in Whitby, Ontario as the originals for Callaghan's novel.
- ⁴ Jacques Maritain writes: "The saints always amaze us. Their virtues are freer than those of a merely virtuous man. Now and again, in circumstances outwardly alike, they act quite differently from the way in which a merely virtuous man acts. ... They have their own kind of mean, their own kinds of standards. But they are valid only for each one of them" (*Existence and the Existent* [New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1966], 55).
- ⁵ Though echoing more directly the Song of Songs 5:5, the baptismal pronouncement is usually taken as a quotation of (or at least an allusion to) Isaiah 42:1, "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my spirit delighteth," and/or Isaiah 49:3, "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." The prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures, rather than the Song of Songs, are considered more likely (because more authoritative) source material for the author of the First Gospel. It is only through a later process of allegorization that the Beloved of the Song is seen to stand for Christ as bridegroom of the Church.
- ⁶ *Le Docteur Angelique* (Paris: Desclée, 1930). The English translation appeared a year later as *St. Thomas Aquinas, Angel of the Schools*, trans J. F. Scanlan (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931). Maritain's book has the same details of Aquinas's last days as appear in Weisheipl's authoritative biography (see *Angel of the Schools*, 26-27).
- ⁷ Though see the interview with Callaghan found in Matt Cohen, "Morley's Coy Mythstress," *Books in Canada* (July 1975), 3-5; also the general discussion in Barbara

Helen Pell, "Faith and Fiction: The Novels of Callaghan and Hood," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18:2 (Summer 1983): 5-17; and, the consideration of *They Shall Inherit the Earth* in John J. O'Connor, "Fraternal Twins: The Impact of Jacques Maritain on Callaghan and Charbonneau," *Mosaic* 14:2 (Spring 1981): 145-63.

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Also, how I lost her ...

All my life I had waited for another woman teacher.
One flew through my childhood, pinned me for life
in one of those deep box frames that spills forth
music, speed of the body, physicality that is joy.
By the time I had stepped out of the enclosures of the north,
the huddled house, the root and cabbages garden,
I no longer needed anyone to tell me I was no scholar.
In introducing anyone to my library, I opened my hand.
How is it that the ones who come in also admit

they have suffered, also put down preserves, cry a little
while they laugh; while they laugh, saying those inane, life-giving
country western words, like life goes on, get it while you can,
and the truly Canadian, please someone finish this off,
it won't be any good tomorrow.

I am sorry when I met you, you would not tell the truth.
All my life, I had been prepared to listen. Instead, miracles, I found
when exclusively deaf, gone blind; the woman who promised nothing
but loved, primarily, children; the woman who knew everything

cut my food into bite-size pieces and cooked only
what I could eat with my hands. When I stepped unseeing, naked,
into her bath, she held my hand and the back of my head
as if a precious child had come to visit. A child who knew nothing
until she experienced it herself, who trusted everyone
until she knew better, who stumbled in the dark
only if she was not lost.

What we are given is what makes us intelligent, what we search for
gives us up for drowned. The ones we don't want to lose, just gone.

Les discours sociaux dans *Les Nuits de l'Underground* de Marie-Claire Blais

Si, comme le dit Simon Harel,¹ “la littérature n’existe qu’à énoncer la différence,” l’appréhension d’un texte par l’identification des catégories que supposent ses représentations sociales ne saurait se confiner à une perspective trop étroite face au roman de Marie-Claire Blais, *Les Nuits de l'Underground*. A l’égard d’ailleurs d’une lecture sociocritique de l’oeuvre blaisienne, il faut, en raison même du raffinement des outils théoriques proposés par les travaux des dernières années, prendre ses distances d’une approche réductionniste telle que celles suggérées par Goldmann² ou Mitterand,³ lesquels ont décodé les textes de Blais en tant que positivité/négativité par rapport à une période sociohistorique donnée. Pour valider cette méfiance face à une lecture ne tenant pas compte de la textualisation proprement dite, il suffit de lire deux remarquables études, l’une de Joseph Kwaterko portant sur les référents littéraires et idéologiques présents dans *Une saison dans la vie d’Emmanuel*⁴ et l’autre d’Élaine Cliche, d’inspiration kleinienne, s’intéressant à l’expression textuelle d’une forme d’avidité exprimée dans *Les Nuits de l'Underground*, *Le Sourd dans La Ville* et *Visions d’Anna*. Alors que Kwaterko s’occupe d’examiner avec précision le sens des intertextualités mises en jeu dans le texte-référence par excellence de l’oeuvre de Blais, soit *Une saison dans la vie d’Emmanuel*, Elaine Cliche, pour sa part, interroge entre autres dans les romans étudiés le rôle du cosmopolitisme perçu comme “une pulvérisation de la québécoisité de la terre maternelle dévorante, ce qui témoignerait d’une autre forme d’avidité transférée par l’énonciation.”⁵ Cette question du cosmopolitisme doit attirer

momentanément l'attention, non pas pour discuter de la pertinence des conclusions d'Élaine Cliche, mais pour examiner plus avant comment, en tant que paradigme essentiel, il modifie ou masque la nature des discours sociaux propres aux *Nuits de l'Underground*.

Ainsi, tout comme on relèvera une axiologie textualisée exprimant une catégorisation à l'intérieur du social, on verra comment ces différences fondamentales en nourrissent une perception du monde, laquelle devrait permettre un éventuel questionnement d'un certain mythe du texte blaisien perçu comme absolument contestataire d'un ordre donné. En d'autres termes, la réévaluation des formes de représentation textuelle de ce cosmopolitisme voudrait, non pas nier le "rôle pulvérisateur de la québécoïté" qu'il suppose, mais surtout montrer comment ce cosmopolitisme reste paradoxalement codé par des hiérarchies tenaces qui reconduisent curieusement dans *Les Nuits de l'Underground* à une reconfirmation d'un certain état du social. Ces précautions rhétoriques ne visent en fait qu'à laisser entrevoir l'hétérodoxie qui consiste à soupçonner que l'expression intrinsèque d'une socialité de la marginalisation dans *Les Nuits de l'Underground* puisse être parfaitement doublée d'une ambivalence latente vis-à-vis de l'affirmation d'un ordre social. Dès lors, l'énonciation de la différence, du fait qu'elle est aussi l'énonciation des différences, devrait nécessairement nous conduire à mieux lire ce qui sous-tend les représentations de ces différences, de nature sexuelle, sociale, linguistique, ethnique ou économique.

Ces oppositions entre des identitaires variés ne contribuent cependant pas à susciter dans le roman de Blais la globalité signifiante manichéenne que certains aimeraient voir accoler à une oeuvre s'occupant de représenter une communauté marginalisée en raison de ses choix sexuels, une telle globalité conduisant selon nous à une polarité réductrice. Plutôt, ces oppositions contribueraient à mettre en relief dans *Les Nuits de l'Underground* la problématique posée par l'instauration d'une marginalisation sociale explicitement affirmée comme norme mais devant être néanmoins confrontée à l'expression d'autres catégories sociales. Et c'est à l'intérieur de cette énonciation du social donnée comme normative que s'inscrivent d'autres marginalisations incontournables indicatrices de clivages dont ce n'est pas le moindre accomplissement de Marie-Claire Blais d'avoir tenu compte, malgré l'ambivalence qui découle de cette reconstruction d'un social, d'un ordre oppressif à l'intérieur d'un ordre qui se veut pourtant subversif.

C'est donc d'abord particulièrement ce cosmopolitisme, posé comme

désintégrateur de l'habituel texte social québécois, que nous soupçonnons de jouer un rôle ambigu dans la représentation des discours sociaux particuliers aux *Nuits de l'Underground*. Ainsi, les diverses représentations de l'Autre, qu'il soit d'origine française, allemande, anglaise, ou américaine, comme fascination et comme objet de désir, semblent associées à un enfermement plus ou moins radical du sujet québécois dans une hiérarchie sociale opprimante. Cette mise à l'écart le conditionne beaucoup plus nettement que ne le fait la spécificité lesbienne, laquelle, comme on l'a souligné, est plutôt présentée comme un donné, un déjà-là de la sociabilité du texte, déjà installé en quelque sorte dans la représentation, vidée de tout caractère proprement hétéronomique⁶. A cet égard, il nous semble que le cosmopolitisme des *Nuits de l'Underground* s'assimile davantage à ce que Simon Harel a pertinemment désigné comme la "tentation du cosmopolitisme"⁷ en tant que "souhait d'une communauté sociale utopique recréant un sentiment de fusion océanique, d'annulations des différences culturelles par la simple multiplication harmonieuse des individualités minoritaires."⁸ Mais pourtant, on peut relever immédiatement que cette "annulation des différences" se pose d'emblée dans le texte comme masque discursif jeté par-dessus un autre discours faisant aussi état de différences d'un autre ordre, véritable noyau inaliénable des *Nuits de l'Underground*, noyau qui ne réussit pas à être entièrement gommé par la représentation dominante de cette déterritorialisation culturelle.

En considérant la fonction de l'incipit du roman comme porteur d'un code de lecture clair, on voit qu'il détermine sans ambages le rôle dominant et ambigu de l'oeuvre d'art⁹ comme référent métaphorique du discours romanesque des *Nuits de l'Underground*. Cependant, ce thème de l'art en soi est immédiatement rattaché au cosmopolitisme, dont on est amené à conclure qu'il n'en est en fait qu'une fonction.

L'amour de Geneviève Aurès pour Lali Dorman naquit comme une passion pour une oeuvre d'art. Sculpteur, Geneviève éprouvait déjà, pour le visage humain, une curiosité profonde; cet amour de l'art lui avait fait parcourir de nombreux pays, et elle préparait une exposition au Canada, et une autre à Paris... (9)¹⁰

Effectivement, le roman s'inscrit d'emblée sous le signe d'une errance presque euphorique liée à une fascination absolue pour la figure de l'autre, à tel point que c'est à ses propres origines que Geneviève semble devenir étrangère, et il n'est pas sans conséquences signifiantes que ce sentiment

d'aliénation par rapport à sa propre appartenance fasse également partie de l'incipit:

Mais une femme pouvait-elle toujours vivre seule, lorsque tout, en elle, l'isolait des lois sociales?" Un groupe de jeunes ouvrières discutaient à ses côtés, et Geneviève, qui protégeait son indépendance d'un air ombrageux, se couvrant le front de sa main pour mieux exprimer qu'elle n'était pas "dans le milieu pour cruiser (elle avait oublié le langage des filles d'ici, et venait d'apprendre qu'on «cruisait beaucoup les vendredis soirs, après la paie du jeudi») mais pour réfléchir au sens de sa vie, espérant pourtant être enchaînée malgré elle dans la trépidante conversation de ses compagnes, mais les jeunes Québécoises parlaient toutes si vite et en sautant parfois des syllabes et des mots entiers, qu'elle craignait aussi, elle qui se jugeait encore étrangère parmi elles et un peu lente d'esprit quand elles semblaient toutes si vives, de ne pas pouvoir les suivre dans leur dialogue jazzé, que rythmait non seulement la criante musique du bar, mais qu'accompagnait aussi les mouvements de leur corps... (10).

Notons cependant ici que le terme "social" utilisé par l'instance narrative est, si l'on considère l'enchaînement avec la phrase qui suit, quelque peu privé, sinon de sa polysémie, du moins de toute son extension sémantique. Les "lois sociales" ici désignées paraissent plutôt qualifier les régulations qui régissent le territoire de la sexualité, et qui le définissent selon la norme de l'hétérosexualité, plutôt qu'elles ne semblent recouvrir les règles déterminant les interrelations de nature économique. C'est la mention directe des "jeunes ouvrières" suivant tout de suite l'allusion aux lois sociales, qui, tout en se posant également sous le signe de la marginalisation sexuelle, installe plus nommément la catégorisation sur le plan socio-économique. De plus, l'instance discursive, contrairement à ce que Kwaterko avait bien démontré concernant *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*, ne révèle ici vraiment pas un appareil proprement intertextuel ou interdiscursif qui pourrait correspondre à un véritable dialogisme entre deux niveaux de discours pris en charge par la narration. Le langage propre aux jeunes ouvrières est clairement réifié par les guillemets et les parenthèses, mis à distance et ainsi désigné comme objet véritablement *étranger* à Geneviève: cette "trépidante conversation", ce "dialogue jazzé", bref ce "langage des filles d'ici" présuppose un ailleurs qui particularise cette langue, qui la renvoie à des origines dont l'instance narrative cherche à se distancer. Et non seulement ce langage n'est-il pas intégré à l'énonciation narrative, mais il est éminemment rattaché à une catégorie particulière: le fait de *cruiser* ne peut se faire que le jour de paie, la sexualité étant ici conditionnée par un ordre économique,

mais à l'intérieur d'une classe autre que celle de l'héroïne qui est le principal sujet focalisateur du roman. Plus signifiant encore de l'évidement du social représenté par cet énoncé gnominique du narrateur sur les "lois sociales" est la distinction supplémentaire établie par l'un des personnages qui reconnaît lui-même, et ainsi confirme, cette rigidité première conférée à l'espace socio-économique: "Qui est la fille à côté de toi Marielle je sais pas connais pas elle est gênée laissons-la tranquille un beau genre mais une intellectuelle c'est pas nous qui l'intéressons..."(11)

Tout autant que la catégorie économique, la différence de capital culturel est aussi désignée comme barrière, non pas à la socialisation proprement dite, mais à la relation sexualisée qui est liée dès lors à ce paradigme supplémentaire de "l'intellectualité." Or, puisque l'énonciation romanesque inscrit immédiatement le parallélisme entre l'amour et l'oeuvre d'art, cette comparaison doit être perçue comme un indicateur d'axiologie désignant l'art non seulement comme information et valeur,¹¹ mais aussi comme *signe* dans la mesure où en tant que "signe, le tableau profile pour le lecteur une idéologie ou une vision du monde."¹² Encore une fois, ce n'est pas tant la nature de la constante référence à l'art qui définirait le type de vision du monde représenté dans *Les Nuits de l'Underground*, mais le fait que cette référence en soi, régulièrement assumée par l'instance narrative, se pose effectivement comme le signe de la vision du monde hypothétiquement représentée par le roman, à savoir, dans une certaine mesure ce que Marie Rouillard désigne comme étant "celle de la bourgeoisie, caractérisée par le goût de l'ordre et du confort,"¹³ encore que cette qualification lapidaire ne rende pas du tout justice au roman de Blais. Cependant, si l'art comme signe renvoie à un certain concept de culture,¹⁴ il faut avoir à l'esprit, avec Sherry Simons que "la culture (dans l'ensemble de (ses) acceptations) a toujours comme fonction primordiale de servir de signe de reconnaissance et donc de division."¹⁵ De ce fait, la comparaison régulièrement assumée dans le texte avec divers tableaux, faisant preuve d'une hégémonie accordée à une "culture artistique," se précise davantage comme le signe de l'intellectualité, et de ce type précis qui implique un "style de vie distinctif,"¹⁶ incluant la capacité de référer au concept de "grande culture." Cette intellectualité subsume toute l'énonciation du roman, de sorte que quiconque ne pouvant (ou ne voulant pas) accéder au langage de l'intellect cultivé, se voit objet d'énoncé plutôt que sujet d'énonciation, comme

l'indique bien la constante réification du langage des “jeunes ouvrières,” aliénées de la vision du monde portée par l'héroïne et thématissant elles-mêmes cette aliénation. “Je suis pas assez intéressante pour quelqu'un comme ça, moi” (11). La prééminence accordée à l'intellectualité comme valeur d'échange pour la circulation à l'intérieur du capital social est d'ailleurs l'objet d'une mention claire par l'instance narrative, où il est clairement désigné, comme ce qui est profondément engagé dans l'échange:

Geneviève avait cette sensation, depuis qu'elle connaissait Lali, de s'émerveiller de ses émerveillements nocturnes et crépusculaires pendant que s'éteignaient en elle les souvenirs de son identité intellectuelle et morale. (112)

Outre l'art comme signe privilégié de la prééminence accordée au capital culturel et intellectuel, source de division, donc d'écart, l'instance narrative ne cesse également de mettre aussi à distance le langage propre à d'autres classes socio-économiques et surtout évaluer de façon significative ces caractéristiques linguistiques propres à certains groupes. On a d'une part le haut du pavé: “...En écoutant Françoise, en étant sensible *au classicisme de sa langue*, seule la riche éruption de sa voix venait à vous” (188). “*La fraîcheur d'un accent* venu des plus beaux ports de France, et en ce chaos de sons charmants, la rigueur de la langue française...” (22). D'autre part se présentent les modalisations où le fils de la Gauveau crie à sa mère “avec l'*accent populaire* des rues “Allô, maman, tabernacle, j'serai donc fier de toi quand tu viendras me voir un jour à mon école,” même si le chant nasillard d'un *tel* langage dans la bouche de son fils lui déplaisait fortement, langage qu'elle déplorait en soupirant: “Et dire que, quand ils étaient avec moi, ils parlaient si bien”¹⁷ (261). On fera bien sûr remarquer que cette dernière évaluation portant sur la façon de s'exprimer du “fils cadet” est le fait d'un personnage, par discours direct, il n'empêche que le *tel*—attribuable à l'instance narrative—est suivi de peu dans le texte par une autre réminiscence positive au sujet du français européen, ce qui est aussi une valorisation du cosmopolitisme: “et le chant de sa voix rappelait encore à Geneviève l'un des plus beaux ports de France” (262). Une fois encore, on a ici un effet fort différent de celui de l'intertextualité renversant l'intertexte national québécois,¹⁸ et subvertissant par jeu dialogique les postulats portés par une représentation traditionnelle du mythe de la terre, comme le démontre Kwaterko. Au contraire, on continue à relever dans le texte la réification constante du langage “anti-intellectuel” d'une autre classe sociale, sa mise à

distance systématique qui confère au discours des *Nuits de l'Underground* cette étrange dimension monologique, qui ne pourrait qu'étonner les lecteurs des *Manuscrits* ou des *Apparences*. Cette réification du langage populaire, marqué ainsi comme non-intégré au discours principal, discours lié au cosmopolitisme, le dénote irrémédiablement comme le langage de l'Autre. Le procédé en prend parfois d'ailleurs, comme on le verra, une allure quasi-documentaire, qui renforce l'impression que cette langue a d'abord pour fonction de "donner à voir" mimétiquement la catégorisation sociale.

Parallèlement, il est aussi pertinent de relever que certains extraits de ce langage populaire s'occupent également d'inscrire les différenciations, non plus sociales, mais sexuelles où on assiste à une manifestation supplémentaire de la distribution des niveaux linguistiques hétérogènes, en tant que représentations directes de la langue d'un groupe social spécifique. Mais, comme toutes les autres représentations sociolectales dans *Les Nuits de l'Underground*, celle-ci encore fait preuve de cette dichotomie linguistique qui n'est pas transcendée par l'énonciation du récit, n'est pas intégrée à une intertextualité et donne simplement à voir, ou plutôt à dire, l'expression d'une autre différence.

Christ, Pierre, pourquoi t'as l'air efféminé comme ça? C'est ta peau de renard autour du cou, encore! On dirait que je m'occupe pas ben de toé, que je ne t'habille pas comme du monde, t'es trop jeune à seize ans pour te mettre du vermeil comme ça sur la paupière.

—Parle-moi pas Georges, j'ai mal aux dents.

—Tu dis ça à chaque fois que tu veux pas faire l'amour, mon petit verrat!

—Je m'en vais toutes les faire arracher ces tabernacles de dents-là. Tu le connais, toé, la tapette qui est au fond? C'est pas l'une des nôtres du show?

—Ben non Pierre, où t'as la tête, à toujours flirter, même icitte dans une place straight, non t'es cave, c'est rien qu'une lesbienne ça!

—Ah, ben, on sait jamais. (79)

Toutefois, dans ce cas précis, la représentation directe du sociolecte gay mâle québécois, qui souligne des marques d'énonciation éminemment catégorisantes (les jurons, les élisions, les marques phonétiques de l'accent populaire, la terminologie particulière à la communauté donnée), joue également sur l'ambiguïté d'un certain potentiel ironique de l'énoncé, et l'opposerait au premier degré de l'énonciation narrative. Le grossissement de certains traits du style de vie du gay mâle, comme la peau de renard, le maquillage, ou le refus d'avoir des relations sexuelles, soulignent l'identité du groupe jusqu'à la caricature. Mais cette indéniable portée caricaturale de

l'énonciation gaie vient aussi, dans le même souffle de la représentation de son langage, dévaluer sa propre représentation méprisante de la communauté lesbienne: "C'est rien qu'une lesbienne". On peut dévaluer le groupe lesbien, mais la parole qui porte cette évaluation négative peut être dévaluée à son tour par sa portée caricaturale intrinsèque. Voilà qui est un exemple probant d'une des marques du discours lesbien présenté comme hégémonique dans l'ensemble du texte, comme central, et qui va repousser les différences dans une périphérie. L'effet caricatural de l'énonciation de cette "différence" sexuelle doublée d'une différence sociale, en s'opposant à la norme du discours lesbien, est bien ce que Marc Angenot appelle l'effet d'hégémonie, effet "qui rend toujours insatisfaisants, inadéquats, problématiques, un peu ridicules aussi, les langages des périphéries."¹⁹ Or la stratégie consiste à désigner paradoxalement l'autre marginalité sexuelle mâle comme étant la périphérie, consolidant le discours lesbien comme dominant, comme normatif, malgré cette volonté ouverte de le dévaluer. Mais le désamorçage du discours de l'autre sur l'autre, du gay sur la lesbienne, encore une fois parce que ce discours est représenté directement, n'est pas le fruit d'une intégration énonciative qui lui conférerait cette perversion de son propre message. Dans ce cas, le potentiel ironique, à cause de cette distribution des niveaux linguistiques comme médiation de représentation de classe dans le roman, où les langues ne sont pas intégrées par une forme véritablement dialogique, est ainsi mis en relief par l'instance énonciative qui les oppose à sa propre représentation.

■ Il n'empêche que le texte des *Nuits de l'Underground* est par ailleurs porteur d'autres possibilités de subversions de certains énoncés. Mais ces possibilités subversives sont de nature telle qu'elles ne peuvent, jusqu'à un certain point, empêcher un doute de s'installer, concernant l'univocité du message assumé par le discours lesbien, comme si tout à coup affleurait dans le texte un second degré de ce message. Ainsi, on sent poindre un soupçon à la lecture de ce qui apparaît comme la citation de certaines stéréotypies idéologiques, pré-formulées, posée dans la bouche de quelques personnages comme un accord absolu à la doxa du discours lesbien en même temps qu'il semble "glisser" vers les apparences d'un contre-discours à l'égard de cette doxa commune: "Ce qu'il faudrait, tu comprends, c'est pas seulement libérer les femmes gay de l'oppression du monde straight, mais libérer le monde straight de ses obsessions à notre sujet"

(140). Cette formulation chiasmatisée est trop brusquement démarquée par rapport à l'instance énonciative, laquelle au demeurant n'attaque jamais de front la question des politiques à mettre en oeuvre pour une libération de la communauté lesbienne, parce que justement le discours porté par cette instance énonciative est le discours central, acceptable, donc qui n'a pas à se justifier. Cet effet de "démarquage" teinté d'ironie lié à cet énoncé gnominique de la jeune militante désigne paradoxalement sa prise de position justement "militante" comme un contre-discours, non pas face à l'hétérosexualité, mais bien face au discours lesbien. Le retournement, le renvoi à la périphérie, est ici de taille: l'hégémonie est à ce point auto-suffisante, le discours lesbien absolument dominant, qu'il vide de contenu ce qui aurait pour fonction de le conforter. Ainsi "les contre-discours, privés par la nature des choses des *critérium* admis, d'assises doxiques, de langage propre, bricolent leurs cadres cognitifs, leurs moyens perlocutaires, persuasifs et leur esthétiques avec les moyens du bord et par des emprunts toujours abusifs et donc à quelques degrés ridicules; les contre-discours opèrent toujours dans la maladresse de l'illégitimité, de l'abus de langage."²⁰ On peut relever d'autres exemples d'autres énoncés "préconstruits" dans les discours directs des personnages, et mis à distance de même: "Elle attaquait d'une voix implacable «la faiblesse des femmes, leur servitude innée, leur docilité de victime»" (162). Si, dans ce dernier cas, la stéréotypie est clairement donnée à voir, distancée et ainsi écartée de l'énonciation principale, que penser par contre de cet autre passage, provenant de l'instance narrative: "Malgré tous les préjugés qui les entourent, des créatures nobles et indépendantes qu'on les appelle corps de lesbienne ou non, leur magnificence est de trahir..." (191). Mais, curieusement, ici, l'instance narrative reprend à son propre compte l'énoncé stéréotypé,²¹ en le dépouillant de la distance sans laquelle il ne peut se lire avec ironie. Le texte offre dans ce passage l'un des rares exemples de son énonciation où l'horizon lesbien n'est pas présenté comme précédant idéologiquement le récit, comme un donné doxique. On a l'impression que le texte "s'oublie" momentanément comme centre et cède à son contre-discours en devenant subitement dialogique, et présuppose en y répondant un discours hégémonique, dominant, qui le décentrerait. Les choses reviennent à leur paradoxal équilibre lors de la scène au bar de Léa, où les "mots" du groupe sont cette fois mis à distance et clairement séparés du premier niveau d'énonciation, et où la redondance, la répétition, contrastant par leur pauvreté stylistique avec la richesse de cette énonciation principale, frôle la

parodie d'un certain discours de l'exclusion et de l'enfermement explicitement périphérique et clairement "inadéquat":

...et elles encourageaient leurs soeurs à résister à l'affront des visiteurs, en psalmodiant avec elles:
 "On est si bien entre nous
 Toutes seules entre nous
 Sans hommes, on est trop bien entre nous
 Rentrez chez vous
 On est trop bien entre nous!". (182)

Tout se passe comme si le premier discours de l'énonciation du récit des *Nuits de l'Underground*, s'énonçant, comme on l'a vu, sous la métaphore de l'oeuvre d'art et assumant formellement une forte intertextualité authentiquement proustienne, "cédait" de façon intermittente au ton du discours lesbien renvoyant à un tout autre circuit culturel que celui désignant l'art et l'intellectualité comme code de lecture. Les exemples massifs de cette interdiscursivité proustienne sont trop manifestes pour ne pas créer de contraste significatif avec le discours répétitif et appauvri des clientes du bar de Simonet:

Lali n'était pas qu'une femme n'appartenant pas à la caste des femmes, mais elle était une femme aimant les femmes, et longtemps sa *race avait été condamnée*, longtemps sans le savoir elle avait expié, ainsi son rêve la dépassait elle-même pour rejoindre d'autres *prisonnières*, d'autres femmes-martyres qu'elle n'avait jamais connues. Là où d'autres *racés*, d'autres ethnies avaient subi la mutilation et la mort parce que, dans son instinct de perversité, la bassesse humaine avait élu ces *racés* et ces ethnies pour le *châtiment* dont, de tout temps, elle n'avait jamais su épargner les hommes, Lali apparaissait sur la terre sans être ni une race ni une ethnie, héritière d'une *nature et de goûts que la société dénonçait comme criminel*, mais si criminels et si honteux qu'elle daignait à peine les nommer, craignant peut-être qu'une épidémie de femmes comme Lali déferle sur le monde et le frappe de sa *jubilante stérilité*. Mais si tout en Lali demeurait, malgré cette atteinte, fraîcheur et innocence, elle ignorait qu'elle était de "celle dont on ne parle pas", dont il vaut mieux méconnaître *les habitudes et les vices, elle qui n'était pas un être d'habitudes et qui ne savait pas ce qu'était le vice*. On laissait Lali et ses soeurs à ce purgatoire où les âmes malades se débattent entre elles, où criminels, voleurs, lesbiennes *suicidés* mêlent leurs souffles fébriles, et *malédiction à ceux qui osaient descendre vers ces plaies cachées* et ramener à la surface de la terre, sous un soleil plus compatissant, *ces hommes, ces femmes qui vivaient comme tous les autres, sans être meilleurs ou pires, qui n'étaient que des autres hommes ou des autres femmes, les frères, les semblables, mais créés autrement du sein de la vie*, non seulement pour mieux souffrir (84)²²

Encore plus explicite de cette manifestation de l'énonciation comme signe culturel, est la référence suivante: "Elle imaginait ce passé de Françoise, et la fluidité de ce déluge d'images qu'elle ne pouvait pas atteindre ni capturer lui causait une méchante douleur, telle cette jalousie de Proust imaginant les infidélités d'Albertine, auprès de la constellation d'amies." (208). En fait, l'intertextualité directement exprimée ici ne se pose nullement comme étrangère au discours de l'énonciation narrative, elle n'est pas en opposition avec lui: bien au contraire, le référent intertextuel proustien joue le même rôle que l'analogie constante avec l'art, fonctionnant interdiscursivement comme signe de l'intellectualité portée à la fois par le narrateur et par Geneviève, focalisatrice principale du récit. Ainsi, cette intertextualité spécifique n'est pas la marque ici de ce que Ross Chambers a désigné comme le moyen par lequel le "discours littéraire manifeste son opposition au discours social,"²³ mais plutôt le signe d'une coïncidence entre discours littéraire et discours social dominant, où l'intertexte désigné est le rapport d'identité avec un texte lui aussi littérairement dominant, incontestable, et dont les assises institutionnelles ne sont pas ébranlées par l'ironie dialogique. La référence à Proust, comme la référence à l'art, confère une légitimité de plus à l'instance narrative qui pourra continuer à instaurer ses catégorisations sociales selon la distance à cette légitimité.

Si, comme on l'a vu, l'énonciation narrative prend peu, sinon jamais en charge, les autres discours propres à d'autres lieux sociaux, les dichotomisant en soulignant la distanciation prise par rapport à eux, il n'empêche que cette distance ne traduit toujours pas une mise à l'écart absolue. La fréquence des citations de discours direct est à cet égard éloquente, comme si la narration restait quand même obsédée par un type de différence sociale qu'elle ne veut pourtant réduire par le biais du discours indirect, ni même opposer à une intertextualité, parce que justement l'intertextualisation, en l'intégrant pourrait paradoxalement lui enlever de son acuité, la "soumettre" en quelque sorte au fil général du discours des *Nuits de l'Underground*.

Cette question de l'insoumission des discours périphériques, nous ramène à la nécessité d'interroger plus avant la manifestation la plus singulière et la plus "obsessive" en quelque sorte du discours social porté par *Les Nuits de l'Underground*. On a relevé auparavant que l'incipit instaurait sans conteste le principe de surcodification, par discours direct, de l'appartenance à un milieu socio-économique inférieur. Dès lors, il est loin d'être négligeable de

constater que le personnage de René s'affirme comme l'énonciatrice principale de ce discours de l'exclusion par la différence économique. Faut-il mettre cette donnée en parallèle avec le fait que René est aussi un personnage prestigieux aux yeux de Geneviève puisqu'elle est l'amie de Lali et celle qui, parmi le groupe qui fréquente l'Underground, paraît bénéficier d'une autorité naturelle qui confère à ses énoncés une valeur particulière, confirmée actantiellement, puisque seule René peut directement s'adresser à Lali, parfaite incarnation de "l'être de fuite" proustien.

—T'as qu'à lâcher ça, brother, t'as qu'à lâcher, regarde, moi j'ai trouvé une autre vocation... Il n'est jamais trop tard...

—But you are always poor, René, I hate to be poor! (77)

—Men, always men, it is too unfair, répondait Lali avec amertume.

—Te plains pas d'eux, Lali, dit René, ils nous comprennent parfois mieux que les femmes, ils sont brutaux mais ils sont désintéressés aussi des fois...

—You, poor innocent soul, dit Lali en riant. (78)

René bénéficie donc d'un privilège exclusif, celui d'évaluer, de juger, et d'enfermer dans son discours l'ineffable Lali, elle-même. C'est à elle aussi que revient, contre le discours cosmopolite de l'énonciation narrative, de signaler—et peut-être de désapprouver—l'aliénation de Geneviève par rapport à ses propres origines.

—Nous autres, on va te sortir, dit René, ah! ces petites Canadiennes à Paris, c'est pire que des bonnes soeurs." (86)

Cette autorité, découlant partiellement du ton assertif de René, jointe à sa fonction actantielle, défait ses paroles de cette dimension documentaire conférée à d'autres énonciations socialement marquées, qui les désigne comme périphériques et donc "inadéquates". Si bien que lorsque René associe dans son propre discours des réflexions sur sa vie sexuelle et des considérations sur sa condition économique ("You are always poor"), cette relation ainsi établie prend un autre relief, et cesse d'être proprement décentrée:

Christ, Léa, je l'aimais tellement cette femme-là. Je voudrais bien aller casser la gueule à son bonhomme en Suède ou je ne sais pas dans quel pays barbare. Et tu comprends, Léa, quand tu poinçonnes chaque matin à neuf heures, dans une usine, ça te rabaisse, ma fille, ça te rabaisse, et c'est tout juste si je peux me payer une bouteille de vin sapristi!" (166)

Le discours de René, son énonciation individuellement marquée,

représente bien la stéréotypie du discours du dépit amoureux, de la jalousie, immédiatement associé, mais presque par parataxe, à l'expression de l'aliénation causée par des conditions économiques difficiles. On sent surtout cette conscience claire d'être disqualifiée socialement par cette "exploitation", ("ça te rabaisse"), qui s'oppose au fait que l'appartenance à une communauté sexuelle n'est pas énoncée par René comme une anomalie comme une hétéronomie qui s'opposerait à ce qui est acceptable. Au contraire, en ce qui a trait à la sphère sexuelle, René considère sa vie homosexuelle comme allant de soi, comme étant une norme qui ne s'oppose en rien à autre chose et qui ne se vit pas comme non-conforme, ce qui lui permet ces innombrables énoncés doxiques qui s'en tiennent à des généralisations qui tendent parfois à l'expression parfois presque "machiste" du sens commun:

Il faut que je fasse ton éducation, toi mon universitaire, avoir tant de diplômes puis si peu savoir de la vie, tu me fais pitié, dégrafe au moins ton chemisier que je vois tes seins, tu ne peux pas en avoir honte, ils sont magnifiques...

—Cela non plus, vois-tu, je n'en avais pas l'habitude avant toi, René.

—Tout s'apprend et se comprend, tu verras." (89)

Il n'empêche, une fois de plus, que dans l'énonciation de René, l'homosexualité donnée comme norme (et coïncidant donc avec l'énonciation narrative, ce qui la rend "adéquate") est fréquemment liée au conditionnement économique qui semble peser beaucoup plus sur les agents secondaires du roman, et qu'il est signifiant que Geneviève et Lali soient relativement libérées de toute contrainte financière. En fait, René semble avoir comme fonction dans le texte d'achever de dépouiller le lesbianisme de son caractère dissident, en le légitimant dans la doxa. Mais en même temps, toujours dans son discours à elle, jamais intégré par l'autorité énonciative, il lui est imparti d'insister à contre-discours sur un autre type de marginalisation, cette fois de nature précisément économique. Ainsi, la légitimation par l'Art, par l'intellectualité ou par le cosmopolitisme, ne rejeterait dans leur périphérie la réalité de la marginalisation et de l'aliénation faute de capital économique que pour mieux la faire ressortir. En fait, dans les *Nuits de l'Underground*, les conflits discursifs sont graduellement déplacés, passant du sexuel au social, ce qui, on le voit bien, confirme dans une autre perspective la question du discours social propre au roman, dans cette volonté qu'il a de présenter les catégorisations économiques sans d'abord chercher à les réduire.

Cependant avec le personnage de Françoise, la dernière liaison de Geneviève, que la question de l'exploitation sociale et économique se dégage avec une acuité encore plus marquée, comme si en fin de course narrative, le texte en devenait de plus en plus obnubilé.

Cette succession de "jours gris" dont Françoise venait d'évoquer l'ombre pesante, cette ombre du labeur qui allait incliner tant de fronts, du matin au soir, dans les usines, tous ces lieux de l'esclavage citadin vers lesquels marchaient déjà une multitude d'hommes et de femmes, en quelques heures, les autobus, le métro, allaient emprisonner cette foule... (225)

Mais ici, on doit constater la coïncidence de ton entre le langage propre à l'instance narrative et la langue de Françoise qui la désigne comme n'appartenant pas à la même classe sociale que René en dépit pourtant de l'identité de leurs discours, puisqu'elles ont tout particulièrement en commun un certain didactisme à l'égard de Geneviève:

Tu sais, ce magasin devant lequel nous passions l'autre jour, dans le Quartier Latin, j'y ai connu là mes premières humiliations, mes premiers affronts à la fierté...

Il ne faut pas connaître cela, mon petit, car après avoir connu l'abaissement, on ne peut plus avoir confiance dans la vie... Vois-tu, si j'avais su autrefois quand j'avais tant de domestiques dans ma maison, combien il est terrible d'être dominée, traitée de façon inférieure" (225).

Mon Dieu, je serai en retard et on me fera encore des reproches, pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas réveillée? (228).

L'homogénéité des langages a-t-elle ici pour effet d'atténuer la disparité des discours et de légitimer un peu plus la parole propre à la marginalité économique? Du moins, si on compare à l'aliénation dont René se dit être la victime cette aliénation vécue et nommée par Françoise "paraît" moins objectivée, moins mise à distance dans le texte, en ce qu'elle partage le même langage que l'instance énonciatrice. De même, cette apparence monovocale s'accompagne d'une plus grande cession narrative dans le texte: le discours direct de Françoise est quantitativement plus important que celui concédé à René, comme si l'instance narrative cédait effectivement devant lui. Est-ce à dire qu'avec la même teneur de discours social, le narrateur "reconnaît" un langage plus qu'un autre? Car on ne saurait nier que les réflexions sur le déclassé social se précisent et s'articulent avec plus d'ampleur avec l'apparition du personnage de Françoise, faisant d'elle la principale voix de ce discours qui envahit le texte, et qui contamine l'instance narrative elle-

même “...et qui balayé comme une poussière par la condition qu’impose la pauvreté...” (223). Doit-on lire dans cette adhésion plus marquée au discours du personnage comme un signe supplémentaire du ton global de l’énonciation? Mais, paradoxalement, on a relevé qu’ailleurs dans le texte l’instance énonciative refuse de se joindre en terme d’intertextualité à cette “représentation objectivée” de la déclassée économique, préférant cet autre signe classifiant qu’est le référent proustien.

Cependant, mise à part cette communauté énonciative entre Françoise et le narrateur, le texte entier des *Nuits de l’Underground* est non pas tant hanté, ni tant travaillé par cet Autre social, et économique, que directement confronté à lui, dans l’impossibilité ou le refus de le saisir dans son propre discours, en même temps qu’il accuse l’obligation de le “donner à voir,” même—et surtout—en s’en séparant. J’ai une fois de plus recours à Harel pour désigner ce “modèle représentatif où la perception de l’Autre est conditionnée par une mise à distance... (où)... l’énonciation de l’Autre supposerait l’extériorité d’un sujet énonçant qui en détermine les propriétés de l’étranger.”²⁴

Mais, autre paradoxe, loin d’être un étranger, l’Autre est plutôt dans *Les Nuits de l’Underground*, le même, un représentant du lieu d’origine (appelé Canadienne-Française) mais séparé, marginalisé, par son appartenance socio-économique et culturelle. L’énonciateur donne le lieu lesbien comme le *centre* de son énonciation, fortement monologique à cet égard, et place plutôt la question de l’hétérogénéité sociale dans la périphérie de son discours qui ne cesse de s’autodésigner. Toutefois, loin d’être rejeté par le discours central, celui qui pose (à peu près constamment) le lesbianisme comme la donnée discursive fondamentale ne peut pas annuler cette véritable altérité que constitue une catégorisation spécifique consécutive à une appartenance socio-économique et culturelle différente. Le plurilinguisme marquant presque immédiatement le début du roman, peut être l’indice dans ce qu’il représente à l’intérieur de sa propre représentation (*On n’est pas assez intéressante pour elle*), de l’irréductibilité inhérente, donc de l’impossible renversement ou déstabilisation des différences sociales. En définitive, seule peut l’exprimer Françoise qui partage le discours culturel, le langage de l’instance énonciatrice, pour qui la différence sociale, le déclassément économique ne semble trouver une compensation que dans la communauté du discours.

Dès lors, ce commentaire de Gilles Marcotte, paru dès la publication des

Nuits de l'Underground, paraît bien résumer la problématique de la représentation des discours sociaux dans le roman.

Geneviève ne déclare-t-elle pas... que la vie, cette vie imparfaite, la vie limitée, l'emporte sur tous les prestiges de l'Art?²⁵ Cette préférence, je crois la retrouver, de plus en plus marquée, dans l'oeuvre de Marie-Claire Blais depuis *Une Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*. L'ambiguïté, l'ironie dévastatrice qui faisait le prix de ce très singulier roman s'estompent à partir d'une vision du monde plus univoque axée sur les exigences d'une morale à inventer.²⁶

Cette univocité, que je traduis par monologisme, ne cédant la place à un certain plurilinguisme que par intermittence, me paraît être équivoque pour la compréhension des discours sociaux des *Nuits de l'Underground*. Équivoque parce que le texte installe son discours dans une hétérogénéité sexuelle qui devient sa norme qu'il conforte sans cesse. S'il cède parfois à de brefs accès ironiques, ces derniers sont vite annulés par des énoncés gnominiques qui renforcent la doxa lesbienne, de sorte que l'ironie, fuse-t-elle du dedans du discours, ne peut entamer véritablement la stabilité discursive. Et surtout, cette univocité ne peut que réinstaller ses hiérarchies discursives, ne peut que mettre en évidence des hiérarchies sociales comme le souligne la narration elle-même: "Tout un cortège de femmes appartenant à la communauté homosexuelle (*et de là à la communauté humaine, marquée des mêmes universelles différences*)..." (180). La mise entre parenthèses des "différences" ne peut-elle pas se lire comme l'inscription de cette irréductibilité de la question des classes, dont aucune intertextualité dans *Les Nuits de l'Underground* ne vient réellement en ébranler l'autorité. Pas plus que l'intellectualité ou le référent artistique, le cosmopolitisme représenté dans le récit, s'il relativise le texte québécois, se révèle par contre inefficace à "pulvériser" les données de classe, les catégorisations socio-économiques qui, seuls véritables éléments hétérogènes du récit, confirment dans leur périphérie celles qui ne "sont pas assez intéressantes." Comme le dit Harel encore: "En somme, la perception du cosmopolitisme comme un facteur d'intégration, de réunification, soucieux de la fusion des différences universelles, (me) semble courir à l'échec si ne sont pas analysés plus avant les motifs de la constitution sociale de cette altérité, et au premier chef leur représentation discursive."²⁷

Les Nuits de l'Underground semblent illustrer une certaine perversion de cette donnée: l'intertexte artistique et le discours du cosmopolitisme n'examinent plus les paradigmes de la création de leur altérité, peut-être

parce qu'ils se heurtent à un autre type d'altérité plus fondamental. Cette altérité est plus déterminante dans la création des différences: elle est celle produite par le fait que les hiérarchies sociales et économiques maintiennent davantage les sujets à distance, éloignés irrémédiablement du centre. En contrepartie, les différences qui peuvent construire et faire reconnaître leur discours, la différence culturelle, la différence identitaire, la différence sexuelle, restent, du seul fait de la reconnaissance de leur même discours, hégémonique. Simplement, la prescience des *Nuits de l'Underground* c'est de représenter cette hégémonie comme partielle, en se refusant à la subsumation illusoire du discours du pauvre, qui reste certes entre parenthèses, mais qui n'est pas aboli. Car intégrer ce discours démuné, le priver de son intégrité par l'interdiscursivité toujours ironique, n'est-ce pas aussi vouloir se détourner un peu plus de cette réalité parce qu'on se détourne un peu plus de ses mots. C'est là ce à quoi *Les Nuits de l'Underground* n'a pas voulu se résigner, malgré l'énorme pression discursive et sociale qui le poussait à aussi assumer, dans sa représentation, le pouvoir incontournable des hiérarchies de toutes natures.

NOTES

- ¹ Simon Harel, *Le voleur de parcours, La tentation du cosmopolitisme en littérature québécoise*, Le Préambule, Montréal, L'Univers des discours, 1989, 33.
- ² Lucien Goldman, "Notes sur deux romans de Marie-Claire Blais" in *Structures mentales et création culturelle*, Paris:Anthropos, UGE, 1970.
- ³ Henri Mitterand, "Coup de fusil dans un concert: Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel," *Voix et Images* 8.2 (hiver 1983): 191-210.
- ⁴ Jozef Kwaterko, "*Le roman québécois de 1960 à 1975 Idéologie et représentation littéraire*." Collection *L'Univers des discours*. Montréal: Le Préambule, 1989.
- ⁵ Elaine Cliche, "Un rituel de l'avidité," *V et I* 8.2 (Hiver 1983): 242.
- ⁶ Voir Marc Angenot, "Réflexions sur les périphéries du discours social en 1889," *Études Littéraires* 22.2 (Automne 1989) : 13.
- ⁷ Simon Harel, "*Le Voleur de Parcours*" *Identité et cosmopolitisme dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine*. Collection l'Univers des discours, Le Préambule, 1989.
- ⁸ *Le Voleur de Parcours*, 41.
- ⁹ Voir au sujet du thème de l'Art, l'article de Marie Couillard, "L'Art pictural dans les derniers romans de Marie-Claire Blais," *Canadian Literature* 113-114 (Summer-Fall 1987) : 268.

- ¹⁰ Les italiques sont de moi.
- ¹¹ Couillard, “A titre d’information, la reproduction du tableau nous renseigne sur la société de la matière romanesque.” Cette donnée se présente sous deux aspects complémentaires: sa socialité et son esthétisme. Tout d’abord ce “par quoi le roman s’affirme lui-même comme société et produit lui-même ses conditions de lisibilité sociale.” Et ensuite en ce qui a trait à la valeur, Rouillard dit que “comme valeur, le tableau-objet d’art atteint “la plénitude de son statut esthétique en basculant dans l’espace romanesque”. In *Canadian Literature*, 270-271.
- ¹² Couillard 270.
- ¹³ Couillard 270.
- ¹⁴ Je renvoie ici à Sherry Simons commentant Fernand Dumont: “La distinction qu’établit Fernand Dumont (1968) entre la culture première (la matière première de la vie en société) et la culture seconde (les mécanismes de prise de distance par rapport à cette réalité) est une reconnaissance explicite de la dualité inhérente à la plupart des définitions de la culture” in *Fictions de l’identitaire au Québec*, Édition XYZ, 1992, p.18. Il est clair que l’analogie avec l’Art, récurrente dans tout le texte des *Nuits de l’Underground*, renvoie à la conception de la culture comme “mécanisme de prise de distance.”
- ¹⁵ “Espaces incertains de la culture” in *Fictions de l’identitaire au Québec*, 19.
- ¹⁶ Bourdieu, *La distinction*, L’habitus et l’espace des styles de vie.
- ¹⁷ Les italiques sont de moi.
- ¹⁸ Kwaterko, *L’Inscription du littéraire dans le roman québécois*, 209.
- ¹⁹ Angenot, 22.
- ²⁰ Angenot, 22-23.
- ²¹ Ou peut-être cette stéréotypie n’est-elle plus en fait qu’un effet de lecture, le référent “préjugés” s’étant connoté culturellement, en raison notamment, pour un lecteur des années 90, de la montée du mouvement “politically correct” et des critiques qu’il encourt.
- ²² Tout lecteur de Proust devrait reconnaître ici une réécriture condensée de l’ouverture de *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. Les italiques sont de moi.
- ²³ Ross Chambers, “Répétition et ironie” in *Mélancolie et Opposition*, 195.
- ²⁴ *Le Voleur de Parcours*, 47.
- ²⁵ Assertion qui ne lie nullement le rôle de l’Art comme signe du texte, comme l’a démontré Couillard. Je vois cette affirmation de Marcotte comme une synthèse de la fabula qui ne prendrait pas en compte l’énonciation textuelle proprement dite.
- ²⁶ Gilles Marcotte, “Une saison dans la vie de Geneviève Aurès”, critique parue dans *Le Devoir*, 25 mars 1978, 35. Les italiques sont de moi.
- ²⁷ *Le Voleur de Parcours*, 41.

A Vision

Once upon a time,
her keratectomy was deemed
a success.
“Sheer wizardry,”
jubilated the surgeon
of his masterpiece.
He exulted:
When the bandages
were unswathed,
when the work of anatomical art
was unswaddled,
the formerly myopic woman would see
wholly
as she last had
when a child of six.

It came to pass:
the bandages were removed.
Even as he had promised,
it was like a fairytale.

She well remembered one story.
The wizard had
a castle
with windows of
several colours.
Opal blue.
Carmine red.
Slate grey.
Inky black.
Some appeared clear,
but shimmered with small silver
haloes around the casements.
How she had longed to live there.

But now,
the castle is her
head.
She must look
out of all
windows
simultaneously.

The shade hurts.
The sun hurts.
A passing robin is
edged in blue.
A migraine aura
colours her always vision.

The fairy tale has fractured into
the nightmare reality of
the woman with Kaleidoscope eyes.
She wants to hood herself in
the blank, pure, seeing pages before
once upon a time.

“The Missionary Position”

Feminism and Nationalism in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*

When Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* was published in 1985 it was to an almost unanimous adulation. The novel won Atwood her second Canadian Governor-General’s Award, and won her equally distinguished, and laudatory, reviews by some of North America’s foremost feminist scholars.¹ Published at a moment when the American Religious Right had become a particular focus for American feminists, Atwood’s prophecy of gender fascism was accepted pretty much unconditionally as an admirable banner of liberal feminist insurgency. Since the mid-1980s, however, presumably as a result of certain gains in historical perspective, many readers of Atwood’s novel have, I think justly, questioned its character as a feminist critique. Why, for instance, does Atwood choose to resolve her drama of women’s oppression by implementing a paradigm of female romance, such that the telos of the heroine’s journey becomes her introduction to Mr Right? How are we to read the heroine’s barely ironized longings for hand lotion and old copies of *Vogue* when the novel provides these as symbols of women’s former freedom? More important, and more troubling, what are we to make of Atwood’s seeming refusal of a politics of emancipation? How do we interpret her apparently uncritical endorsement of the self-protective passivity of her heroine? For the critics who ask these questions *The Handmaid’s Tale* is less a critique of androcentric political structures than a consolatory instruction on ways of “making do.”

I want to begin my own reading of *The Handmaid’s Tale* by stating that, in essence, I agree with this position. For a novel so overtly offered as a piece

of feminist doctrine, *The Handmaid's Tale* delivers a curiously, and, for Atwood, an unwontedly, conservative interpretation of women's exemplary social actions, advocating what looks more like traditional femininity than an insurgent feminism. But I also want to propose that this conservatism is, in fact, politically motivated, not by Atwood's feminism in this case but by her nationalism. Although *The Handmaid's Tale* is not generally regarded as part of Atwood's nationalist canon, its understanding of female independence is nevertheless determined by Atwood's sexually coded understanding of the relation between Canada and America. In this, Atwood's only full-scale parody of American society, what concerns her is not a feminist politics of emancipation, but the nationalist politics of self-protective autonomy, an autonomy which, as I will argue, eventually translates into an advocacy of traditional femininity.

In Atwood's career-long promotion of Canada's cultural autonomy from the United States, national and gender issues have had for her a commensurate and almost interchangeable status. Her 1972 novel *Surfacing* overtly identified the "rape" of the Canadian wilderness by American investors and tourists with the abuse of the female narrator's body by men. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, published in the same year, indirectly elaborated this identification of Canada and victimized womanhood into an explication of the essential Canadian identity as that of "the exploited victim" (35, 36). Although *Survival* did not venture expressly to characterize Canada's victimhood as feminine, Atwood's commentary since suggests the extent to which this notion of victimhood was for her a feminine construct. In a 1987 essay that strongly opposed the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, an agreement regarded by many Canadians as the beginning of the end of Canada's cultural autonomy, Atwood told her readers: "Canada as a separate but dominated country has done about as well under the U.S. as women, worldwide, have done under men; about the only position they've ever adopted toward us, country to country, has been the missionary position, and we were not on top" ("...only position" 20).²

While *The Handmaid's Tale* was a departure for Atwood in that it took up feminist issues to the exclusion of themes focusing on Canadian culture, her collapse of national and gender categories would, under any circumstances, make a consideration of her nationalism relevant to her feminist readings of contemporary culture. However, more than this, *The Handmaid's Tale* is not simply a non-Canadian novel, it is, as Catherine Stimpson emphasizes

(764), Atwood's first foray into an extended representation of America.³ Its story of gender oppression is situated within the object of Atwood's nationalist antipathy and the roles given both to America and to the novel's heroine are familiar: America is posed here, once again, as the male aggressor, its masculinist qualities literalized in the Gileadean patriarchy (which has, incidentally, mandated the missionary position); the heroine, to borrow a term from *Survival*, is the "exploited victim." If the geographical partition in *Surfacing*, the dotted membrane separating Canada from America, is not a central issue in *The Handmaid's Tale*, it nevertheless survives as a psychic and bodily construct, a membrane preserving the "victim" from total capitulation to the "victor." And accordingly, what Atwood defines as the optimum political response of her subjugated heroine is not a politics of liberation, if we understand such a politics to entail an active resistance to oppressive power, but a form of border patrol, a strategy of protectionism not unlike what she advocates for the survival of Canada's cultural autonomy: "good fences," as she puts it, "make good neighbours" ("Canadian-American" 392).

When Atwood's heroine Offred contemplates the power of the Patriarchal Republic of Gilead she understands it as a form of domination that wants to abolish borders, that has no limits:

"This is the heart of Gilead, where the war cannot intrude except on television. Where the edges are we aren't sure, they vary, according to the attacks and counterattacks; but this is the centre, where nothing moves. The Republic of Gilead, said Aunt Lydia, knows no bounds. Gilead is within you" (33).

Moving borders from continental to internal spaces and replacing colonization with indoctrination, Atwood goes on to define her heroine's response as a necessary preoccupation with the protection of her personal integrity—what Atwood in *Survival* terms "spiritual survival, . . . life as anything more than a minimally human being" (33). Stating at the start of the novel that she "intends to last" (17), Offred proposes to live outside of Gilead's amorphous discursive borders in a space of the self which its doctrines have yet to chart. She looks back to the days when "We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. / We lived in the gaps between the stories" (66-7). Throughout the novel these empty, unwritten spaces are posed as sites of escape. There is first of all the blank space, surrounded by a plaster wreath, "a frozen halo, a zero," in the ceiling of Offred's

bedroom where the chandelier has been removed, which offers the ultimate escape of self-annihilation: "Draw a circle, step into it, it will protect you" (223).⁴ There is the hole in the washroom wall at the Centre where Offred touches Moira's fingers and hears of her plans to escape the Aunts (100). "The Canadian experience," Atwood once said, is "a circumference with no centre, the American one a centre which [is] mistaken for the whole thing" ("Canadian-American" 379). What counts as survival in the face of this appropriating wholeness is the integrity of the unscripted voids, one of which is Offred's real name:

My name isn't Offred. I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginably distant past (94).

Unmentioned and surrounded by its aura, another border, Offred's identity is protected from appropriation. That the evasion of naming is paradoxically a form of self-affirmation is made clear in what Offred says about rhetorical strategies of evasion generally: their purpose is "to keep the core of yourself out of reach, enclosed, protected" (274).

The degree of Atwood's investment in such strategies of self-protection is suggested by the fact that moments of crisis and horror in this novel are organized around threats to the internal and bodily membranes surrounding the uncharted space of the self. Of course, within Gilead's gendered economy of power, sexual penetration is the most obvious manifestation of threat, and appropriately, the Commander's penis, to which Offred must open herself once a month, is described not only as an invasive instrument but as a "delicate stalked slug's eye," "avid for vision," attempting to read a "darkness" (98)—that blank of personal plenitude. When Offred and her husband Luke drive north in a desperate last-minute attempt to get over the borders of Gilead, Atwood describes Offred's fear of discovery as a fear of being penetrated, and of being read: "I feel transparent," she says. "Surely they will be able to see through me" (95). It is appropriate, given Atwood's investment in blankness as a site of identity, that when Offred finally does move into a territory potentially free of Gileadean penetration, her narrative stops, thus literalizing the association of emptiness, of what might in other Atwood works be called wilderness, with spiritual survival.⁵

Atwood's representation of her heroine as a special space or territory to be protected is perfectly consonant with her long-standing identification of the missionary position with America's missionary tradition of cultural and economic infiltration. Yet whether this use of nationalist models is entirely commensurate with the liberal feminist assumptions she calls upon to provoke her reader's outrage is another question. The problems critics have with *The Handmaid's Tale* focus precisely on the discrepancy between its overt invocation of feminist outrage and the heroine's self-protective avoidance of any form of political interaction with her circumstances. Glenn Deer, for example, remarks that Atwood "seems to privilege the female existential will, the realm of private consciousness, as an adequate recompense for... enslavement" (229). And Barbara Ehrenreich points out: "Offred cries a lot and lives in fear of finding her erstwhile husband hanging from a hook on the wall, but when she is finally contacted by the resistance, she is curiously uninterested. She has sunk too far into the incestuous little household she serves—just as the reader, not without intermittent spasms of resistance, sinks into the deepening masochism of her tale" (34). Ehrenreich, in fact, pinpoints a crucial problem. Atwood's internalization of a nationalist political paradigm produces a heroine whose sole resistance goes on inside her head, a resistance at once indistinguishable from passivity and masochism and uncomfortably synonymous with traditional stereotypes of feminine behaviour. It would be fairly easy to conclude that this incongruousness is simply an accident produced in the collapse of incompatible paradigms—that feminism, which historically has been based on a politics of liberation, is simply not synonymous with Atwood's notions of cultural autonomy and that, in assuming their interchangeability, she comes up with what her readers regard as a dubious response to "enslavement." Yet Atwood's politics of autonomy are more complicated than this suggests. If Offred's self-protectiveness is produced by Atwood's nationalist idea of the relationship between victim and victor, it also duplicates and fortifies this novel's generic idiosyncracies, anchoring Atwood's formal choices in the heroine's efforts to maintain her integrity and suggesting that Atwood places herself as a colonial writer in the same victim category that she places her heroine. And here we have the second big problem critics have with this novel. What Atwood chooses as a colonial writer, what she lights upon to signify her own integrity, is not the political and anthropological density of feminist dystopian fiction but the highly formulaic fluff of

popular female romance, the genre whose paradigms finally ground Atwood's formulation of colonial autonomy.

It is important to underline, first of all, Atwood's sheer reliance on the contrivances of women's junk fiction to structure the plot of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Like her prototypes in bodice-rippers and costume gothics, Offred is the innocent heroine who finds herself imprisoned in a menacing world over which she has no power, and indeed seeks to gain none for fear of compromising her womanly integrity. She falls in love with a man—in this case Nick the chauffeur—who is an attractive, ambiguous figure, stereotypically characterized by his roguish cynicism, his silence and his ability to melt the heroine with his ways in bed. Although like all of his strong and silent brethren, Nick initially seems to be part of the atmosphere of evil—he may, for instance, be a spy for Gilead—the heroine nonetheless trusts to feminine instinct and surrenders herself to him completely. For this leap of faith she is, of course, amply rewarded. The ambiguous lover turns out to be her saviour, the knight who rescues her from the menace—who, in this case, smuggles her out of the heart of Gilead into a space of relative freedom where she is at least able to articulate her story.⁶

The Handmaid's Tale recapitulates the plot of a romance; but more than this, Atwood thematizes romance conventions themselves as agents of women's resistance and autonomy. Given that the "blank" space of the victim's autonomous self is framed as an essentially discursive territory, one whose scrawl the imperial order is incapable of deciphering, Atwood's particular thematization of romance conventions suggests that these form the cryptic writing on the victim's unreadable void. For Offred romance conventions provide the scripture that allows her to counter Gilead with a defense of hope. It is her belief in the fairytale narrative of the damsel rescued by her prince that both encourages Offred's self-protectiveness and saves her from capitulation. She says of her husband Luke: "I must have patience: sooner or later he will get me out... Meanwhile I must endure, keep myself safe for later" (116). Likewise, what Offred wants from the renegade Moira, another source of hope, is "gallantry... swashbuckling, heroism, singlehanded combat" (261). The very trappings of costume gothic, namely its costumes, its feminine trinkets and adornments, are posed as subversive alternatives to Gilead's institution of plainness and uniformity, so that Offred, catching sight of a group of Japanese tourists, notes the women's clothes, their short skirts and thin stockings and high heels, and

says to herself: “I used to dress like that. That was freedom” (38). In some of Atwood’s other novels, in *Lady Oracle*, for instance, in which the narrator is actually writing a costume gothic, romance conventions function as the objects of parody and critique. They are things to be escaped, both by the heroine and by Atwood herself as a writer. But in *The Handmaid’s Tale* romance conventions are presented as the *instruments* of escape, as much for Atwood as for the heroine. Indeed, the degree of Atwood’s investment in romance paradigms as emancipatory structures is underlined by the fact that she does not—whether for her characters, her reader or herself—offer a way out of Gilead except through them. Moira, who engages in a tangible campaign of subversion and struggle, ends her days still imprisoned. Offred, who sits in her ersatz tower at the top of the Commander’s house looking constantly out her window, is rescued by her hero.

Not unexpectedly, Atwood’s critics view her reliance on popular female romance as an abysmal political lapse, one that is at least as glaring as the heroine’s passive acceptance of enslavement. Chinmoy Banerjee argues that Atwood’s invocation of costume gothic is there to dissolve feminist critique and to facilitate for the reader a soft commercialist consumption and enjoyment (90). Similarly, reading through what he regards as Atwood’s obfuscations of history, Jamie Dopp concludes: “The Handmaid’s desire for a man seems a part of the unchanging order of things, another emblem for the determination of political relations by sexual instincts and for the hopelessness of women’s struggle” (263).⁷ But if, as my own argument suggests, Atwood’s endorsement of the romance is motivated by the same strategies of “survival” that determine her heroine’s passivity—if Atwood, in other words, is cloaking a critique of Canada’s victimization within the folds of the apparently complicitous costume romance, perhaps we should take a closer look at precisely what costume that romance is sporting.

Although the Republic of Gilead is generally accepted as an incarnation of the burgeoning American fundamentalism of the early 1980s, Atwood herself made a point of stressing that Gilead was in fact inspired by her studies in American literature and history. When asked by one interviewer whether *The Handmaid’s Tale* takes place in “some amorphous Boston,” Atwood responded:

Not amorphous. It’s enormously concrete. The Wall is the wall around Harvard yard. All those little shops and stores mentioned are probably there at this very

minute. I lived in Boston for four years. It's also the land of my ancestors. They were people who left New England in 1775-1783, during the revolution and went to Nova Scotia. They were Puritans of the 1630-1635 immigration. They are all still in the Salem genealogical library. They are those people in the dour, black, strait-laced pictures that appear in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The book is dedicated to Perry Miller who was one of my teachers at Harvard who wrote *American Puritans* [sic].... And the other dedication is to Mary Webster, who is one of my ancestors who was hanged as a witch. She's the witch who didn't die. They hadn't invented the drop then, so your neck didn't get broken.... She must have had a very sinewy neck and didn't die. Under the law of double jeopardy they couldn't execute her again. So there she was living away ("There's nothing," 67).

Several readers of this novel, including Cathy Davidson (26) and Alden Turner, have commented on Atwood's invocation of the American Puritan tradition in her representation of Gilead. But what Atwood is invoking more specifically—in her reference to Miller, in her reference to Harvard, in her emphasis on a Puritan fear of women's sexuality, and even in Gilead's branding of the Handmaids in *scarlet*, though the actual letter is missing—is not just the persistence of a puritan strain in modern American culture but a tradition of American studies that celebrates Puritan intransigence as quintessentially representative of the American spirit. When Atwood was Miller's pupil at Harvard in the early 1960s, Americanists such as Richard Chase, Harry Levin, and Leslie Fiedler were busy transforming Miller's studies of the Puritans into *the* measure of authenticity in American writing. If Atwood was not herself a student of American literature, the efforts of these critics to define a national literary character were influential enough to inspire her to undertake a similar project for Canada and write *Survival* ("Canadian-American" 382-84).

Atwood's exposure to 1950s and 1960s Puritan Studies provides her with the means to parody American culture. Aiming her attack at Americanist academics, Atwood holds up for condemnation their own most cherished national ideals: their approving construction of an uncompromising American spirit with its "tragic vision," its deep affection for allegory, for Manichean conflict and moral absolutism, and, above all perhaps, its iconoclastic reinventions of the social order. At the same time, Atwood's exposure to Puritan Studies arms her with a very neat, very precise definition of what constitutes the un-American mind. For the coterie of all-male critics writing during the 1950s and concerned to invest their national culture with a certain "toughness" and manly rigour, the one unequivocal un-American territory, the swamp which none of them could bring themselves to claim

or settle under the national flag, was the morass of women's popular fiction—what Ann Douglas, another student of Perry Miller, would eventually term “the sentimental heresy” (11). As later feminist critics were quick to point out, Puritan Studies scholars, having defined the American spirit as one distinguished by “an absolute refusal to give the feminine principle its due” (Fiedler 29), went on to erase women's fiction from the “genuinely” American literary history which they themselves were engaged in constructing.⁸ And this, I would suggest, accounts for Atwood's commitment to the trashy feminine world of love and romance. Identifying autonomy as a discursive space, an illegible void within the victim's self, Atwood locates the site of resistance and the means of struggle—for her heroine, for herself and for her country—in a language America had not equipped itself to read.⁹

It is thus no surprise to find in the concluding “Historical Notes” to *The Handmaid's Tale* that at centre stage is a male academic, a historian like Miller, who finds himself unable to read the essential content of Offred's story. Professor Pieixoto's appearance at the end of the novel as an expert on the now long-extinct Republic of Gilead fixes Gilead itself as an academically-inspired construct, flanked by Miller at the beginning of the book and Professor Pieixoto's at the end. As Arnold Davidson notes, Atwood's epilogue “loops back through the text that precedes it to suggest that the ways in which scholars (present as well as future) assemble the text of the past confirms the present and thereby helps to predict the future” (115). And presumably, just as the text of the Puritan past read by Perry Miller foreshadows and inspires an American Gilead, so Pieixoto's reading of the text of the Gileadean past predicts the possibility of another gender tyranny, a future actualization of the forms of chauvinism he exhibits during his talk.

However, if part of Atwood's aim in the “Historical Notes” is to expose the complicity of academia in the formation of authoritarian institutions, another part is to offer strategies for slipping through what W.F. Garrett-Petts calls “the official discourse of History” (82). The pairing of Professor Pieixoto and Offred at the end of *The Handmaid's Tale* mirrors the pairing of Perry Miller and Atwood's ancestor, the Puritan Mary Webster, at the beginning; and the issue in both cases is the failure of the female object of study to fit the patterns of inquiry set out by her male scrutinizer. Confronted with the Handmaid's refusal of politics for romantic introspection and history for passive self-absorption, Pieixoto cries, “What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford's [the

Commander's] private computer!" (322). Hailing from yet another Cambridge (England instead of New England), Pieixoto is implicitly as ill-equipped as his Puritan studies prototypes to read the hieroglyphs of feminine culture. Atwood's critics have, as I've said, condemned her endorsement of popular romance both for its gender conservatism and for its commercialism. And yet the "Historical Notes" indicate that a tribute to the "low brow," to forms of culture inadmissible to scholarly exchange, is part of her project. It is no accident that Offred's tapes are discovered among other tokens of popular passion and bad taste—Elvis Presley tunes, folk songs, Mantovani instrumentals, and the screams of Twisted Sister—nor that all of these are laughed at and dismissed by Professor Pieixoto. If the projected end of Pieixoto's academic efforts is only another tyranny, these tacky unreadable texts, like the romance itself, slip through his "official discourse" to signify the potential of resistance and hope.

Offred's failure to write the history that Pieixoto would be able to read is presumably mirrored by Mary Webster's failure to live the life that Puritan studies scholars could utilize in their constructions of the American spirit. Mary Webster's comic salvation by a weak rope contradicts the academically sanctioned "tragic vision" of a novel like *The Scarlet Letter*, which refutes the possibility of miracles precisely by redelivering its heroine to the scene of her tribulations. That Atwood duplicates Webster's miraculous escape in her own text, allowing Offred to escape Gilead through the implausible circumstance of falling in love, suggests this novel's challenge to the brutal teleology that produces a Hester Prynne, that celebrates and determines the female victim's capitulation to a "tragic" place in the history of persecution. The same might be said of Atwood's own choices for her novel. As her presentation of Pieixoto implies, imperial domination is for her as much an act of interpretation, a projection of cultural consciousness onto an uncharted self, as it is an economic or geographical domination. Finally, and much like her heroine, Atwood escapes interpretation along an "Underground Female Road," the illicit textual trail that leads over the border dividing American Tragedy from Harlequin Romance.

What fate does Atwood finally envision for Canada itself? In the nightmare future she imagines, women have succumbed to a totalizing patriarchy. Appropriately, given Atwood's conflation of feminism and nationalism, Canada, in some analogous gesture, has succumbed to its

totalizing southern neighbour. Among the historical facts revealed in the “Historical Notes” is Canada’s complicity in the Gileadean enterprise, its refusal to harbour female refugees escaping north for fear of “antagonizing its powerful neighbour” (323), and, even more insidiously, its contribution of the design of the handmaid’s costumes, which are modeled on the uniforms of German prisoners of war in Canadian P.O.W. camps of the Second World War. The logic behind such dour predictions seems to have its basis in 1980s history. Written at a moment when Canadians had just elected an unabashedly American-friendly Prime Minister, *The Handmaid’s Tale* predicts a future in which the iconic move of crossing the border into Canada will no longer represent the escape from American persecution which it had, variously, in the eighteenth century to the United Empire Loyalists, in the nineteenth century to Southern American slaves, and in the twentieth century to refugees of the draft. In order to escape Gilead, Pieixoto tells us, Offred would not just have had to go north, as Atwood’s ancestors did; she would have had to leave the North American continent altogether.

And yet if the epilogue predicts and, indeed, comments upon Canada’s complicity in American aims, it also preserves the terms of Atwood’s nationalist project, presenting in Professor Pieixoto the emissary of yet another of Canada’s imperial rulers, this time Great Britain. In accord with the geographical trajectory of Atwood’s nationalism, which equates northern wilderness with a final refuge, the scene of embattled autonomy has been pushed up almost into the Arctic itself. This scene is perhaps no longer identifiably Canadian. By Professor Pieixoto’s era, Canada has disappeared as a geo-political entity. The academic conference at which Pieixoto speaks takes place at the “University of Danay, Nunavit,” “Danay” apparently being a version of “Dene,” one of the First Nations tribes, “Nunavit” being that portion of land in the Northwest Territories which the Canadian government has designated for the Inuit peoples and which, in Atwood’s version of the future, has achieved its promised sovereign status. But if Canada itself has disappeared, the position of the feminized “exploited victim” has not. Maryann Crescent Moon, as the representative of native culture, itself an object of Caucasian imperialism, is also the object of Pieixoto’s sexist remarks. The “Historical Notes” section, in other words, recapitulates the relations between female/colony and male/empire that Atwood’s nationalism inscribes throughout this novel. In some sense, indeed, the prediction of Canada’s dissolution, as well as Atwood’s reference to Canada’s unsavory

participation in Gileadean fascism, only reinforce her call for national autonomy, precisely by painting so bleak a picture of the price of Canada's compliance.

There is no question that Atwood's attempt to warn against the dissolution of borders, whether national or personal, prompts her to propose models of autonomy for women that many feminists would consider too dangerously androcentric and heterosexist to be of much value. But by reading this novel outside the liberal/left feminist framework which its critics invariably bring to it, we can perhaps better understand its feminism not as part of a prescribed or consistent itinerary, but as a protest contingent upon the idiosyncracies of its contexts. Both the position of Canada with respect to Reagan's America in the mid-1980s and the self-designations of the Americanist scholars with whom Atwood was familiar determine her combined advocacy of self-protective autonomy and the unsanctioned texts of women's popular culture. But I would also suggest that such a reading might go further to question whether our standards for legitimacy in feminism don't sidestep the possible alterations required of it when gender is fused with seemingly unrelated political issues. Atwood draws on a conceptually skewed conflation of feminism and nationalism, but the very fact that she does so suggests the extent to which national selfhood is already a libidinally invested construct, one which enmeshes the discourses of citizenry and sexuality and which therefore potentially confuses the traditional coordinates of feminist response. The fantasies of drugstore romance may not seem like adequate weapons in the struggle for women's equality and recognition. But then, maybe lying in the missionary position under Uncle Sam, you need a little fantasy.

NOTES

- ¹ Namely, Cathy Davidson, Barbara Ehrenreich and Catharine Stimpson.
- ² In a talk delivered in 1981 Atwood said almost exactly the same thing: "Are we talking about a proposal of marriage, in which case the States would proclaim, 'with all my worldly goods I endow thee' in exchange for Canada's adopting the missionary position?" Atwood went on, "Canada has always been a cheap lay" ("Canadian-American" 389).
- ³ Actually, fewer critics and reviewers than one might expect have taken account of this novel's American setting, especially considering that Atwood herself mentions the point again and again in interviews. Among those that have, apart from Stimpson, are Davidson (24), Turner, and Ketterer. Ketterer gestures towards the connections among

Canadian nationalism, feminism and the American setting about to be explored in this paper: "SF is only worthy of serious attention when it is about something real; and in this case, underlying the muted feminist polemic, the central theme, equally real and earlier identified by Atwood as particularly Canadian, is that of human survival" (209).

- ⁴ Dorothy Jones has a different reading of these plaster halos: "The white circle represents a stifling denial of growth and fertility" and "the dubious safety of observing the boundaries society imposes on women" (34, 35).
- ⁵ Whether Offred actually crosses the borders of Gilead is never revealed. But that she does escape to some space of relative freedom and safety beyond the constantly watchful eye of Gilead is made evident by the existence of her tapes.
- ⁶ Dorothy Jones indicates an additional way in which this novel resembles a female romance when she describes the Handmaids as occupying the "socially ambiguous position of a Victorian governess" (32). It is precisely this social ambiguity, a stock characteristic of the misplaced and orphaned heroines in women's historicals, that Atwood parodies in the costume gothic Joan Foster is writing in *Lady Oracle*. Charlotte, like Offred, is a third wheel at Redmond Grange, a love object for the lord of the manor and a considerable irritation for his jealous wife; like Offred, she feels there is "menace lurking somewhere in the vast house," a menace intensified by the fact that, although she must remain at Redmond, she lacks access to the knowledge granted to either guests or servants (30).
- ⁷ In taking Atwood to task for her obfuscations of history, Dopp is among several critics and reviewers who have remarked on what Barbara Ehrenreich calls the "anthropological" thinness of *The Handmaid's Tale* (34), its cursory explication of those things that would make Gilead seem more historically "real" and would, the implication is, de-eroticize the heroine's passivity (see also McCarthy 35, and Banerjee 78-80). Interestingly, it was precisely this attention to "realness" that Atwood objected to in her 1976 review of Marge Piercy's feminist utopia, *Woman on the Edge of Time*: "To turn from Piercy's utopia to her poetry is to turn from an imagined world to an imagination, from a sense to a sensibility....I find the poetry more convincing" ("Marge Piercy" 277).
- ⁸ The best discussion of this process remains Nina Baym's.
- ⁹ I should mention that Barbara Ehrenreich identifies Atwood's approval of conventionally feminine paraphernalia, including, by implication, her approval of romance, with the backlash against the early 1980s radical feminism of those like Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon. But while a critique of radical feminism is certainly at work in Atwood's presentation of Offred's mother, whose condemnation of make-up and penchant for book-burning only end up facilitating the rise of Gilead, this critique does not quite account for the absence of what Dopp calls a "critical perspective" from which to assess the heroine's passivity on the one hand and the text's debt to romance on the other (272-81). To read *The Handmaid's Tale* purely as a condemnation of radical feminism, in other words, is to be unable to account for Atwood's unqualified endorsement in this novel of the gender norms and genres which in her other novels she invariably represents, if not critically, then at least ambiguously.

Weak Anthropic Principle

Postulates a universe remarkably in sympathy with our existence.

(Dr. Brandon Carter)

or

Egg Drop Soup

Drifting out of the void
Atoms form, collide, reform,
Accidentally combine into elements—
Hydrogen, oxygen, carbon et al.
A cosmic soup
Slow cooked. Carbon chains itself,
Forms complex rings, synthesizes
Organic compounds,
Hydrocarbons, the basis of all earthly life,
Protoplasm, the essential matter of single cells,
Eggs.
A cosmic flip,
Eggs drop, plop,
Into the broth of eternity.

Strong Anthropic Principle

Postulates a universe that had to give birth to man.

(Dr. Brandon Carter)

or

Counting Chickens Before They're Hatched

Nested precariously
Out on a limb of chaos,
Properly brooded,
The egg has no choice.
Perfect conditions command perfect certainty.
Once started, the egg
Rolls onward, gathering, growing,
Inwardly becoming more than itself.
The egg had to crack,
Embryo hatch, scratch its way
Into existence.
Nothing's sharper than an egg-tooth,
Surer than the inevitability
Of chickens.

Participatory Anthropic Principle

Postulates a universe that man helps to create with his observations and understanding.

(Prof. John Wheeler)

or

Why The Chicken Crossed the Road

Once hatched the nest becomes too small,
There must be more.
Little Chicken stretches, scratches
For food, shelter. Busily being,
She barely notices herself,
Until, loudly, there was Cock.
Fighting Cock, crowing Cock,
Sun-gilt, bronzed feathers, cock's comb crowned,
Cock-a-hoop in celebration of himself.
Chicken preens,
Suddenly distinctly aware of herself
As a possible participant
In an act that will change the world.
Impulsively she flaunts across
Life's double yellow line,
Self-consciously rehatched—
Cock of the walk.

Final Anthropic Principle

*Postulates a universe in which life will never die out
and where knowledge will increase forever*

(Prof. Frank Tripler)

or

When The Chickens Come Home To Roost

Now Chicken knows and knows she knows.
She plans, acts,
Understands outsides and insides;
She mates, hates,
Scratches her existence boldly
Over the crust of the world.
Observe—she has created a universe
Perfectly evolved for herself,
For chickens.

Cock's crow cracked her shell of awareness
calling her into tomorrow.
Cock-sure of a new day
hatched time after time
For and by
Chickens.

Anthropic Principle Revisited

Repostulates an anthropocentric universe.

(KVS)

or

What Came First?

Reality is what is observed.
From a chicken's point of view,
Egg had to be
For there to be a chicken
To lay eggs.

Time is what is observed.
From an egg's point of view,
Chicken is egg's way
Of creating
Egg.

Truth is what is observed.
From eternity's point of view,
Both are right.

Private and Public in Timothy Findley's *The Wars*

The closer critics look at Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, the more we recognize how structurally complex it is. Scholars have demonstrated that the novel is almost poetic in the extent to which it is unified through language, symbol, and motif.¹ One of the novel's most important themes is the dramatic change both Robert Ross and the society in which he lives undergo, as World War I overturns the past and destroys the philosophical and moral foundations of the pre-War world. The change is reflected in a new attitude toward private and public: thanks to the war, characters lose their former sense of what is supposed to be kept private and what may be shared with others. Indeed, the private sphere seems to disappear altogether, as both joys and griefs become national rather than individual or family affairs, and secrets become almost impossible to keep. Findley has structured his novel in part through patterns of contrast between private and public.

Findley portrays the pre-War world as one in which there is a clear and proper distinction between the public and private. Pre-war society constrains people from revealing their emotions or calling too much attention to themselves; it obliges its members to communicate through established forms—courtesy, ritual, and so on—and to erect false fronts to hide their true feelings. Whatever emotions may be bubbling beneath, the public persona must be staid, decorous, polite. For example, the narrator/researcher observes that in the photographs taken before the war, “everyone at first seems timid—lost—irresolute. Boys and men stand squinting at the camera.

Women turn away suspicious. They still maintain a public reticence.”(11) To be photographed is to suffer an intolerable invasion of privacy.

Ross himself begins as someone who wishes to keep himself hidden, out of the public eye. He values his privacy and shuns the camera. One of the earliest photographs in which he appears shows him standing “on the sidelines with pocketed hands” (13), barely visible as he strives to stay out of the combatant and noncombatant war activities of his society. Rowena, too, shuns or is kept out of the public eye: “She is never in photographs that are apt to be seen by the public” (13). Ross feels this preservation of the family’s privacy is right, although his mother disagrees:

Mother and Miss Davenport, wearing their canteen aprons, stand on the platform at Sunnyside Station handing out chocolate bars to the soldiers who are leaning out of trains. They do this every Thursday afternoon. Robert wishes his mother wouldn’t do such things because he’s shy and thinks she appears too much in public. But Mrs. Ross is adamant. (14)

Her sense of duty overrides her natural shyness, although within her own family she tries to hide her emotions. After the death of her brother in a trolley car accident she conceals her eyes behind dark glasses. Later, she refuses to leave the Ross private train car to see Robert off, unwilling to let Robert see her grief at his departure.

But as Robert Ross notices on the train to Kingston, the war has changed this familiar world of decorum and order:

Where were the streets with houses ranged behind their lawns under the gentle awnings of the elms? What had happened here in so short a time that he could not recall his absence?... Where, in this dark, was the world he’d known and where was he being taken to so fast there wasn’t even time to stop?(46)

The rows of houses no longer provide safe refuge for their inhabitants; people can no longer hide behind the physical barriers of well-kept lawns and flourishing trees, nor the social ones of dignified appearances.

Both the Ross family and the society as a whole are forced to abandon their earlier insistence on privacy by the needs and enthusiasms of war. Compare the earlier photograph showing pre-War “public reticence” before the camera to ones taken after war is declared:

Here is the Boys’ Brigade with band. Backyard minstrels, got up in cork, bang their tambourines and strut across a lawn on Admiral Road.... Everyone is waving either at the soldiers or the cameras. More and more people want to be seen. More and more people want to be remembered. Hundreds—thousands crowd

into frame.... Women abandon all their former reticence and rush out into the roadway, throwing flowers and waving flags. (12)

War is a national, not a private, affair, and so the former social norms of propriety and dignity are discarded in favour of very public displays of patriotism. Those who formerly avoided the camera now try to be recorded forever on film. The Georgian world is turned upside down; as often happens in Findley's fiction, such as *Famous Last Words* and the short story "War," war causes an inversion of social mores—what used to be frowned upon is now encouraged, what used to be considered wrong is now considered right, and what used to be labeled insane is now viewed as normal.²

With the start of the war, Ross experiences an inextricable meshing of private, domestic concerns and the larger, public battle. The conflicts at home, notably between Mr. and Mrs. Ross, become reflected in the general struggle. As Lorraine York says, *The Wars* is "a war novel which is largely concerned with domestic strife." (*Front Lines* 30) Ross's motivation for joining the army is his guilt over his supposed dereliction of duty to Rowena; in other words, a very private and personal imperative drives him to participate in a public act of violence. (York, *Other Side* 83; Drolet 150) Findley sees no real distinction between what spurs us to family or international wars—as Coral Ann Howells says, he "sees the war as the focus for the same impulses enacted on the personal level in relationships and within the self." (132) In war we act out on a public scale the violent tendencies that drive us in our domestic conflicts. War, then, destroys the fragile peacetime barrier between private and public motives and actions.

Ross strives vainly to preserve his isolation, but like the rest of Canadian society finds it impossible to do so. While waiting for the train to Lethbridge he avoids the other new soldiers, "wanting to protect the last of his privacy" (18). At Lethbridge, we are told, "he watched the men around him from a distance. Some of them were friends from school. To these he was polite but he found excuses to keep them at bay" (28). But his blushes betray him, so in spite of himself Ross becomes part of the larger entity that is the army (29). We also learn that he is "shy of girls" (18), but the soldiers' visit to the whorehouse reveals that nothing—not even sex—is a private matter any more. The thinness of the walls means that one's most intimate secrets become public knowledge: "He thought: now someone knows about

me" (43). He is embarrassed by the overt sexual behaviour of the other soldiers. But he himself becomes a voyeur, ashamed yet compelled to watch Taffler's acts with the Swede (44-45). The war will not let him remain hidden or avoid seeing others.

One aspect of this theme that is especially relevant to the brothel scene is the contrasting imagery of clothing and nakedness. At key points in the novel Ross's state of dress or undress reflects his psychological state or sense of identity. For example, before enlisting he dreams of becoming a runner, emulating Tom Longboat, and when he comes down with jaundice stands naked before a mirror and imagines he has indeed succeeded in attaining Longboat's yellow colour (48). Immediately after this scene, we are shown Ross in his uniform; he has traded childish identification for an adult identity. At the same time he is forced to hide his individual dreams in favour of joining his society's larger purposes.

Perhaps the most well-known scene in the novel embodying this image and the theme of private *versus* public is the one in the Ross bathroom. After being beaten by Teddy Budge, Ross sits in the bathtub soaking his wounds. His mother enters and nonchalantly sits on the toilet. Ross is stunned by this intrusion into what is normally a totally private act: "His thoughts—that had seemed so consecutive and wise a moment before—began to stutter and shuffle to a halt. He sat there blank." (26) She talks about his bruises, which are completely visible to her, and reminisces about his childhood. Meanwhile, Ross tries to maintain his composure.

She set the empty glass on the floor and re-assembled herself—using toilet paper to wipe her eyes. After this she sighed and crossed her legs—looking as if she always came and sat in the bathroom with her son while he bathed. (27)

While Robert is the one who feels most exposed during this scene, both characters are revealing more of themselves than they wish:

His mother watched him—all the laughter fading from her eyes. If Robert had turned to look, the expression on her face might have frightened him. Yet people tend to look most often like themselves when no one else is watching. (27)

During wartime, one's physical and emotional condition is of concern to more than just the self. Here, Robert is forced to share both his pain and his efforts to relieve his pain with his mother. The stakes have become so high now—as Mrs. Ross knows that Robert is going to join the army and perhaps be killed—that no one can afford to be shy. Robert's bruises are the

physical counterparts to his emotional wounds over the deaths of Rowena and her rabbits; everything he is feeling, both physically and emotionally, is all too visible to others.

What Ross learns as he sails to and fights in Europe is that privacy is no longer an affordable luxury. He must live, and perhaps die, in the trenches with the others. Everything he does, he does in the presence of his men, and so he must be careful how he looks and sounds to them. Despite his fears and insecurities he has to behave like an officer, as in the scene on board the ship to England when he has to reassure a soldier even though he himself is frightened (64). It is on this ship that he learns how difficult it is to maintain privacy in the army, even when it comes to bodily functions. For the men it is impossible:

Few of the men had ever been to sea and although they were tolerably used to the crowding of their barracks, nothing had prepared them for the airless jamming of their quarters underdecks. The makeshift latrines and showers were virtually open forums where privacy was unheard of. (56)

Conditions are little better for the officers:

Bathrooms were shared by all excepting the battalion commander. Privacy was desperately won but not an impossibility as down below. At least the cabinet doors could be closed on the w.c.'s and the showers had partitions. (57)

Everything the soldiers do and become is exposed to everyone else. As Ross learns in the hospital in England, even the soldiers' suffering is put on public display, as "philanthropists" like Barbara d'Orsey make periodic visits to "comfort" the men. It is noteworthy that during the description of the visit by Barbara d'Orsey and Taffler to Jamie Villiers, Taffler's hands are described as "naked" (97). (Compare this to how carefully the young Ross hid his hands in his pockets in the photograph discussed above.) The image suggests that Taffler is vulnerable; it certainly recalls the scene in the whorehouse. To Ross, Taffler has no secrets; indeed, none of the soldiers do.

On the other hand, the meshing of the private and public sphere results in a bizarre attempt to reconstruct a kind of domestic life in the trenches. The soldiers make their battlefield station into a perverted version of "home," with a stove, "a knotted rug on the floor," Levitt's books neatly shelved, and a table for their "banquet" (89). Only in the twisted, inverted world of war could such a scene be considered "rather commonplace" (83).

The novel continually sets up a sharp contrast during the battle scenes

between the individual perspective on the war—what we may consider the private war—and the larger picture. We see the war mostly through Ross's eyes, and therefore witness *his* war, but we are also treated to periodic overviews that place his experiences in context:

The Second Battle of Ypres had taken place in April of 1915 and from that time forward till the end of the war the city would remain in Allied hands. It was here that most of the Canadian troops were deployed. Their objectives were the towns and villages, ridges and woods for roughly ten miles either side of them. That was the larger picture. In terms of individual men and companies, their worlds could be limited to quarter-miles. In Robert's case, the furthest extent of his world was the four miles back to Bailleul. (83)

The war forces Ross to recognize and exhibit his own capacity for violence, and while he continues to try to hide that truth from others it is clear he is amazed by what he has revealed to himself. During his convalescence at the d'Orseys he is discovered in an act of wanton destruction. As Juliet d'Orsey says:

Robert I discovered was a very private man. His temper, you know, was terrible. Once when he thought he was alone and unobserved I saw him firing his gun in the woods at a young tree. It was a sight I'd rather not have seen. He destroyed it absolutely... he had a great deal of violence inside and sometimes it emerged this way with a gesture and other times it showed in his expression when you found him sitting alone on the terrace or staring out of a window. (152-53)

It is not merely his violence that Juliet manages to see when she spies on Robert.

Ross, then, becomes more and more exposed, both to himself and others. Later in the novel, he experiences the ultimate violation of his body and his self. Significantly, before the rape scene he is shown masturbating in the privacy of his room; Findley may be trying to establish a contrast between his initial idyllic seclusion and his later violation by the other soldiers and, by extension, the war itself. He is also without his kit bag, and its absence leaves him disoriented: "It was strangely disconcerting to have lost it. He felt as if he'd left his face behind in a mirror and the Webley in a stranger's hand" (159). He feels naked and helpless without it. The next morning he walks to the baths and is literally naked and helpless when he is raped by his fellow officers. Like his mother they have invaded the privacy of the bath, but to engage in—rather than help soothe him after—a violent act: "Hands and fingers probed and poked at every part of

his body” (168). This act represents the ultimate invasion of his private self: “the war rapes him, invading the intensely private frontier of the human body.” (York, *Introducing* 50) It is a violation of his spirit as much as, if not more than, his body. And his individual violation is symbolic of the spiritual rape of all the young men in World War I; defending the scene, Findley has said, “It has to be there because it is my belief that Robert Ross and his generation of young men were raped, in effect, by the people who made that war.” (*Inside Memory* 151)

Even his subsequent act in freeing the horses threatened with death can be seen as a reflection of how private and public come together during war. When public events and imperatives impinge on the self, we can succumb to the pressures and deny our individual ethical and moral responsibilities. We can accept the destruction of our private selves and act as parts of the larger whole, thereby deflecting responsibility for our actions on the collective. Or we can assert private morality in the face of public immorality. As Ronald B. Hatch says, “an individual can refuse to follow the ‘forces of history’ through the power of his moral judgement”; by freeing the horses, Ross shows he “embraces the traditionally opposed masculine and feminine virtues, thereby linking private, domestic virtues with public action.” (93)

Of course, it is not only Ross who has suffered a loss of privacy. The war has forced everyone to surrender his or her privacy in favour of the common good. Even the upper classes have not escaped the intrusion of the necessities of war. Lady Emmeline d’Orsey is a woman who values her privacy immensely:

she extended her energies to providing her husband and children with a life in town even though it was basically abhorrent to her because she believed it was her duty to keep every avenue of social contact open to them. (141)

But with the coming of war she has allowed her home to be used as a convalescent hospital:

In the end, despite the awesome invasion it would mean of her precious privacy it was the Marchioness herself who decided that her home could not remain a private sanctuary. (142)

For the d’Orseys as well as the Rosses, with war comes domestic conflict that parallels the world war: “Findley shows himself aware of the complicated family wars which engender private battles.” (York, *Front Lines* 40) Public image is extremely important to Barbara d’Orsey, but we see the pri-

vate reality behind it through the photographs the researcher uncovers. (York, *Other Side* 83) In general, no one can escape the demands of war; national needs override individual desires for privacy.

While Ross is recuperating at the d'Orseys we are presented with a scene that parallels his revelation at the whorehouse: he is not the only character in the novel who becomes an unwilling observer of sexual acts. A large portion of the second half of the novel is in the form of Juliet d'Orsey's childhood diary, in which she recounts the events surrounding Ross's visit to her home. She deliberately spies on her relatives, but is seldom pleased with what she sees and is shocked when she encounters Ross making love to her sister. Love, however, is hardly the word to describe what she thinks she sees:

I've blundered into everything I know. I've blundered into rooms and I've blundered into danger and I've blundered into other people's lives. . . . What I did was worse than blundering.... This was a picture that didn't make sense. Two people hurting one another. That's what I thought. I knew in a cool, clear way at the back of my mind that this was "making love"—but the shape of it confused me. The shape and the violence. Barbara was lying on the bed, so her head hung down and I thought that Robert must be trying to kill her. They were both quite naked.... Robert's neck was full of blood and his veins stood out. He hated her. And Barbara's hand was in her mouth. (154-56)

The similarity to the sexual violence Ross himself has been a witness to is clear. Returning to the image pattern of clothing and nakedness we traced earlier, it is worth noting that Juliet has long tried to catch her siblings naked. She compares what she sees with the time she saw her brother: "It wasn't like Michael where his being naked explained itself" (156). Like Ross, Juliet is forced to undergo some painful revelations. What should be private is now exposed, and the result is shock and a sense of shame.

While most of the characters in the novel reluctantly surrender their privacy, or are subjected to horrifying violations of their privacy, Ross's mother ceases to care. Early in the novel she attends church but can no longer stand listening to the Bishop rallying the congregation to support the war. She walks out, attended by Miss Davenport, and sits on the church steps, not terribly concerned about the way she might appear to passers-by:

"But—we can't sit here," said Miss Davenport.

"I can," said Mrs. Ross and did.

She even lighted a cigarette. Why should it matter? The only people passing were children—and they were all running after motorcars, slipping and sliding on the ice.... She drank and offered it to Davenport—but Davenport was afraid of censure, sitting so near the street, and she refused. (53-54)

It is only when a child sees her, and she worries about frightening the girl, that Mrs. Ross stands up. This has been her very public protest against the smug and thoughtless patriotism of the other churchgoers, who do not seem to mind sending their children off to be killed. As Findley has said, “Here she makes a great resounding peace, because she invites the strangers to look at her, to go back in there with her, and listen to the singing.” (Aitken 87) As in the bathroom scene, Mrs. Ross here discards her sense of social decorum; later, she seeks out storms so that she can experience the kind of hardship Robert is enduring across the sea, again not minding who might see her doing what her dignified neighbours would probably consider insane acts.

The war, then, is an elemental situation that eliminates our “civilized” notions of what is properly private and what is acceptably public. As Lorraine York has shown, the entire novel is structured around an alternation between domestic and battle scenes, with both sorts usually being violent, as Findley demonstrates that during war the distinction between the private and public spheres fades. (*Introducing* 41) York sees this “modulation” most clearly reflected in the photographs the researcher-narrator pores over:

Findley uses photography in *The Wars* to underline one of the most important ideas in the novel: the necessary interpenetration of the public and the private in any complete understanding of a war.... Private violence serves to enlarge in our minds the overwhelming horror of the 1914-18 carnage. (*Other Side* 81)

As the researcher continues his/her study, the photographs portray a more private world, moving away from efforts to capture an entire way of life and drawing the focus most closely onto one family and its tragedy.

The researcher’s goal, in fact, is to see the public event, World War I, through the experiences of one man and one family. Beyond the public “truths” as defined by the history books—the facts and statistics of battle—lies the private truth of each soldier who fought in the war. Findley mixes history and fiction “to show the human lives which traditional history, with its accounts of battles and treaties, tends to ignore... he is interested in shifting some emphasis away from the ‘great names and events’ of history and toward the history of individuals.” (York, *Introducing* 37-38) History distorts the truth not only because the big picture obscures the individual human reality, but also because the present continually reinterprets the past;

as Hatch says, “the past is something shaped in the present and in continual need of reshaping.” (93; cf. York, *Introducing* 32) To understand the public tragedy we focus on one man’s story: “the private story of Robert Ross illuminates the tale of an entire generation.” (York, *Other Side* 84) Thus, the “interpenetration” of public and private during the war helps reveal its true horrors.

Once the war is over, and the world returns to “normal,” the former reticence returns. No longer do people share their joys and pains; they attempt to cover up the scars that they had previously displayed, voluntarily or otherwise. The entire novel, in fact, is in the form of an effort by the researcher-narrator to break through this public reticence to discover the real Robert Ross beneath. The narrator strives to learn the truth, but can never really do so, because too many people, like his nurse and Juliet d’Orsey, want to forget, or hide, who he was and what he did. The narrator recognizes early that he can never really see the whole picture; he must rely on publicly available fragments that only partially reveal the private truth:

It’s best to go away and find your information somewhere else. In the end, the only facts you have are public. Out of these you make what you can, knowing that one thing leads to another. Sometime, someone will forget himself and say too much or else the corner of a picture will reveal the whole. What you have to accept at the outset is this: many men have died like Robert Ross, obscured by violence.... As the past moves under your fingertips, part of it crumbles. Other parts, you know you’ll never find. This is what you have. (10-11)

History, as Simone Vauthier has shown, hides as well as reveals, because it omits the personal: “History... generally excludes the private... The links between the private and public sides of Ross’s experience are precisely what the reader must puzzle over, what is of significance to the reader.” (15)

Essentially, then, the researcher’s efforts constitute the most pervasive attempt in the novel to violate someone’s privacy. What he/she tries to do is locate the real Robert Ross, to penetrate the screens erected by the passage of time, the need by Ross and others to preserve a public image, and the inevitable barriers of understanding that exist between different people. To understand Ross we would have to be Ross; failing that, we can only violate his privacy so far. After that, what we are left with is guesswork—in other words, imaginative reconstruction.

Of course, it is not merely the researcher who engages in that reconstruction. As numerous critics have pointed out, the novel is itself a series of

fragments we as readers must piece together, just as the documents and photographs become the discontinuous primary material for the researcher's work.³ The very act of reading the novel is therefore an attempted violation of Ross's privacy as well.

The novel is thus an imaginative search for the private realities behind the public documents. (Kröller; Findley, "Alice"; Aitken 84) Like the war itself, the novel breaks down barriers between people who jealously guard their separate existences. World War I, Findley shows, opened our eyes to the evil, the capacity for inflicting—and enduring—pain, that we try to hide from each other and ourselves. Privacy is a luxury of peacetime, when we can isolate ourselves in our homes and our minds, certain that life is rational, orderly. For Findley, war is a cataclysm in which secrets are revealed, in which—despite all our efforts—what is private becomes public.

NOTES

¹ See, for example, Pirie; Klován; York, "A Shout"; and especially Hulcoop.

² For discussions of the inversion of society's norms, see, e.g., Ricou, and Brydon.

³ E.g., York 79, and *Introducing* 26-27; Duffy 64; Aitken 84; Kröller 68.

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Essaying

Steve McCaffery & bp Nichol

Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book Machine; The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group, 1973-1982. with an Introduction by Steve McCaffery. Talonbooks n.p.

bill bissett

inkorrect thots. Talonbooks n.p.

Reviewed by Doug Barbour

For those of us lucky enough to be readers of *open letter* back in its early days, the first appearance of the Toronto Research Group (TRG) in its pages in the Spring of 1973 was a revelation. In this collaborative guide, bpNichol and Steve McCaffery were clearly offering readers a new kind of essaying, one which was exciting even when it resisted easy meaning. I know I was not alone in looking forward with keen anticipation to each subsequent report, knowing that I would be sure to learn about authors with whom I was unfamiliar and a kind of creative theorizing I wanted to emulate.

According to Steve McCaffery's warm and elegiac Introduction to *Rational Geomancy: The Kids of the Book-Machine; The Collected Research Reports of the Toronto Research Group, 1973-1982*, bp and he had been planning this volume before Nichol's untimely death in 1988. With that loss of his collaborator, McCaffery realized that any planned alterations in the original texts, such as the footnotes which would, again collaboratively, "instigate a dialogue between change and fixity across typographic time," would have to be dropped.

I came to the decision that to carry out the project of revision as a series of critical footnotes supplied by myself would be ethically unforgivable and rebarbative in the extreme. Equally I felt it imperative that the reports be gathered and presented in whatever compromise formation best suited. Accordingly, I have carried through the initial plan to stylistically revise the reports but not to update their content. Such revisions include a more uniform format and a greater consistency in punctuation and capitalization as planned. I have not sacrificed the first reports' variety of tone, address, and shape. Obvious typographic errors and the factual mistakes in the first revisions have been corrected. What footnotes I have made have been confined to the ends of reports and can be disregarded by readers if so desired. For the most part they are of a supplementary nature, restricted to fact and completing textual references left trailing in the original.

The important point, for McCaffery as editor/reader and for us, is that "no intervention has been made in the intellectual substance of the content," even in cases where he knows of his and bp's "shared dissatisfaction" with some of their early ideas.

In the 1980s, Nichol and McCaffery began to follow separate paths addressing the central questions of writing and text, and their various later works reveal a continuing commitment to what they called research in often sharply divergent ways. However, it is exhilarating yet also depressing how 'new,' 'fresh,' and 'provocative' the TRG Reports remain. As McCaffery points

out, “[m]any of the works cited and discussed are as little known today as when we first published our reports of them.” Moreover, the TRG was one of the first to introduce its readers to the major new continental theorists (Jabès, Derrida, Barthes and Lacan had all been read by 1974). Still, it was not the content alone which made the TRG Reports so exciting; rather it was the collaborative manner in which Nichol and McCaffery used “the format of the reports to stretch the formal parameters of the expository essay.” As they each talked and typed, as they both created the ‘voice’, so to speak, of this writing, what emerged

from this collision of differences was something along the lines of a ‘general economy in dialogue’: a complex interaction between two discrete human beings in research sessions, both of whom exploited the fragility of the contract between them that bound one as the enunciator and the other as transcriber of the reports. One unavoidable implication of this method of dictation [in which the transcriber could and might put down his own ideas in response to the dictated ones rather than simply transcribe them] was the loss of certainty around independent judgement. Thought’s proprietary nature was a risk as we dispersed it through active dialogue into the transcription of synthetic proposals. (Only later would we discover the similarity in our method to the complex and central status of the dialogue in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin.) Also, the normative assumptions around authorship were profoundly unsettled. As well as creating a synthetic subject (based on a *We-full*, not an *I-less* paradigm) the reports also worked to undermine the classic authority that pertains to the written.

The revolutionary implications of this approach remain as strong today as when the TRG Reports were first published.

bill bissett has been one of what Robin Blaser would call bpNichol’s “companions”

since the early 60s, and in many ways he has remained as singularly eccentric as he was then. Readers picking up *inkorrekct thots* will find the same deliberately anarchic spelling, chants, occasional ramblings, drawings, and satirically ‘naive’ polemics they could have found in any of his books since *we sleep inside each other all first* appeared in 1965. If there is any new note to his latest collection it is the elegiac: besides his heartfelt, if somewhat sentimental, elegy for bpNichol, there are two poems for friends who have died of AIDS, and the dark angel of mortality hovers over most of the book.

bissett has often appeared innocent and naive in his writings, and there is no doubt that he would have been a most unlikely participant in the kind of theorizing that marks the TRG texts, but it is all too easy, and I think wrong, to dismiss his poetry as nothing more than Romantic ramblings, lacking any driving formal thinking. He has been extremely clear about the political basis of his anti-spelling and anti-grammar, and one has only to see him once in performance to recognize his mastery of oral ‘play.’ For many readers, *inkorrekct thots* may prove too incoherent or too vague and general in its reportage. I must confess that I found a few of the longer, narrative pieces wandering into a flat recital of personal information that added nothing to the poem—this is especially true of ‘timothee sz / ther is no deth,” which staggers from deeply moving moments of compassionate insight into his friend’s suffering to stunningly banal comments on his own travels (bissett represents himself in almost all his poems in a strongly autobiographical manner)—but, as has been the case in almost all of bissett’s books, *inkorrekct thots* repays the diligent reader with some wonderful lines, stanzas, and poems.

Gathered here are some deliciously wide-eyed satiric thrusts at provincial and federal governments, a few impressive

sound-texts, erotic/mystical lyrics, and the poems for friends and fellow poets, which manage to suggest the necessity of such company even when they sometimes stretch a bit thin. *inkorrekt thots* is typical bissett: this means that readers who like his work will like it, although new readers might do better to try him first in a more stringently edited volume like *Beyond Even Faithful Legends: Selected Poems*. I'm glad he's still around fighting the good fight in his life and writing, though; we can never have enough free spirits like him, and, with the far too early deaths of bpNichol, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and Bronwen Wallace in the last decade, we cannot afford to lose any more of our poets.

A Poet's Bones

Margaret Atwood

Good Bones. Coach House \$18.95

Reviewed by Neil Besner

Because Atwood is a better poet than a fiction writer, I have always read her novels and short stories with grudging admiration. Yes, I teach *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Edible Woman*, and I recognize the ways in which these and other Atwood novels are exciting in the classroom and out of it, but I would much rather read, teach, talk about her poems.

That this view should run against the rising tide of Atwood's reputation as a novelist might only reflect on the increasingly rarefied readership of poetry in Canada outside of academic circles (increasingly rarefied, it almost seems, in inverse proportion to the rising number of books of poems published annually). More's the pity. But to my mind *Good Bones* demonstrates marvellously—as did *Murder in the Dark* to a lesser extent—how the fragmented and deceptively offhand form of these short pieces serves the turn of Atwood's imagination more powerfully

than does her more conventional fiction. Despite what Atwood herself, or her publishers, might think *Good Bones* is all about (I heard her suggest to June Callwood on television two night ago—trust the tale, forget the teller—that the book is simply helping out a small literary press in hard times), the truth is that *Good Bones* is a much better book than, say, *Wilderness Tips*. This is no backhanded compliment; *Good Bones* pulses with a grim drollery that engages and entertains even as it looks back at tradition with a knowing little leer and ahead towards various versions of apocalypse with a deftly controlled grimace. These are fictions for our time, and, arguably, fictions that show Atwood's narrative talents at their finest.

I came to *Good Bones* ready to find in it all of the distinctive Atwood virtues, all of the strength that at times resonates less powerfully in her prose than in her poems (and that, tellingly, so often calls to mind's eye and ear, in this age that has so blithely proclaimed the death of the author, the pervasive and indecipherable life of text, Atwood's own *face* and *voice*): the ground-glass wit; the dry and cool and flat menace of her sentences, posed, posed, compressed, composed; the taut hilarity of characters, most often female, contemplating civil wreckage, domestic havoc, psychic chaos with casual terror; the steely insight delivered deadpan. They are all there and more. But *Good Bones* is worth glancing at, *and* rereading, *and* opening up at random because in these twenty-seven pieces (they are not stories, poems, postcards, fables—they really are fine *pieces*). Atwood is free both to call up *and* to dismember conventional demands for coherence, unity, plot complication and extension, and character development; she is more free to play, always a deadly serious game for Atwood, to invoke familiar storylines, tales, and traditions *and* to trick them out in new, riddling, fragmented form.

Among this collection's delights are its protean pluralities. Variations on traditional myths are retold with unnerving familiarity, featuring contemporary reincarnations of old protagonists: in "Bad News," the opening piece, as a sleeping metamythical bird on a rooftop contemplates the unutterable boredom of uneventful mundanity, readers can revel in a rhythm, diction, and tone worthy of Atwood's best poetry:

She perches on a rooftop, her brass wings folded, her head with its coiffure of literate serpents tucked beneath the left one, snoozing like a noon pigeon. There's nothing to do but her toenails.

This is canny writing, sinuous with allusion, alive with cliché made strange; at a glance, it is writing to spend time with, and not simply or primarily to see through or beyond. And it is typically of the writing in the collection.

As often as these pieces look pastwards from another perspective (try "Gertrude Talks Back" for a female and maternal corrective to a suddenly prissy Hamlet), they look ahead with elegant, stylish gloom to a sterile and attenuated world under a dome ("Hardball"), or at our own world from a point of view at once soothingly familiar and freakishly alien, the perspective of moths, bats, spermatozoa, of a consciousness from another planet ("Cold-Blooded," "My Life as a Bat," "Adventure Story," and "Homelanding," with its "cave people" and "prong people": guess who?) Many pieces celebrate the skewed stories of women past and present, revelling in the status of the unloved ones—of the ugly sister, the witch ("I'm the plot, babe, and don't ever forget it" gloats the voice of "Unpopular Gals")—and showing that the very impulse to tell stories often arises from the myriad sadnesses, the predictable loneliness and sorrow of women singled out ("Let Us Now Praise Stupid Women," "The Female Body"). And the hoary old art of telling

any story comes in for some self-consuming and revisionist pruning as the narrator of "There Was Once" is subjected to a mercilessly correct (and very funny) ideological inquisition.

Of course Atwood's men, those sly and silent, murderously abstract ghosts, are at large here again ("Making a Man," "Epaulettes," "Men At Sea"); they are artfully empty figures, and like so many of the creatures slipping along these pages, they seem to haunt and beguile the wry and rueful voice that reads them into being. And there is a new tone in amongst Atwood's better-known registers, a reflective, meditative tone that gently broods over mortality, its own and others'. You can hear it most clearly in the title piece at the end of the book, but it also inhabits passages of "Death Scenes," for one.

As some elements in the Atwood canon recede into fixity—think of *Survival*, a bare twenty years later it is heartening to see how her new writing can still surprise us with its old fluency, its old delights. *Good Bones*, I am happy to report, is not a new Atwood novel, not just another book of stories. But it most ably shimmies and shakes, rattles and drolly rolls its bones—"them bones, them dry bones, them and their good connections."

La critique

Réjean Beaudoin

Le Roman québécois. Editions de Boréal \$9.95

Anthony Wall

Hubert Aquin entre référence et métaphore. Editions Balzac n.p.

Reviewed by Neil Bishop

L'originalité principale du *Roman québécois* de Réjean Beaudoin, c'est son renversement de l'ordre chronologique. Beaudoin procède en fonction de l'institution littéraire dont le critique qu'il est, les lectrices et lecteurs que nous sommes: le *terminus ad quem* de tout ce qui nous a

précédé-e-s, une longue tradition littéraire, critique, didactique. Beaudoin tend donc à remonter le cours du temps: “À partir du présent ou nous sommes, trois grandes phases apparaissent, que nous intitulerons respectivement: le *roman contemporain* (1945-1990), le *roman du terroir* (1916-1945), le *degré zéro du roman* (1837-1916).” Démarche choisie afin de répondre à deux questions: “quels sont les romans québécois lus ou encore lisibles aujourd’hui, et quels sont ceux dont l’influence est repérable dans la littérature québécoise contemporaine?”

Outre l’inversion chronologique, Beaudoin met en oeuvre une riche grille de lecture. Le chapitre 2 porte sur les romans du groupe et de l’individu; les chapitres 3 à 7 abordent les romans du territoire et ceux de l’espace, les mots et les choses, le même et l’autre, et le roman québécois face aux médias et à la critique.

De grandes révélations, on en demanderait difficilement dans un ouvrage d’une centaine de pages (brièveté excessive qu’il faut sans doute imputer à l’éditeur). *Le Roman québécois* est riches néanmoins d’aperçus intéressants et quelquefois originaux qui renouvellent les perspectives—e.g., l’affirmation selon laquelle l’opposition entre “les mots et les choses” serait pertinente à l’analyse du roman québécois. Le Chapitre 5, “le même et l’autre,” a le mérite non seulement d’aborder un sujet négligé dans plusieurs histoires de la littérature canadienne-française / québécoise, mais celui de dépasser le simple recensement qu’aurait pu susciter la relative nouveauté du sujet pour témoigner d’un effort de réflexion et de systématisation de ce nouveau savoir. Ainsi, Beaudoin remarque que la découverte de l’autre par le roman québécois a connu trois étapes, passant de l’Amérindien (années 60) à la femme (années 70) pour aboutir au “point de vue des communautés culturelles qui composent la société québécoise mod-

erne.” Simplification excessive que Beaudoin ne tarde pas à nuancer, mais que permet aussi de voir les contours d’une déjà vaste forêt que cachaient bien des arbres.

Les deux derniers chapitres sont consacrés aux rapports du roman québécois avec, respectivement, les médias et la critique. Beaudoin ne cache pas sa satisfaction de voir reculer les purs et durs de la critique immanente et ressurgir l’histoire littéraire. Le Chapitre VI, “le roman québécois et les médias,” surprend en évoquant la science-fiction sous la rubrique “Les best-sellers québécois”; et la phrase “dans la production récente de la science-fiction québécoise, il n’est pas exclu que certaines oeuvres s’imposent par leurs qualités littéraires” paraît trop timide, puisque bon nombre d’auteurs de science-fiction québécoise conçoivent leur entreprise comme “l’aventure d’une écriture”—entreprise réussie dans plusieurs cas.

Beaudoin reconnaît à juste titre l’apport des Ontariennes P. Smart, J. Paterson et A. Whitfield à l’étude du roman québécois. Le Chapitre VII, que se penche sur la critique, aurait pu signaler les dimensions considérables et croissantes de la présence, dans le domaine de la critique littéraire québécoise, des critiques non-québécois.

L’un deux, c’est Anthony Wall de l’University of Calgary. Son *Hubert Aquin entre référence et métaphore* constitue une contribution importante aux études aquiniennes et aussi à la méthodologie critique et à la théorie littéraire. Peut-être Wall souscrirait-il à cette phrase de son collègue d’outre-Rocheuses à propos de “la partie la plus importante de la critique, celle qui n’a d’autre souci que d’interroger directement les romans pour en dégager les sens et en décrire les moyens d’expression utilisés.” C’est bien là tâche que s’assigne Wall dans son *Hubert Aquin entre référence et métaphore*. Wall à son tour tourne le dos à la critique “immanente.” Il n’hésite pas à défendre la pertinence du référent dans

l'économie signifiante du signe; et donc du processus de référentialité dans la lecture du texte littéraire. Exercice particulièrement salutaire en critique aquinienne. Ayant observé en Introduction que "Tout texte travaille [...] la fonction référentielle inhérente au langage humain dont il est fait," Wall s'efforcera de le prouver au Chapitre 1 à l'aide d'un très rigoureux raisonnement fondé sur la philosophie et al linguistique. L'"hypothèse de travail" de Wall, c'est que "les signes référentiels repérables au niveau de la surface du texte aquinien continuent à dénoter, malgré tous les contextes bizarres dans lesquels ils ont le malheur de tomber;" "Montréal doit dénoter Montréal." Position qui conforte la recherche d'un critique qui voudrait "mettre le doigt sur la profonde substance politique sous-jacente aux quatre romans d'Hubert Aquin publiés jusqu'à ce jour," et "comprendre la façon extrêmement compliquée et infiniment variée dont les romans d'Aquin laissent voir sans cesse le Québec."

La complexité de cette tâche rend "indispensable" "un ensemble de méthodes et de concepts capable de rendre compte de la relation spécifique qu'entretient l'écriture aquinienne avec le hors-texte." C'est ainsi que la dénotation n'est pas la seule clef de lecture du roman aquinien: ensemble, référence, dénotation et connotation constituent la "référentialité" dont Wall cherche à rappeler l'importance dans l'économie signifiante aquinienne. Les trois processus co-fonctionnent pour permettre aux romans étudiés de parler et du Québec et d'un Québec subjectif, le Québec tel que vécu, rêvé, pleuré, désiré par Hubert Aquin. C'est un Québec dénotatif et connotatif à la fois, le "référent abstrait" auquel renvoient les romans—l'aide notamment de la "référentialité antérieure."

L'autre grande procédé signifiant des romans aquiniens selon Anthony Wall, c'est la métaphore que n'est pas celle de la critique littéraire traditionnelle puisqu'elle

naît de la "juxtaposition" "des mots séparés par d'énormes distances textuelles [qui] réussissent à se toucher," d'où des "métaphores transphrastiques" dotée d'une "référence dédoublée." Mais il a raison, car il tient compte du rôle actif des lectrices et lectures. A quiconque prétendrait que Wall fait de la métaphore—jusque dans son existence—un pur produit de la subjectivité de l'instance lisante, il faudrait répondre que sa définition situe la métaphore dans le seul lieu où peut exister le sens romanesque: dans la rencontre du texte et des lecteurs.

L'importance théorique et méthodologique de l'Introduction et du Chapitre 1 est telle, on le voit, qu'il ne reste plus guère de place pour parler ici des autres chapitres dont chacun analyse un roman; on admirera particulièrement le Chapitre IV, "Le travail complexe du chronotope dans *L'Antiphonaire*." Chapitres riches en aperçus qui intéresseront non seulement les spécialistes d'Aquin et ceux du roman québécois mais tous ceux qu'interpellent la sémiotique et la théorie littéraires ainsi que la méthodologie critique. Aperçus qui feront pardonner les quelques faiblesses de l'ouvrage (qui résulte d'un souci de respecter la rigueur de la thèse qu'il fut naguère), dont surtout une tendance à la répétition (notamment dans l'Introduction et le Chapitre 1, nonobstant leur intérêt).

Transgressions

Mark Vinz and Dave Williamson, ed.

Beyond Borders: An Anthology of New Writing from Manitoba, Minnesota, Saskatchewan, and the Dakotas. New River and Turnstone \$14.95

Elisabeth Bowers

No Forwarding Address. Douglas and McIntyre n.p.

Reviewed by Dennis Denisoff

In their introduction to the anthology *Beyond Borders*, the editors, Mark Vinz and Dave Williamson, claim to be celebrating a

transgression of borders and definitions. According to Williamson, the absence of specific selection of a criteria reflects the uninhibited and unrestrained writing of the 24 authors, "who believe that writing should know no boundaries." But in the editors' choice of works by writers who experience, in Vinz's words, "a common ground of attitude and spirit [that] goes beyond borders, political and otherwise," it is made apparent that the mutually-respected value of creative freedom constitutes part of the criteria.

The fact that 90 percent of the chosen authors have published at least one book, and that over half of them teach, or have taught, at a college or university, also suggests that other concerns besides a belief in creative freedom played a part in the editors' choices. Vinz acknowledges a preference for "those writers who've either been directly connected with the ongoing dialogue and exchanges [of the "Writing Across the Curriculum" movement], or those who've expressed strong interest in them." There is nothing problematic about an anthology that celebrates the work of a specific group, but to suggest that the writers were chosen because they are transgressive and without borders is misleading. Since much of the prose and poetry in the collection is "mighty fine," as Williamson puts it, one wonders whether the editors would have been better off had they not bothered to imply more complex measures than their own standards of quality.

The common motifs in the anthology, such as prairie realism, the underdog mentality, and the love/hate relationship with the land, are not particularly innovative. This limitation does not keep the quality of the writing from being, in most cases, outstanding. The most rewarding prose works are Linda Hasselstrom's "Prairie Relief" and Robert Kroetsch's "The Cow in the Quicksand and How I(t) Got Out." In each essay, the author uses experiences in the

Great Plains region to articulate personal opinions on the larger issue of social perspective. Hasselstrom's confident yet causal discussion of urinating on the prairie comes as a pleasant relief amidst the anxious and serious pieces in the anthology. Kroetsch's essay is a more daring and thought-provoking analysis of regional writing than that offered by Vinz and Williamson. Kroetsch even offers his own list of worthy prairie authors, with approximately half of the contemporary writers he nods to appearing in *Beyond Borders*. Carol Shields, Sharon Butala, and Williamson's pieces also show admirable control and sensitivity.

Though the poetry in this collection is fairly conservative, it is not weak. Lorna Crozier's prairie realism and Anne Szumigalski's more mystical writing are particularly rewarding, especially in their imagery. Dennis Cooley's poetry also works well, fusing syntax, image, and sound to construct a unified field of emotion.

No Forwarding Address, Elisabeth Bowers' latest piece of detective fiction, is similarly most rewarding when considered in isolation and not as an example of detective fiction. Though consistent and controlled, the novel lacks the narrative complexity found in the work of such authors as P.D. James and Ngaio Marsh. As a detective work, the greatest flaw of *No Forwarding Address* is its plausibility is over-extended. By sheer coincidence, one character turns out to be living near the principal victim, sleeping with the victim's sibling, and possibly playing hockey with the victim's murderer. But, as all readers of detective fiction know, there are no coincidences. Though much can be said for breaking a genre, there is no apparent reason for Bowers to be doing so in this way.

Jane Rule's blurb on the back of the book points to what makes Bowers' novel unique: "A fine feminist detective teaches us how subtle we have to be to discover the obvious." Rule's statement does not only

imply the “obvious” elements of the novel, but also the obvious signs of crime in the lives of the readers. During her investigation, Detective Lacey encounters numerous characters who have been victims of physical and psychological abuse from various individuals. The novel hinges (or unhinges) on the ambiguous line between domestic and public violence, with Bowers juxtaposing the relationships which lead to the murder of Sherry Hovey with events in Lacey’s seemingly typical family life. Ben, Lacey’s son, is going out with Tiara, who dumps him for his roommate, Aziz. Tiara then dumps Aziz and the two men renegotiate their friendship. The quotidian nature of the love plot is a counterfoil to the cruelty and violence bubbling forth from the Hovey case, in which abusive relationships become too numerous to keep track of. Tiara’s sexual sampling, for example, is amplified in the adults’ disrespect for contracts of monogamy. Ben’s understandable jealousy of Aziz is paralleled by the violent need for domination demonstrated by Hovey’s husband. What is seen as unfortunate but inevitable in everyday life is less obvious but equally responsible for Hovey’s murder.

Through the juxtaposition of what contemporary wester society perceives to be common, and therefore justifiable, modes of social interaction against more overtly abusive relationships, Bowers succeeds in attaining a remarkable depth and clarity of social analysis. As a comment on the social structures of our time, *No Forwarding Address* is an intelligent, sensitive work displaying a deep understanding of human emotion and a strong sense of social responsibility.



Habitable Interiors

Jean McKay

The Dragonfly Fling. Coach House \$12.95

Barbara Sapergia

South Hill Girls. Fifth House \$12.95

Reviewed by Susan Rudy Dorscht

Jean McKay prefaces her book of humorous, critical, self-conscious, playful, serious, short texts, which are as paradoxical and unexpected, as flitting and precise, as the metaphor of “the dragonfly fling” which names them, with these words by Margaret Avison, which spoke to both books under review:

Gentle and just pleasure

It is, being human, to have won from
space

This unchill, habitable interior.

Both McKay’s *The Dragonfly Fling* and Barbara Sapergia’s *South Hill Girls* win, from very different spaces, warm, very readable, “interiors”—the engaging, moving, smart, fictions between the covers of their books. McKay works in an overtly textual but always social space; Sapergia in a conventionally realist space in which the lives of girls and women are enacted.

McKay’s *The Dragonfly Fling* consists of sixty-one short (most are under two pages) texts and four entries “from the Dragonfly Notebook” which tend to be a bit longer (around four pages each). All of the entries are both highly self-conscious about their construction and the words they find themselves being written in. The first entry, “Grab your honey,” begins “There’s nothing for it but to begin”; the second entry, “from the Dragon fly Notebook” begins “The Raw Materials (pinned to the wall, accumulating at random)”; the last entry, “from the Dragonfly Notebook,” begins “The scraps of paper accumulate throughout this dark hoarding winter. They abut, collide, crawl out to cover the

wall. They hum to each other, flap and feed, nurture themselves in this little room, this kitchen.”

Fragmented, self-conscious, and self-reflexive as they are, these texts could be called postmodern in their gestures. But they are also highly readable in other than intellectual ways, clearly have something to say, and so are multiply *meaningful*, not just *multiply* meaningful. Consider “The view from below,” for example, one of the few longer (six-page) passages near the end of the book. “The view from below” seems to begin with a self-conscious comment on one important aspect of narrative construction: “First of all, there’s the Setting.” But the reader quickly realizes that the “Setting” here is “one corner of the floor and a bit of a wall” in a horrific dream:

Floating in this rectangular corner pool are corpses. We, the women and I, have come to sit out the night with our dead. The corpses are either the real thing embalmed in some peculiar way, or models of the deceased.

The youngest is a baby; his mother keeps fretting at him. It’s just his head, but solid, as if it were done in plastic, or marzipan. Rigid and stylized, like the lid of a fast-food container. Quite a shiny surface. The corpses lurch and roll as if they were bobbing in water, but there is no water.

After the baby, the second youngest is mine. It’s my son, about two years old.

The “I” dream narrator traces “the Action of the dream” which “is sewage... I’m revolted, I want to grab my son and run, but I know that the law requires that I leave him here in the mess, that if I pull him out I will be shot.”

When the text ends with the following address to the reader—“You know these dreams, you were there when they occurred; I don’t know how you can still calmly ask, Where is your novel? Why do you persist in writing these cluttered ill-fitting scraps, that assemble like too many

coffee mugs on the drainboard?”—how can anyone say this is simply playful, textual gesturing? The story compels its readers to believe something, to learn something, to watch more carefully for something. All the “ill-fitting [textual] scraps” in McKay’s book do so in one way or another; they make us persist.

Barbara Sapergia’s *South Hill Girls* is organized around a series of stories told from the point of view of various mothers, daughters, and granddaughters of different generations and life situations, all of whom have lived in the same small town. *South Hill Girls* assumes that mothers’ stories are of “vast significance.” Because they give us mothers’ stories through which to think, they give us ways to, in Virginia’s Woolf’s words, “think back through our mothers.” These are extraordinary stories because of the ordinary and uncanny juxtaposition of characters, the unexpected, unpredictable narrative shifts, the many women, linked by blood and proximity, speaking together. For example, two stories which appear one after the other, “Sun” and Eating Avocados,” offer highly unusual mother/daughter narratives: the story of Rita whose daughter Brandi is anorexic and the story of Eleanor whose daughter Jocelyn is hyperkinetic. The stories reveal the strength of women in coping, not only with boredom and repetition, but also with the terrifying and yet somehow expected and familiar reality of mothering a perpetual child: Jocelyn, who in sleep looks “totally at peace,” inspires a “fierce anger” in her mother, is a child who scorches drapes, carves up coffee tables, smears excrement on the sheets, and can only be “managed,” never cured. Brandi “is unformed, unfinished, a reluctant fetus denying itself nourishment. Brandi is a sealed room, a high windowless tower, a science project using human subjects. Brandi is a judge without mercy.” These stories are a testimony to the strength women show, even within the complex

oppressions of heterosexuality, motherhood, and the nuclear family.

Moreover, they are written by a white woman who is willing to explore her internalized racism, classism, and homophobia. "Matty and Rose," for instance, begins "I remember what brazil nuts were called when I was young. Nigger toes. Not that people really imagined big brown men with hard gnarled toes. It was more casual than that, just a name." The ways that names are never just names, however, is demonstrated in this story of a black man. Although "[n]obody knew if they were married or not," when Rose becomes pregnant, "people watched from behind curtains," speculating on what colour the baby would be: "only [the narrator's] former babysitter, Mrs. Tansley, didn't think it mattered one way or the other." "Matty and Rose" is a story about the stories the watching people in the small town told about Matty and Rose. By the end of the story, neither the pregnancy nor the relationship is viable. Matty and Rose leave separately. All that "we" hear about the story is what the narrator hears: "they found out he wasn't from the States at all, he was from Halifax, Nova Scotia."

In "Danny's Story" both the class and the sexual orientation of the characters takes on an importance not usual in Canadian fiction. Ethel Trantor, who "some of the people on River Road thought... [was] ignorant, lower class, cheap," loves and, briefly, married, Danny, who ends up recognizing and living his homosexuality. As he writes in a letter to Ethel: "I live with the man you saw in the restaurant. I am quite happy with him, as happy as I can ever be. I am free to be myself in a way I never was before." By the time Ethel marries again she has "become a thoroughly well-groomed woman, worthy to stand comparison with any of the models in the Eaton's catalogue." Although she learns, through Danny's departure from her life,

how dependent she was on him she learns also, through a sadly paradoxical recognition, "what a separate thing the self usually is, learn[s] about barriers and privacy and the agreements that can be negotiated with the outside world."

Both *South Hill Girls* and *The Dragonfly Fling* narrate complex, unexpected, entirely believable lives. They are both, as Aritha van Herk says on the cover of *South Hill Girls*, "stories that locate absence and difference."

Journeying

Susan Swan

The Biggest Modern Woman of the World.

Key Porter, \$16.95

Theresia Quigley

The Child Hero in the Canadian Novel.

NC Press, \$17.95

Reviewed by Jo-Ann Elder

In her study of the portrayal of children in Canadian fiction, Theresia Quigley attempts to understand why so much of our fiction in both languages "paint[s] the world of the child as a very bleak one indeed." Quigley chooses to restrict her study to children who are major characters in adult novels, since these give her the opportunity to study more serious portrayals of childhood. Her primary list includes 18 novels, 9 in each official language. Quigley's intentions seem to be largely pedagogical. She provides plot summaries and both the works in her bibliography and the language she uses are accessible to students. Quigley's background (a doctorate in Comparative Canadian Literature) informs the selection and the approaches in her book, and this makes *The Child Hero in the Canadian Novel* particularly useful for anglophone students and teachers interested in understanding major themes in Québec literature.

The works considered are from the two canons: novels by Atwood, Beauchemin, Blais, Caron, Davies, Ducharme, Findley, Hébert, Langevin, Laurence, Mitchell, Nowlan, Poulin and Roy. However, with the exception of Ducharme, few of these authors would spring to mind as writers with a particular interest in childhood. The practice is to study *The Diviners*, for instance, without realizing the depth and perception of Laurence's view of childhood.

Quigley's study suggests that this practice is neither accidental nor insignificant. For instance, are the relative critical neglect of Findley's *The Last of the Crazy People* and its focus on a child's point of view a simple coincidence or linked by societal devaluation of childhood? The question is never fully answered, but Quigley's examples make a strong case for linking social and fictional practices.

Perhaps it is too strong a case. Quigley concludes, in the last paragraph of her study, that

The corruption of childhood, as depicted in English-Canadian fiction, and the virtual death of childhood, as portrayed in French-Canadian fiction, particularly in *Le Matou*, are danger signals that, in our world of today, childhood, the traditional symbol of the spirit of innocence, is on the verge of disappearing.

Quigley believes that writers choose child characters because they feel that childhood is an important formative period in an individual's life, and that the bleak and often abusive childhoods portrayed in Canadian fiction effectively represent what actually happens to children in our society. It is tempting to assume that the evolution of the novel—in which the portrayal of childhood moved from innocence to corruption—corresponds to a similar societal evolution. However, this assumption would neglect the misfortunes of children in the past. *Le Matou's* Emile, for instance, reminds me of no one so much as Hugo's

Gavroche. Moreover, the idea that fiction mimics reality glosses over differences of form and intention. Fiction cannot really provide a reliable statistical sample. Finally, perceptions of the bleakness and pessimism of Canadian fiction are legion. Historically, our writers have been particularly gifted at exploring the psychological dramas of the alienated and the underprivileged; perhaps, indeed, happy families have no stories, or at least their stories are less interesting.

Susan Swan's *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*, in some ways, at least, reminds the reader of Yves Beauchemin's work. This novel, too, spreads over many years and many incidents, and weaves together a story that is "part truth, part legend" (back cover) to create a magic realist whole. The emphasis in Swan's work, as in Beauchemin's, is on the story: an unusual life portrayed with sensitivity and pathos as well as humour and absurdity. There is an obvious comparison to be made with Beauchemin's *Juliette Pomerleau* who, while not a giant, is a character whose proportions match those of the book. One difference is that few of the events in Swan's novel catch the reader by surprise, the way mysterious coincidences do in Beauchemin's. The first-person narrative of Anna Swan (who "may or may not be related" to the author, the "tallest woman freelance writer in Canada"), a generally sensible character, makes the story entirely plausible. The narrative shifts to letters or diary entries by other characters generally serve to confirm Anna's perceptions or to extend them, rather than to provide a contradictory or unusual perspective. For this reason, one of the most interesting passages is that in which Anna's mother writes a remarkably and unpredictably vehement attack on Anna's second husband, and Anna returns the fire. This sort of passage, which occurs too rarely, serves to make us question the narrator's

calm authority. Otherwise, Anna remains an imposing figure in this respect, too.

Anna's gender is raised as a significant issue; her efforts to lead a fulfilling life are thwarted by her failed modernities, unsatisfactory sexual relations and her exploitation at the hands of her lovers and managers. Much of Anna's life is characterized by a lack of control; despite her practical and decisive attitude, her biology seems to have determined her way of life. "I have been accused of being preoccupied with myself," admits Anna, "but it is the world which is preoccupied with a giant's height and never lets a giant forget it." This, however, is not the final word. Anna concludes: "So big people may as well enjoy being noticed."

Thus, unable to escape notice, Anna makes herself as noticeable as possible by joining Barnum's and other's companies. Nevertheless, she refuses to consider herself a side-show, and her dignity ultimately allows her to live the best life possible:

To me, life is a performance and all moments are dramatic. (I believe this is a characteristic of show biz people.) Yes. I have made my bed and I have to lie in it, as the Blue-noses [Canadians, but more particularly Maritimers] put it—that nation of scoffers who don't understand the need to dance up to the aurora borealis. Yet I am content... I have accepted my destiny. I was born to be measured and I do not fit in anywhere. Perhaps heaven will have more room.

Quigley's book describes a certain number of adult protagonists who come to terms with their childhoods. Their "childhood trauma" and its "lifelong effects" are somehow addressed through "a healing process" and "the mourning or reality" so that "a mature and whole existence in the present might be possible." Swan's character also undergoes such growth. Perhaps, far from a reaction to an exceptionally painful childhood or an unusual fate delivered by biology, this is the journey we all make.

Community

Anne Marriott

Aqua. Wolsak & Wynn \$10.00

Joanne Arnott

Wiles of Girlhood. Press Gang \$9.50

Janice Williamson

Tell Tale Signs. Turnstone \$12.95

Reviewed by Jane Ennenberg

We can all stand to be reminded how hard an audience will or will not work to understand us. When we spend time to understand a work, a community of others who would confirm our views becomes imaginable to us. If the work is a pleasure to read, its community seems huge. And if the work fails to reward our efforts to decipher it, we are unable to imagine its community.

Aqua is a ninth book of poetry for Anne Marriott (whose second book won her the Governor General's Award in 1941). Most of its poems are informed by Marriott's illness and impending death. New poetry dealing with a subject usually kept out of conversation in our society is more than welcome. But Marriott keeps the reader from relating directly to her poems by being too much there herself. Too often in these poems, tangents and asides place us more vividly at her dinner table, listening to anecdotes of travel and romance than inside the poems themselves. Often, what should not be there in the poem is there in parentheses. The lines

Tonight my lungs
(the last X-ray
showed the disease advancing)
fill with grey vapours

and

The donkey men knew nothing
caring only for their animals
(their investment)

tell what might otherwise be implied or omitted. At these times, her general audience dwindles. In the occasional poem,

Marriott writes beyond the desire to tell all. Seemingly alone in these poems, a more fictional narrator communicates not the anecdotes but the experience of pain, the approach of death, doubts, and recurring memories. She says,

(The natural earth
scares us with metaphors
we pave them out of sight
inventing more
more obvious)

and parentheses here are part of the poem's statement—the tone is more personal, the statement more assertive. Best read in one sitting, *Aqua* forces us to realize an audience whose members are equally alone in the death they imagine for themselves. The loss and subsequent regaining of a more intimate audience is part of what Marriott's poems communicate about death.

Joanne Arnott's poems in *Wiles of Girlhood* are first of all wonderfully readable. Single images evoke sentiments of whole afternoons that seem familiar even as they are drawn for us. But it is only on second and third reading that one thinks to consider how Arnott achieves such familiarity and resonance. Her choice of words is simple and direct; we never confuse the image and connotations for the referent itself. "If *Honour* is Truth" begins,

If I were a rat in a bucket
instead of your daughter

and traces a disturbing and expansive image within an easy rhythm. In "Double-Take: A Poet Represents Her Poem," Arnott tells us she remembers "only pieces of a life." Her use of the indefinite article here is as telling as her exclusion of a definite one in her title, *Wiles of Girlhood* for it seems these poems could be referring to any number of lives. Arnott can tilt the balance of our own "memory/non-memory, knowing/not knowing" and teach us a knowledge of things we have not otherwise

experienced. In "flatland summer," the specific gestures of a girl on a porch speak of the tensions and fears of childhood, making what is not familiar imaginable:

she sat there eating spiders
lamely off the walls
of inner tensions pushing sliding
pulling taut and hang-
gliding through air
crunchy spiders
having nothing else to do
when the weeds
grow high around the porch
and the wind files in
from the old road pushing
at the house

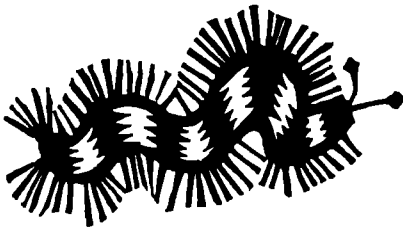
Somehow, Arnott communicates what she knows of childhood, even where she cannot remember. Her poems continue to yield and so deserve to be studied. They gracefully assume a healing environment among members of a warm, interested, and significantly large community.

Janice Williamson's *Tell Tale Signs* is visually the most enticing, seductive book I have seen in a long time. But reading the book, cover to cover, is often frustrating. Although some passages keep me glued to the page, too often the reading is unrewarding work. In "Tell Tale Signs," beautiful graphics accompany prose paragraphs which read more like language poetry. Ample white space on each page invites or compels me to make connections between word and visual form, between paragraphs and graphics. But the number of possibilities for meaning easily boggles; connections are too loose or too obscure and I am left where I started, with a visually seductive book that is more rewarding to flip through than to read. These characteristics are disturbing because I am left with an impression of the book that is more classically feminine than educationally feminist: outwardly intriguing, beautiful, inviting, the book on closer look is a maze of interior avenues, and full of blind corners.

If *Tell Tale Signs* creates a community, it is a narrow one whose interests are largely academic and whose members already know how to appreciate such a work. There is little satisfaction in viewing the collapse of structures and in coming up against one's expectations of form and language when no clear message comes of the exercise. A subtitle in "Tell Tale Signs" reads, "collaborating, reader and writer think of nothing)" and I come shoulder to jammed door against the close parenthesis. In "Domestic Accounts," the paragraphs of a larger text are interspersed with portions of sentences that together form a separate, smaller text. This, as do many of Williamson's poems, demands a linear reading even though a random perusal of the pages and passages is more fruitful. Though clever, they are still tricks which seem to keep much hidden. Scanning the pages, I find gorgeous sentences, like

This is how she reads in the middle of her
life,
sucking in words like lungs

which are easily missed when trying to absorb a whole paragraph. I enjoy Williamson's challenge to linearity and conventions of form and language—she seems to trace thoughts in ways that have me reading passages aloud—but I am left wondering whether communication has been made or merely deconstructed, and whether readers will recognize themselves as part of the community of this book.



Great Distances

Maxine Hong Kingston Reading *The Woman Warrior* and *China Men* (excerpts). 52:50 minutes
\$20.00

An Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston. 53 minutes. Mono audiocassettes. Produced by American Audio Prose Library Inc., P.O. Box 842, Columbia, MO 65205

A Moveable Feast #226: **Bharati Mukherjee** reads from her novel *Jasmine* and talks about India, Iowa and the American character. 30 minutes. Mono audiocassette \$8.95

Reviewed by Susan Fisher

Bharati Mukherjee's cool precise voice travels great distances in this reading from her 1989 novel *Jasmine*. She begins in a Punjabi village, telling stories about an astrologer and a girl who bathes in a river clotted with the dung of water buffaloes. She finishes in Iowa, that same precise voice (but now with distinctly American vowels) describing what the new corn looks like from the kitchen window of a farmhouse. Mukherjee's ease in both these contexts reminds us, as no geography lesson can, that these two worlds exist, just a plane journey apart, on the same small globe.

On the face of it, *Jasmine* is a preposterous tale: illegal immigrant from India, widowed, raped, exploited and pursued, ends up a housewife in Iowa, caring for a legless bank manager and their adopted Vietnamese son. Yet, *Jasmine* is a wholly believable book, successful not as realism, not as a tract about multiculturalism, but as a fable about hope and transformation in this modern world where as Mukherjee says, "fates are so intertwined...., how can a god keep them straight?"

The reading on this cassette is taken from the first two chapters of the novel, and introduces the poles of Jasmine's existence: her beginnings as Jyoti, in an Indian village, and her life as Jane Ripplemeyer, in Iowa. Mukherjee, raised in an orthodox Hindu family, and educated in India and

Iowa, knows both these worlds. Like Jasmine, she has had to re-invent herself to survive. In the interview, Mukherjee declares that “what sets me apart from other immigrant writers is that I say, because I believe this myself, it’s all right to let go... We are now Americans; let’s make out emotional commitments here.” And this is precisely what Jasmine does, shedding her previous selves, and adapting to America. But what enables Jasmine to do this is not the optimism of America, but what Mukherjee calls “the long perspective” of her Hindu upbringing. “In Hinduism one is trained to take the long perspective. The body and this life, the physical world around us, is an illusion... Salvation means the knowledge that this body is simply a pitcher... a shell.” In the novel, Jyoti/Jasmine/Jane knows that “when a clay pitcher breaks, you see the air inside is the same as outside.” She is broken many times, but she survives.

Like Bharati Mukherjee, Maxine Hong Kingston is a woman of two worlds. America, the new world, has given her a voice. But it is the other world—the feudal village world of myth, ancestors, and ghosts—which gave her something to say. Hong Kingston, American-born daughter of Chinese immigrants, grew up in Stockton, California, hearing village gossip, peasant maxims, and classical Chinese poetry. America, with its lights, its highways, its televisions, did not blur her knowledge of that other world.

This two-cassette package from the American Audio Prose Library presents readings from Hong Kingston’s two award-winning books, *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980). In *The Woman Warrior*, Hong Kingston deprecates her own voice as “a bad, small person’s voice, without impact,” but this is not true. It has a tremendous impact. At times she sounds like a child, at others, like an old woman, and this combination suits perfectly the

mix of prosaic detail and myth-inspired fantasy in her books. She works hard to get the voices right, sometimes saying phrases aloud in Cantonese as she types an equivalent in English. When she reads, even the broken English, and the English which serves as translations of Chinese conversation, come across as direct and believable.

But Hong Kingston is not a realist. She thinks of her books not as novels or history, but as “biographies of imaginative people.” She points out that her father told the story of how he came to America in many different versions. Each was different, but all were true. As a storyteller, she, too, finds different ways to tell the truth, adapting Chinese myth and legend to tell an American life.

The opening words of *Woman Warrior*—“‘You must not tell anyone,’ my mother said, ‘what I am about to tell you’”—suggest the silence which Hong Kingston’s book broke. Yet the same mother who enjoined silence, and tried to frighten Hong Kingston into obedience with village tales of how women who transgressed were punished, also slit the frenum of her daughter’s tongue—not to silence or disfigure her, but to ensure that she “would not be tongue-tied” and that her “tongue would be able to move in any language.” Her mother was right. Hong Kingston learned to make what might have seemed an irremediable handicap in America—her Chinese upbringing, her strange imprisonment inside the old village attitudes that “when you’re feeding girls, you’re feeding cowbirds”—into the source of great eloquence.

In Mukherjee’s novel, Jasmine’s tongue is also cut. But Jasmine does it herself, before murdering the man who has raped her. Like Kali, whose tongue drips blood, Jasmine spills blood from her own mouth on to the sleeping man she stabs. Ultimately her tongue heals, and she learns to speak like an American. Like the woman

warrior, she learns to tell the stories from the old tongue in the idiom of the new.

Mukherjee and Hong Kingston carry Asia and America in their minds; their stories embrace two continents. Thus they seem excellent guides to what Mukherjee describes as the "transformations that you and I, the world, but especially North America is going through right now." These tapes, with their well-chosen excerpts, and pertinent interviews, make one want to hear more.

Beauty and Sadness

David and Maggie Helwig, eds.

Best Canadian Stories 1992. Oberon \$15.95

Douglas Glover and Maggie Helwig, eds.

Coming Attractions. Oberon \$12.95

Reviewed by Jill Franks

Despite the unevenness of the selection, at least half of the works in *Best Canadian Stories 1992* probably merit the superlative of the collection's title. Four of them in particular display control, experience and sensitivity: "Zonians," "A State of Affairs," "Emma's Hands," and "How Beautiful Upon the Mountains."

"Zonians" contains, besides simply a good story full of sex, betrayal, family rivalry and a violent political demonstration, a humorous cross-sex narrative voice, as Lesley Krueger writes from the point of view of the protagonist Pete, who manages to sleep with his cousin's wife, dislocate a shoulder, and save his aunt's life in the course of a short visit to the Panama Canal Zone. Although the cards would seem to stack up on his side, thus eradicating his guilt in the betrayal of his own wife and cousin, who is cruel and bigamous in his own right, such an easy solution is not in fact accepted by the author. She punishes Pete with his own guilty conscience, with another woman's harsh remonstrance, and with a new awareness of responsibility.

Krueger renders a believable male consciousness deftly and humorously; Pete's internal voice is matter-of-fact, cocksure and detached until he experiences guilt. About the quick tryst that caused so much pain, Pete observes only that "she pulled off their clothes and got loud." The next sentence is just as impersonal, though evocative of the unique erotic experience: "The smell of green coffee from the sacks excited Pete with a back-of-the-throat bitterness he knew he would never meet again."

"A State of Affairs" shares the cross-gender experiment with "Zonians," achieving as graceful a result. Gallant's protagonist is an elderly Polish refugee residing in Paris; his "problem" is that he is old, has no friends, and is slightly depressed by a wife who cannot remember who he is or where he lives (he lives with her). The themes of loneliness and the vagueness of senile consciousness are beautifully woven into the fabric of the story; they are represented in images such as solitary care-sitters and by funny things the wife says in her forgetfulness. Alone among the stories in the collection, "A State of Affairs" renders that rare quality of beauty within the sadness of life.

"How Beautiful Upon the Mountains," like "A State of Affairs," employs a leitmotif that gathers resonance as the story progresses. That leitmotif is the lifelong wilderness home of the narrator's grandmother, contrasted with his own sense of rootlessness. Although the story is framed by the setting of the grandmother's funeral, the main action is contained in the narrator's recollection of his father's story of his own boyhood. In his search for permanency, a sense of place and of family tradition, the son takes a subtle assurance from his father's life that a final settling-down or homecoming is possible. The title suggests the contingency of modern living; "how beautiful upon the mountains" are the words of the Christmas sermon that the mortician mistakenly reads over the

coffin of the dead grandmother instead of the funeral elegy, rendering the service cheerful instead of elegiac. Such humorous touches lighten and expand Heighton's simple tale in much the way that the wife's senility did in Gallant's.

Where *Best Canadian Stories* displays in unevenness in its selection, *Coming Attractions* boasts a more uniform one. The three female Canadian authors represented are interestingly contrastive and complementary. Carolyn Adderson writes about working class families who struggle against their socioeconomic conditions as well as their psychic limitations. Marilyn Eisenstat writes about middle-class white women: two who live in China, one in Canada. The plight of her third protagonist, however, is strictly a function of her race and her birthplace, as she is an unwilling participant in the dogmatic regime of her homeland, Communist China. The third author, Marina Endicott, in three stories with the same narrator, recreates the world of domestic drama inhabited by a child's consciousness.

Endicott's stories are my personal favorites because she recalls for me my easily-forgotten concerns of childhood. The world was so large then, and parents' moods and morals influenced us (me and my sister) so absolutely; Endicott remembers well what this different consciousness is like. Her protagonist Laura is a curious, aggressive and cheerful girl who has trouble getting along with her sister, though she depends on her for her own identity. She is aware, also, of the stresses and strains in her family in the intuitive way of a child. Endicott creates larger-than-life grown-up characters to teach Laura about adult life: an attractive married man next door is Laura's first crush, though, or perhaps because, he is so different from her father. The manic-depressive neighbor Ariadne Keller, on the other hand, gives Laura her first taste of the joys and sorrows

of womanhood, as she becomes involved in the family strife of this boisterous, yet unfulfilled mother-of-six. Endicott paints character with a few well-chosen details, expressed astutely through the voice of an eleven-year-old; about Ariadne's excitement, Laura observes, "I think there were sparks of light coming off her."

Most of the nine stories in the collection describe a moment of misery or poignancy in the lives of their characters. Some of them, such as Endicott's "The Orphan Boy" and Adderson's "Shiners," render these sad moments with a sense of their beauty, just as Mavis Gallant did in "A State of Affairs." Others stretch too far for the symbol that will lend meaning to the situation; this awkward symbolism often derives from the Bible. Adderson's "The Chmarnyk" ends with the racially-motivated shooting of the child narrator's brother. He has brought rain to the thirsty prairie town but the locals don't allow foreign magical powers in their provincial enclave. The magic realism of the rain-dance is enough symbolism to prove the rainmaker's special powers; the overlaid Christ analogy, made explicit in the mother's dream of her son's return, is excessive.

Endicott also relies a little too heavily on the Bible to add significance to her story, "Being Mary." Six-year-old Laura reluctantly relinquishes the chance to play the Virgin Mary in the school drama, but rationalizes that it would have been inappropriate to play such a virtuous character when she herself is really a liar and a thief. "Perhaps I would wait a while and be Mary Magdalene," she comments, although the author provides not proof that she understands this other Mary's sins or virtues any better than the Virgin's. Despite these minor flaws, each of the works in this collection contains writing that captures the essence of the short story genre: to convey without sentimentality or didacticism the beauty in the sadness in the beauty of life.

Significant

Allan Greer and Ian Radforth, eds., *Colonial Leviathan: State Formation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada*. U Toronto \$22.95; \$55.00

Ken S. Coates

Best Left as Indians: Native-White Relations in the Yukon Territory, 1840-1973. McGill-Queen's \$39.95

Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

As comfortable as it may be at times for those working in Canadian letters to focus their attention on the poetry, fiction, and drama and on those books and articles which themselves bear directly on the literature, due account must also be taken of the wider range of Canadian studies.

Two volumes which offer significant comment on areas of national history not necessarily in the forefront of literary scholars' attention are *Colonial Leviathan*, and *Best Left as Indians*. The first book, a collection of essays, looks at a variety of issues which reflect the development of state power/control in the middle of the nineteenth century and essentially dwells—logically—on central Canadian experience, though one piece is devoted to the Maritimes; the second volume consists of a single text devoted to one issue, considered over a longer time-span—the history of Native/non-Native relationships in the Yukon from the days of the earliest non-Native incursions to the present.

In a curious way, unity consists in diversity in Greer and Radforth's book. All the essays are on different topics: for instance, the development of police forces (largely in Upper and Lower Canada), class shifts in Lower Canada, the reforms of Sydenham, education in Canada West, "état et associatinnisme au XIX^e siècle québécois," "gender regulation and state formation," the beginnings of railway construction in Canada West, transportation and changes in the social fabric in Upper Canada, finance, and "ideology, society and state"

in the Maritimes. All the pieces, despite the variety of approaches and styles, are interesting, well-documented, and readable, and the studies by Allan Greer (on the police) and Graeme Wynn (on the Maritimes) are outstanding. The period under review in the book is, of course, the era of Susanna Moodie, Isabella Valancy Crawford, and Charles Sangster, and such works as will strengthen an understanding of the ethos of the late colonial period can only be welcomed.

Ken Coates' *Best Left as Indians* does not, certainly, deal with a part of the country marked—so far—by either extensive literary inspiration or output, even given the popular writings of Robert Service. As Catherine Parr Trail and Susanna Moodie would have agreed, coming to terms with the environment is usually a first consideration; cultural advances tend to grow better in conditions of some nourishment. And Coates' concerns are not literary, although his own style is particularly effective; this is not a dry book in any sense—for all the detail, it is, from start to finish, a compelling account. The notes are excellent. His subject is the whole question of white-Native interaction and of institutional handling of settlers in the territory. Thus, he considers the effect of policies developed by the Hudson's Bay Company, the federal government (especially the Department of Indian Affairs and the police), and the churches. And such is the picture of marginalization of the Natives—at least until recent years—that one can only be aghast at the notion of what might have happened if, for example, steps had not been initiated to look at the issue of land use, the enormous effect of modern non-Native living standards and habits, and the increasing danger to Native languages and cultural traditions. But this book has an importance beyond its picture of the northwestern corner of Canada, for it also serves to bring to mind the matter

of non-Native/Native relations across the country and the many writers who have offered telling comments across the years—D.C. Scott (who served the D.I.A., rising to the position of Deputy Superintendent-General), Emily Carr, and A.M. Klein, among many others.

Political Commitment

Elizabeth Wesseling

Writing History as a Prophet. Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel.
John Benjamins, us \$65.00

Richard Weisberg

Poethics: And Other Strategies of Law & Literature. Columbia, us \$32.95

Reviewed by Gabriele Helms

Is political commitment possible in the postmodern condition? In *Writing History as a Prophet* Elizabeth Wesseling challenges those critics of postmodern historical fiction inclined to overemphasize the nihilistic element of postmodernism at the expense of political commitment. In her final chapter on “Alternate [sic] Histories,” she depicts novelists who have suggested positive answers to the question of political commitment. For Wesseling, their mode of “uchronian” fiction (counterfactual fantasies that explore alternative possibilities of historical situations and are informed by utopian ideals) is the major contribution to the generic repertoire of the historical novel to have emerged from postmodernism.

Writing History as a Prophet, however, also outlines a history of the historical novel. Wesseling follows an evolutionary model of the genre that sees generic change as a gradual process. Therefore, to understand postmodernist innovations in the historical novel, Wesseling sets out to explore “the historical dynamics of this literary genre,” drawing attention to the changing relationship between historiography and historical fiction in the course of

time. She first describes the classical model of historical fiction in Walter Scott’s novels. A survey of nineteenth-century historical writing shows how this model was imitated and emulated. Finally, Wesseling identifies two kinds of innovations in the twentieth century which she conceptualizes as prominently figuring strategies, not as a fixed opposition: self-reflexivity and the writing of alternative histories.

Wesseling regards literary innovation as “generic hybridization, that is, as the combination of previously separate generic conventions,” thereby hoping to name innovative elements in a more precise and positive manner. Barnes, Cantor, Coover, and Swift, among others, have according to Wesseling continued Woolf’s and Faulkner’s modernist experiment with self-reflexivity. They have turned epistemological questions into a literary theme, and in their search for the past their self-reflexive novels can be seen as a conflation of the historical and the detective novel.

Writers who invent alternative versions of history “imagine the future by altering canonized history.” It is Wesseling’s primary concern to show that the uchronian fictions of postmodern writers such as Pynchon, Reed, Doctorow, Rushdie, Grass, Wolf, Berger, and Fuentes do not change history at random. She sees uchronian fictions as a mixture of the historical novel and science fiction; the utopian potential of science fiction accounts for their political implications. Versions of history become instruments of power for these writers. Thus, in “writing history as a prophet,” that is, in “recording the past with an eye to the future,” they hope that “prematurely crushed possibilities may yet be realized.” In addressing the problematic exclusion of minorities from canonized history, they address emancipatory causes.

Wesseling places her own approach in the context of the contemporary debate on postmodernism but dissociates it from

other familiar approaches such as Linda Hutcheon's and Brian McHale's. She recognizes that her perspective is competing with others and challenges the reader to judge the value of her readings in terms of plausibility, interest, relevance, and especially explanatory power. The reader should not expect an expansion of the corpus of innovative historical fiction from this book, for that is not Wesseling's aim. She restricts herself mainly to familiar works in North American, British, Dutch, and German literature (although it is surprising that she does not discuss any Canadian novels in spite of her frequent references to Linda Hutcheon's work). However, her book is valuable for its attempt to see postmodernism not as "apolitical, ahistorical, uncommitted," but to develop a differentiating approach that allows for a political stance.

Richard Weisberg's *Poethics: And Other Strategies of Law & Literature*, a collection of essays from 1974 to 1991, offers another response to ethical questions in our present condition. Less conscientious and self-critical in his approach than Elizabeth Wesseling, Weisberg criticizes postmodern criticism in literature and "free market microeconomics" in law, because these systems have attracted people away from "the essence of their fields, away from the passions, the hopes, the reality of the world around them." Seeing legal thought and practice in an ethical void, he seeks a revival of jurisprudence through poethics, by using literature to learn about law in an ethical way. In the interdisciplinary field of Law & Literature the author tries to supply what so far has been missing: a guidebook to theory and practice aimed at students, teachers, amateurs, and specialists.

In seven of his essays Weisberg analyzes law-related fiction, seeking to present fresh readings of well-known works by Dickens, Barth, Shakespeare, Melville, and Faulkner. While I find his re-readings interesting but

not exactly revolutionary, his discussion in part 3, chapter five, essays 13 and 14 (the organization and numbering of essays is rather confusing) is definitely thought-provoking. Here he examines the rhetoric of law and takes the practice of law in Vichy France in World War II as his case study. He examines the need for interpretive and ethical strategies to minimize the risk of future disasters and explores the ramifications of postmodernist theories for Holocaust studies.

Only the chapter on "The Self-Imploding Canon" proves equally engaging to me; it is a response to recent challenges to the field of Law & Literature for relying too much on the traditional literary canon. Weisberg vehemently argues for the preservation of the "Great Books." He tries to show that there is no need for restructuring the canon because the mainstream texts themselves are of a self-destructive, autosubverting nature. His polemical style in this essay needlessly belittles innovations by feminist and post-structuralist approaches; Weisberg feels that he does not have to "just satisfy some social litmus test," or to reevaluate the curriculum "just because some feminists insist we do so." After all, he argues, the canon has been less under white male control than other institutional structures, which is one of his weakest arguments.

I think that Weisberg is at his best when he discusses the similarities between law and literature in terms of their use of language and narrative structure. However, he does not engage in a discussion of the implicit epistemological questions. For him, all it takes is to "rediscover the difference between reality and interpretation." Although his theoretical approaches are open to debate, Weisberg's book can be interesting reading for a newcomer to the interdisciplinary field of Law & Literature. However, such a reader would have appreciated a list of references at the end of the book to facilitate further research.

Spiritual Vitality

Marguerite Van Die

An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918. McGill-Queen's \$34.95

Michael Gauvreau

The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression. McGill-Queen's \$39.95

Jon Butler

Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People. Harvard \$29.95

Reviewed by Henry Hubert

Michael Gauvreau's *The Evangelical Century*, the fifth volume in the McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion series, complements Van Die's *An Evangelical Mind*, the third in the series. In a sensitive study, well grounded historically, Van Die reviews how Nathanael Burwash met the challenge of science and higher criticism in late-Victorian Canada by emphasizing vital religious experience, tested by reason and science. With Victorian optimism that projected the advance of Christianity in a secular world, Burwash served Victoria College first as Professor of Natural Science, then as Dean of Theology and finally as chancellor. As leader of Canadian Methodism from the 1880s onward, he guided the movement for church union until his death, and, as chancellor of Victoria, Burwash argued that the federation of a religious college with the University of Toronto would integrate Christian faith into the intellectual life of the nation. Toward the end of his life, however, he was unable to convince a young minister like J.S. Woodsworth that the church was flexible enough to meet Woodsworth's demands for both theological and social relevance in the twentieth century.

Focusing on this issue of the church's relationship to the Social Gospel movement, Michael Gauvreau rejects arguments

by Richard Allen, Ramsay Cook, and A.B. McKillop that Burwash and his contemporaries concocted "a social vision out of an unstable melange of philosophical idealism, evolutionary naturalism, higher criticism, and sentimental humanism, which subverted traditional views of God, man, sin, and redemption." Traditional historians, writes Gauvreau, force "key elements of Victorian culture into a mould cast by the expectations and attitudes characterizing the modern relationship between religion and society." For Gauvreau, the social gospel grew out of spiritual vitality, not out of a church weakened by critical thought.

Debate about science and criticism within the church died in the years following World War I not because of a theological shift to support a social gospel but because of the growing division between college and pulpit. From the middle of the nineteenth century, protestant clergyman-professors like Burwash had led the church in grappling with new ideas. But a new generation of professors did not take to the pulpit. After the turn of the century, more and more academic theologians argued that new ideas among themselves rather than wit the laity. Hence the church lost intellectual vitality. In restricting his study to the influence of clergyman-professors, Gauvreau does not relate the new isolation of theology to the rise of specialization in higher education, and he ignores developments in the full church culture in Canada. Nevertheless, by arguing from a perspective within the church, Gauvreau's study, with Van Die's, offers important correctives in the study of Canada's religious history.

Jon Butler's *Awash in a Sea of Faith* takes an external perspective to examine the role of religion in American society. Rather than a flagging of religion, as happened in Canada, Butler discovers growth. Colonial church leaders reached barely 20% of the population; through the middle of the

nineteenth century this figure rose to 30%. Both figures fall far short of the 60% of the American adults who belonged to American churches in the 1960s.

American religion has never been uniformly orthodox. Butler's impressive scholarship demonstrates that contemporary American religiosity derives from complex historical processes at work "far beyond the narrow confines of Puritan New England." Although the Salem trials executed women for witchcraft, colonial American almanacs featuring the human male anatomy interpreted in astrological terms outsold the Bible. Butler returns continually to "the role of authority and coercion in advancing Christianity in America." Denominational schisms in the first half of the nineteenth century prefigure the Civil War. Religion is implicated in the rise of slavery and in the concomitant genocide of African religion in America. But the Christian religion also ultimately returns to Afro-Americans an identity that allows their cultural survival. The breadth of interest as well as the contradictions in American religion, both historical and contemporary, are reflected for Butler in the 1980s American president, who was "firmly backed by fundamentalist and evangelical Christians," but allowed his "daily schedule to be guided by horoscopes... from a San Francisco astrologer." This pluralism, Butler claims, is a unique American creation, differentiating American religion from its European forbears.



Lie of the Land

Adeena Karasick

The Empress Has No Closure. Talonbooks n.p.

Sharon H. Nelson

The Work of our Hands. The Muses' Company

\$12.00

Liza Potvin

White Lies for my Mother. NeWest \$14.95

Reviewed by Marilyn Iwama

Central to each of these three books is the urgency of addressing the historically engendered lies that define individual roles in society. None of these is a comfortable read. There is a two-hundred page telling of childhood abuse here; there is an exploration of Canada's more sinister "Gross National Product" of male violence towards women and children; there is separation, disappointment, and undignified death. And none of these texts offers what Potvin calls "the irresistible solace of victimization." Worse yet, more by the daring of their words than by any zealous didactics, each work disturbs the paralytic complicity of silence.

Much of this suffering begins and ends in the language of the symbolic order, and Karasick's text offers a provocative alternative: "So. Palimpsest yourself..." When self-reflexive, this lusty imperative is Cixous': "right now. in language. *with* laughter. and through the body. For I laugh with my body" [emphasis hers]. Sanguine, even jubilant, Karasick layers on Freud as she erases him with Cixous, Bill Bissett and Derrida. Her work is a poetic of literary criticism that exceeds the inscription of its own boundaries. What seems a poem has already been presented as a conference paper; the "Alefbet Transfers" published in this volume is, Karasick assures us, "a work in process." Nothing is certain, but "twisting, shifting, unintelligible..."

The Empress Has No Closure is an impressive deconstruction of language and

meaning that is already finding an enthusiastic audience among feminist (especially) academics, and will, I hope, find a(n) (un)stable place in the corpus of texts that are changing, and being changed by, contemporary pedagogies. But read, for instance, against the stark backdrop of Sharon Nelson's poetry, Karasick's exorbitance highlights the thin line between self-transgression and self-indulgence, as well as the conditional terms of deconstruction. Writes Nelson:

Half the men you've ever met
will rape you
if they think they can
get away with it.
One in ten
will beat you
in the name of love
or discipline.
And one in five
will fondle
your daughter.

Efforts to "open up" such a text falter under the force of obvious meanings. Nelson's poems are plain talk. Sentences begin with capitals and end with periods, and most lines neatly hug the left margin. Titles like "Premenstrual Syndrome" and "Spring Cleaning" announce domesticity and "femaleness." Yet "half the men..." the passage quoted above, is from the poem entitled "Gross National Product." Nelson's satire attacks the undergirding power structures of logocentrism, a process intensified in "Silencing," as the voices of the never recognized mothers of poetry are "released / like bellies from girdles...."

We know the meanings of "Literature,"
the convenient historiographic lies that
obtrude
so that when we speak clearly,
what we say cannot be heard.

Nelson's volume looks innocuous enough. Unlike the obvious linguistic and pictorial collage de-centered on the black

of Karasick's book, the primary colours of Segal's cover art suggest a happy yellow sun shining on a generously proportioned womanly form. But happening between the covers of *The Work of Our Hands*, is a frank undoing of the ideology of deconstruction. The ordered stanzas of "Premenstrual Syndrome" fairly scream the Name of the Father while troubling the platitudes which male medicine has used to quiet questioning (women) patients. In "Dancing as Fast as I can," one syntactically precise sentence dismantles the romantic (male) myth of the prima ballerina: "[t]he audience is wild, / romantic and in love / with a woman with strained knees / and bloody feet."

One expression of the damage done in the name of that authority is Liza Potvin's *White Lies For My Mother*. Potvin's narrator was sexually abused by her father from infancy to adolescence. As memories return, the adult narrator discovers that she and twenty-one of her aunts and cousins were also abused by her grandfather. This "story" is one of those lies that must be exposed as women come to speech. As Potvin observes wryly: "Freud was wrong: there is nothing taboo about incest. The only taboo is public discussion of incest." The ethics of reviewing such a book are complex, but to resist the exercise is to participate in the conspiracy.

Most pages of text are overwhelmed with blank space, each page number centered in a black blot on the extreme right margin. Predictably, the relentlessness of this visual accentuates the horror of the telling while imaging the conspiratorial silence of the narrator's mother, priest, and doctor. (Psychiatric records describe the narrator's eighteen suicide attempts as "typically adolescent.") As well, it allows the reader an interactive space—for reflecting, a telling of one's own, or respite.

Initially, both feminism and language stand as obstacles to Potvin's telling: "there

are no words to convey the truth, only feelings, disconnected and vague." And anyway, "[a] good feminist never blames her mother, understands that all mothers are victims of male oppression." Invoking Philomela, Potvin unleashes the telling that is beyond, (before?) speech. Weaving together her dreams and disconnected feelings, journals written in and out of hospital and therapy, "letters" to her mother, her father and herself, the text escapes the despair of lament as completely as it does the transcendence of glorious triumph. Potvin's text transgresses the lie of the authority that defined her as guilty and deserving of her father's "love" and her mother's silent absence. The telling comes to rest at the point where she can,

feel the magnificent enormity of saying "nothing happening." And yet be contradicted by the peculiar circumstances and absolute details of the moment, the random intersection of light and time and space....

Assertions

Tsigane Baernstein

The Katzenbody Problem. Black Moss \$12.95

Gertrude Story

How to Saw Wood with an Angel.

Thistledown \$12.00

Reviewed by Michèle Kaltemback

What future have aging women to look forward to in contemporary Canadian society? Both volumes attempt to offer an answer to this question, though in very different ways indeed. In *The Katzenbody Problem*, Tsigane Baernstein develops an acid accusation of male-dominated society at large, an the academic institution in particular. With the story of a part-time female history instructor out of a job whose face is so distorted with the effects of Graves' disease that her two profiles look "like two people vowing internecine

warfare forever over bumpy nasal terrain," the narrative weaves its way through interior monologue, journal entries and hallucinations alternating with third person narration and shifting points of view.

Tsigane Baernstein lures us into the mind of a fifty-year-old woman for whom "aging is much worse than dying." Unable to make sense of the mysterious hallucinations brought about by her disease and its drugs, faced with the absurdity of fate—"you live what's predicted for you no matter how you got the script"—will Rachel, who is "determined to terminate," enjoy enough free will to end this phase of her reincarnations the way she has planned it?

Turned down by her girlfriend, loved by a faithful student who keeps reappearing at the most unexpected moments, this prosaic earth-woman may be seen as an anti-heroine in a modern version of a courtly love story. She takes her young naive lover through a succession of ordeals and mysterious errands—"go home and apply for a visa" (she means a Visa card)—and she fights with knife and words to curb his passionate advances so that his love remains a platonic devotion. Will he succeed in marrying his lady to spend a life of bliss by her side, the tamed dragons sleeping at his feet? With its skilfully contrived ending, this story constitutes a vigorous expression of female independence.

The deconstructed narrative, the hyper-realism of such repulsive images as the decaying corpse of a little girl or a cricket floating in a glass of milk, intertwined with the most extravagant flights of fancy make us share the anger but also the detachment of a woman who knows she has nowhere to go in this world: "I have not the heart for being a pitiful menopausal welfare case." Assaulted by bankers, doctors and pharmacist, turned down by employer and union representatives, Rachel certainly finds reasons enough to be disillusioned about society. She is not too sure either about what

awaits at the other end of the tunnel: will she find her friends and relatives, and Cybele, the faithful hound, in a world of bliss and contemplation or else a reincarnation on an unknown planet processing corpses on a conveyor belt, or a void space abandoned by the loved ones already busy with their next lives? In any case, reader, beware, Rachel's plight may very well prefigure your own, and that of all human kind: "Don't vote. Don't go to war. Don't go to work. Don't pay your taxes. Lector Benevole, start cleaning up now. It's your only chance." Pretty soon, the future of humanity could be in jeopardy. AIDS, cancer and pollution might very well wipe out all traces of life from this planet. Then, how come that in spite of such cataclysmic predictions this book leaves us with a feeling that all hope is not lost? the extraordinary vigour of the persona, the mere strength of the narrative using language as a tool for survival and a weapon to fight the absurdity of life, turn what could be a bitter tale into an assertion of female, or maybe plain human endurance against all odds.

Gertrude Story's collection of anecdotes certainly conveys a very different impression with the portrayal of a serene sixty-year-old content with her free and happy life in rural Saskatchewan. By means of autobiographical fragments in the shape of an ongoing, unstructured conversation with an ever present reader, the narrative unwinds from one digression to the next. Gradually we get to know this independent woman who insists on sawing wood the old-fashioned way as this activity proves to be the occupation which affords the best opportunity to carry on a conversation with the unpredictable angels in her head. We learn about her present life as a visiting writer enjoying the hospitality of the communities she works with, her interest for her land, plants and language, but also about her growing-up years on a farm and her former life as the wife of a country

teacher. Imbued with a certain nostalgia, the book is not, however, a rejection of modern life but rather a recipe on how to overcome solitude, to find peace of mind and be in tune with nature and the essence of life.

All the stories reveal a strong sense of place, of belonging to a community deeply rooted in the land. Many evocations provide us with bits and pieces about life in Saskatchewan: the colours and sounds of the passing seasons, the smells of an old-fashioned Thanksgiving dinner or the luxuriant endurance of weeds and the delicacy of the first crocuses. We come to realize how life in the Prairies remains, as it was during Gertrude's youth, a constant struggle against the harsh land and climate. A long drive on treacherous winter roads brings back to mind similar expeditions at an earlier time when the driver had to get up at four in the morning to place a pan of hot ashes under the car to warm the oil. Through she is definitely moved by her strong love for her homeland, Gertrude Story is still quite aware of some of the devastating effects of the narrow-mindedness and isolation of those Prairie communities. As a child, she was more prone to read books than to help her mother with household chores, and even proved rather inefficient at preventing her father's cows from getting into the neighbour's fields. Even today, she feels bitter about the resulting exclusion from her mother's and sisters' close circle.

Its metafictional quality, however, sets this book above mere regional literature. Its presentation as a conversation always allows a certain amount of space for the reader to enter the narrative. The author lets us in on all the secrets about her craft: the composition of the story, the choice of titles, or even the reasons for writing. We learn about the whims and demands of the "Writer Inside" and are warned to be patient whenever the point of a develop-

ment appears particularly uncertain.

Gertrude Story is less convincing when she attempts to convey in simple language such abstract concepts as what she calls “the power of the deer” or the notion of bliss. Partly because of her wish “to put it in grade four terms,” such passages often border on sentimentality and oversimplification. Still, her prevailing sense of humour certainly makes up for a few over-emotional passages.

In the Midst

Warren Tallman

In the Midst: Writings 1962-1992. Talonbooks \$12.95

Peter Quartermain

Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe. Cambridge \$47.95

Reviewed by Jon Kertzer

Warren Tallman’s title, *In the Midst*, suggests the close view of a writer swept up in the world of letters as it whirls around him. “My own dilemma,” he confesses to Robin Blaser, “is, as reader, I seem fated to be scattered around in close relationship to so many poets, it all becomes impossible.” His solution is to record scattered opinions and connections just as they occurred, in the hope that they will provide a glimpse into the Canadian cultural scene, and beyond that, into “our midcentury North American imagination.” The rush of ongoing immediacy is important in this collection of essays, letters, photographs and reviews, which are offered without apology or annotation as disparate, occasional, engaged and quirky. Only a few items are published for the first time. Most are short, some little more than fragments. What unites them are mere chronology and the lively mind of their author—Tallman, the American-in-Canada, the far-westerner, the unprofessorial-professor.

The ability to grasp the significance of what is happening as it happens is the tal-

ent of a good reviewer, rather than of a retrospective critic or historian. Some of Tallman’s best works appear in reviews, where he registers the primary impact of poetry on a responsive reader who draws as close as possible to the creative process. Since the poetry he favours is concerned with the intensity of experience (“Vivid life”) just as it is seized by words (“body English”) and recognized as value (meaning, morality, politics), his position “in the midst” is all the more appropriate. Hence his fondness for personal information and the private conditions of writing, seen for instance in a biographical fantasy about Jack Kerouac. Hence his admiration for people who “jump actively into the middle of things.” Hence his love of the avant-garde, and his skill at explaining techniques such as repetition, variation, incantation and improvisation: “By repeating the word, phrase or sound, one in effect hovers over the given feeling, perception or memory, draws it close. And by so doing draws or conjures up hidden, unexpected meanings and possibilities.” The central value for Tallman is always the energy of life as it is lived—the “quick” of things. Accordingly, “some direct, immediate and concentrated form of energy” appears in most of these essays, where it becomes creativity, courage, boldness, freedom, the id, the unconscious, eros, jazz.

In the Midst serves various purposes, but not all equally well. It provides revealing glimpses of the Canadian literary scene; it fights some old battles; it defends poetry in an unpoetic age. It offers insights into specific writers, although Tallman’s purpose is often to promote them, as much as to analyze their work. He is content to disclose poetic energies, rather than to explore their consequences. In the later essays especially, his expressionist style provides a way of resonating with the poetry he admires. He probably did not intend to write a memoir, and personal essays such

as the “Treatise on Alcohol” strike me as laboured; yet *In the Midst* effectively evokes the personality of its author. Although the writing extends from 1962 to 1992, Tallman’s gaze keeps returning to two formative periods: “the high old times” of the 1950s in northern California, when the beat generation was beating; and the “crazy salad” of the 1960s in Vancouver, when the 115H generation was tishing. Exuberant energy characterizes both periods, which are personally as well as culturally significant for Tallman. They provided him with close friends as well as literary heroes, whose names recur in these pages: Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Victor Coleman, Frank Davey. In opposition stand the enemies—philistines, puritans, bureaucrats, academics—who are usually presented through satiric caricature.

Peter Quartermain admires curiosity, gusto and wit, and in *Disjunctive Poetics* he abundantly exhibits these qualities. He endorses the modernist aesthetic that sees modernity beset by a fundamental crisis undermining the traditional powers of thought, language and reality—three interdependent categories which now disrupt each other’s authority. In pace of hierarchy, stability and logic, we find multiplicity, ambiguity and disjunction. Poetry especially bears witness to the anti-metaphysical truth of things, since it is a “decontextualized object” without ulterior purpose, in which linguistic signification supplants logical reference. It presents “a mental/linguistic landscape rather than a verifiable description of the world outside the text.” To this argument, Quartermain adds a native American twist by examining the “objectivist” tradition expressing local, polyglot, multicultural American realities. Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky are his chief figures, accompanied by Creeley, Duncan, Reznikoff, Guy Davenport, Susan Howe and, with apology and tribute, the unAmerican Basil Bunting.

Having sketched the larger, philosophical picture, Quartermain proceeds to take it for granted in his highly “conjunctive” study of literary history, personality, influence and textual exposition. This is just as well, since his formidable talents appear best when he is most specific. His analysis of lines and even individual words is impressive and sometimes astounding. He is an excellent close reader, who is so perceptive that his example threatens to disprove his claims about disjunction. Even as he demonstrates the “generative incoherence” of a poem, his scrupulous analysis discloses the disguised intelligibility of techniques that only seem haphazard: “The energy of this writing comes from the ways in which the tension between referentiality and its lack becomes a structural principle...” He is so thorough that occasionally he risks “overexplaining” the poems by drowning them in explication. In just two pages we find Thomas Sprat, Marx, Pound, Clerk Maxwell, Spinoza, Aquinas, H. Stanley Allen (a physicist), Max Planck and Hugh Kenner (a critic whom Quartermain resembles)—all applied to lines from Zukovsky’s *Fist Half of “A-9”*. After marvelling at such erudition, I wish I could believe that Zukofsky were worth all the fuss. I wish I could get so excited about Stein’s variations on the word *it*: “the fourth *it* further problematises the text... The dynamics of this (the sixth) *it* are interesting...” But I find that in many cases I admire Quartermain’s critical leg-erdmain more than I do the poems.



Festshriven

John F. Hulcoop

Phyllis Webb and Her Works. ECW \$9.95

Pauline Butling, ed.

"You Devise. We Devise." A Festschrift for Phyllis Webb. Special issue of *West Coast Line*, 6:253 (Winter 1991-92) n.p.

Reviewed by Jon Kertzer

John F. Hulcoop is so well-acquainted with Phyllis Webb's writing that he chafes against the tight format used in the *Canadian Writers and Their Works* series. His instincts are expansive, while the format is restrictive. Nimbly citing manuscripts, variants, unpublished and private letters, he looks behind the scenes so often that he almost obscures the scene. If his purpose is to introduce Webb and her writing, then newcomers will feel overwhelmed, while readers familiar with her intense and intricate imagination will feel undernourished. Hulcoop amasses 162 footnotes for only 50 pages of text, and some notes are curiously appended, as if their original point of contact had been cut in an earlier revision. His own style tends toward the baroque—agreeably so—but the ECW regulations leaves no time to be gracious. The study is full of valuable insights (Webb as a "sinistral" or left-handed poet, as a "painter-conscious poet," as an admirer of Paul Goodman's gentle anarchy), but they are often given on the fly. As a result, the argument grows hectic with glances at Stoppard's *Travesties* or Dickens' *Great Expectations*, allusions that might be rewarding given more time, but that are cluttered when offered as hurried asides. It is true but unfruitful to report that Webb's "earliest published poems reveal additional debts... to Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth; to T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne More, W.H. Auden, and Dylan Thomas."

Pauline Butling classes Hulcoop with critics devoted to "the now familiar narrative of Webb as the suffering, sensitive individual"—a reasonable view, especially of her earlier poetry. His current study shows, however, that he has consulted Harold Bloom, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, and other theoretical champions. Consulted, but used sparingly except for Bloom, who proves the most useful, perhaps because his analysis of creative anxiety reformulates the tradition of poet as suffering, sensitive individual. Hulcoop also favours Bloom's romantic temper and vocabulary: "the insurrectionary impulse of the poet," the physical as metaphysical, the precursor or "Covering Cherub" as father-figure. And like Bloom, Hulcoop treats the poet's mind as a psychic arena for competing personal and rhetorical energies. Webb's characteristic contest appears most clearly near the end of *Wilson's Bowl*: "and the great dreams pass on / to the common good." The competition of private and public needs, and the need to resolve them, however tenuously, in any articulation of the "good," offer a broad framework for Hulcoop's informative and busy commentary. Or as Libby Scheier restates this focal point: "Phyllis is constantly juggling her commitments to political principle and her commitments to creative chaos, addicted to the precarious and fluid game of keeping all the balls in the air at once."

"*You Devise. We Devise.*" was not available to Hulcoop, but perhaps he has responded in advance to Butling by classifying her: "...feminist critics have not, as yet, zeroed in on Webb with the intensity that marks their devotion to Woolf and Nicole Brossard...." I sense rivalry rather than scorn in his tone, since he later acknowledges that Webb's *Naked Poems* represents "a rebellious breaking-out of the male's tradition of lyric love-poetry (so startling that many critics missed the point altogether...)." "*You Devise. We Devise.*" shows

how sophisticated the rebellion has grown. For her part, Butling admits that Hulcoop “argues for an emerging feminist consciousness in his review/article of *Water and Light*. Still, she parts company from him by marking a fundamental shift in Webb criticism. Earlier studies were based on modernist/humanist notions of “self-objectification”; recent studies are based on post-structuralist/feminist formulations of a decentered self “constructed of and in language.” I would replace the phrase “self-objectification” with “self-expression,” because the former implies a process of transforming (by whatever means) a subject (however conceived) into an object (however represented), and this intricate process is actually the subject of several essays in Butling’s collection. Self-expression suggests unmediated contact with the poet behind the poems, at least as an ideal. I make the distinction to highlight the irony of a *Festschrift* “dedicated” (a word ripe for deconstruction) to a writer who promptly evaporates into a series of rhetorical functions, which assert “her subjectivity as a nexus of self/reader construction and something irreducibly ‘other.’” Granted, her poetry continually poses the riddle of identity. “Who is this *I* infesting my poems?” she asks, and every essay, memoir and poem in this book serves as a gloss on the question, or an attempt to answer it, or a diagnosis of the infestation. Nevertheless, a post-structuralist *Festschrift* is a curious beast. On the one hand are letters and essays by Webb, biographical notes, interviews, conversations and photographs, all directed at the poet behind the poems. The writers express (oops) such strong affection and admiration for her that their joint tribute is triumphantly suffused with Webb’s personality. On the other hand are critical essays speaking austerely of enunciative positions, discursive formations, and sexual-textual spaces, through all of which “Phyllis Webb,” poetic starfish,

comes into being: “*I am the mask, the voice, the one who begins those lyrical poems... I commits suicide in the watery commune, the vocal pod. We swims on.*”

It is impossible to assess all 26 contributions, so I offer a few final impressions. As a source of material about Webb, her life and opinions, this book is essential. Its essays venture into areas (lesbian love, suicide, forms of lyric) barely touched on previously. It offers fine examples of feminist criticism at its most sophisticated and uncompromising. It supplies good, old-fashioned background information, as well. It displays the curious egotism of writers bent on confessing the limitations of their critical positions—such resourceful modesty. It shows how Webb has continued to develop her talents, and how the changes through her career illuminate corresponding cultural changes. It pays homage to a superb poet who in these pages is lovingly festshriven.

Discoveries & Mysteries

Bronwen Wallace

Keep That Candle Burning Bright and Other Poems. Coach House \$12.95

Joanne Page, ed.

Arguments with the World: Essays. Quarry \$16.95

Reviewed by Janice Kulyk Keefer

The publication of these two volumes is both a gift and a wound, reminding us of the exceptional art, intelligence and passion Bronwen Wallace brought to her writing, and of the enormous loss we have sustained by her early death in 1989. Anyone interested in contemporary Canadian writing and in the interconnections of aesthetics, politics and social issues that currently make up the literary (mine)field, will find Bronwen Wallace’s posthumous contributions indispensable.

Arguments with the World opens with

Joanne Page's fine introduction; it conveys the powerful impression Wallace made upon those lucky enough to have known her well or upon those who, through reading her, have come to feel as though they were intimacies of this writer who strongly believed in positioning her readers with her, on "the same side of the page."

Arguments consists of newspaper columns, speeches, essays and interviews; all of them articulate Wallace's chief interests and allegiances with a grace and decisiveness that combine to give a necessary clarity to the voice we hear speaking out on issues as varied as violence against women, the exclusionary mode of teaching literature in public schools, and the grievously reductive mythology of the family. Without that clarity it would be all too easy to mythologize Bronwen Wallace herself, to blur the edges of that particularity on which she insisted—her working class origins, her radical feminism, her fierce attachment to the people and landscape of southeastern Ontario—and turn her into a soft-focus Good Woman of Kingston, a form of hagiography she would have vigorously resisted.

In her newspaper pieces and general public speeches, collected here under the title "The Politics of Everyday," and "The Family and Other Stories," Wallace excels as a rhetorician, making accessible, understandable to an audience presumably much less radical than she, concepts such as the right of lesbian couples to have the same accesses to infertility clinics as their heterosexual counterparts, or our urgent need to correct the racist bias of the systems which educate and govern us. On a whole range of social issues Wallace is "politically correct," without, however, losing a sense of self-reflexive humour or the understanding that to change people's beliefs and uproot their prejudices one must persuade rather than prescribe.

In the third section of this volume,

"Arguments with Myself," Wallace situates herself both as a writer within a distinctly Canadian literary tradition, acknowledging her debts to Al Purdy and Alice Munro, among others, and as a writer for whom certain voices, regardless of national provenance or gender, have inflected her writing in a formative way—the voices, for example, of Flannery O'Connor, Doris Lessing, John Berger. The essay "Why I Don't (Always) Write Short Stories" and the interview with Janice Williamson are especially revealing as expressions of Wallace's chosen aesthetic. In the latter, she shows herself to be comparable to Margaret Atwood in her distrust of the academy (like Atwood she dropped out of a PhD programme in English literature) and similar to writers like Paulette Jiles or Sharon Thesen in her concern that theory, literary or political, shouldn't become proscriptive, shouldn't lead to a "Stalinism of imagination." In her statement of what amounts to an artist's credo—"I write from what I am given, not from what I decide," Wallace encapsulates what she explores in different ways throughout this volume: the conviction that there is a mystery at the heart of writing, by which the self can discover its hidden face, and the belief that both the visible and indivisible self are marked by the particularities of the "given"—that through an awareness of one's limitations as imposed by gender, class or race one can also begin to understand one's possibilities for changing self, others and the world itself.

The author of *Arguments* emerges as a writer who uses "isms" but refuses to be bound by them; who makes eclectic and idiosyncratic use of theories; who can draw upon a Keats and an Emmylou Harris, a Yeats and an Angela Davis to construct an aesthetic that will comprehend rather than constrict the rich and problematic specificity of a life she sees in collective, rather than universal terms. Most importantly, Wallace insists upon the power of language

to touch and to change us; to *refer* to real things and people and situations rather than to itself alone. No post-Saussurian, she.

Yet no Pollyanna of discourse, either. The epigraph to *Keep that Candle Burning Bright* acknowledges the gap between what the poet wants to say, how much she wants to encompass, and the words with which she must make do. This gap must be bridged, not through an evasion of the real, a launch into the orbit of metaphysics, but through a recognition of the inevitably embodied nature of all knowledge and language. A metaphor Wallace uses recurrently in the first half of *Candle* is that of the snug fit of a good, stylish pair of shoes—or cowboy boots: a metaphor which speaks eloquently to her desire to belong on and to this plant, “criss-crossed with roads and trails and paths and streets and sidewalks”—the “only map of heaven I can rely on.”

All but the last poem in this volume are prose poems, as if in them Wallace had achieved a final synthesis of poem and story. In *Arguments*, she quotes John Berger’s conviction that

Poems, even when narrative, do not resemble stories. All stories are about battles, of one kind or another, which end in victory and defeat....

Poems, regardless of any outcome, cross the battlefields... They bring a kind of peace. Not by anaesthesia or easy reassurance, but by recognition and the promise that what has been experienced cannot disappear as if it had never been. Yet the promise is not of a monument.... The promise is that language has acknowledged, has given shelter, to the experience which demanded, which cried out.

The poems in *Candle*, weighted as they are with the burden of love, and thus of “all that I have to lose,” are yet astonishingly buoyant, borne up by the intensity of Wallace’s delight in the hearing and telling of stories, whether drawn from Country and Western songs or the pages of *The*

National Enquirer. These stories, she shows us, are our best way of knowing ourselves and our world; they remind us of all that we would rather not know, yet also reveal the miracles that occasionally visit us: angels we can never quite get used to treating as our guests. Such stories are taken in not just by our ears, but by the very cells of our bodies, keeping us in “auditory touch” with one another, so that for “two or three milliseconds, your body moves to the beat my thought sets up, just as my hand writes by what it hears of you, out there somewhere.”

Bronwen Wallace’s extraordinary power to use language and the whole register of speech—from luminous *aperçu* to vernacular expostulation—creates her only possible monument, one dedicated to the desire to embrace and be shaped by the voices of others, and to the recognition of “the obvious, unavoidable weight of... how we fill each other briefly, but perfectly and then uncurl, from arms, wombs, lungs, as carelessly as smoke uncurls across the sky. Even the dead, whose dying goes on and on.”

Outsider Within

Himani Bannerji et al.

Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggle. Women’s Press \$14.95

Dawn Currie and Valerie Raoul, eds.

Anatomy of Gender: Women’s Struggle for the Body. Carleton UP \$29.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

Women’s knowledge is often regarded as particular, local, and physical, and has therefore been consistently devalued by an education system that prizes the abstract and the universal. *Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggle* appropriates and redefines that view; it incorporates five articles by female instructors and students, and thus displays a variety of cultural and social experiences. In

the introduction, the authors of this book acknowledge that they occupy a unique position: privileged within the non-academic world, yet marginalized in the context of the university. The woman academician, they suggest, is often the “outsider within.”

Although the theoretical approach cited most often is Marxist, more fascinating are the actual life stories that the writers narrate. In fact, the inclusion of theory to lend weight to the arguments sometimes detracts from their insistence on appeals to personal experience. The authors share a questioning and self-consciousness of their various “location,” and their stories raise many issues concerning the place(s) of women within the university. Linda Carty, for instance, shares her experience of being “a Black woman from the Caribbean” who struggles within a Eurocentric academy. Himani Bannerji draws on her own background of growing up within the colonialist education system of India and Pakistan to argue that feminist discourse must not undermine issues of race and class. Women, one of the articles suggests, are multiple and contradictory subjects. The book is, on the whole, a captivating study that combines story and theory to question assumptions about the university, about knowledge, and about feminism itself. It celebrates complexity but does not provide or elicit facile answers.

The Anatomy of Gender: Women’s Struggle for the Body is a valuable study of the issues associated with the female body. It consists primarily of papers from a conference—titled “Gender and the Construction of Culture and Knowledge”—held at the University of British Columbia in 1989. Similar to *Unsettling Relations* in questioning the claims that totalitarian feminism often makes to represent all women, *Anatomy of Gender* focuses primarily upon issues of biological determinacy. The editors, Dawn Currie and Valerie Raoul, claim that the

book “is about the deconstruction and the reconstruction of the female body.” They divide the study into three sections: first, examining the representation of women in “mainstream culture” and its reflection of the political processes mostly controlled by men; secondly, looking at the fields of law, medicine, social work, and social policy; thirdly, focusing more specifically on the ways in which women can begin to “know ourselves” outside of male definitions. Each article begins with a short summary of the argument and concludes with a series of questions. The ostensible reason for these inclusions is to convey the atmosphere of the conference itself—to encourage dialogue on these and related issues; however, the summaries and questions also suggest that this work would serve as a good “textbook.” Indeed, there are several articles that would be useful for discussion in the Canadian classroom: thus Janice Williamson’s reading of the West Edmonton Mall takes us on a tour through many of its 58 entrances; Kathryn McCannell, Clair McCarthy, and Barbara Herringer analyze the way in which Canadian social policy ignores those who reject the traditional roles of wife and mother.

While individual articles offer substantial contributions to recent similar studies, the multiplicity of positions and focuses presented, especially in the first section, threatens to overwhelm the overcohesiveness of the collection. The editors often establish only tenuous connections, although their efforts are successful in linking the powerful and often frightening studies by Janet Stoppard, Kathy Kendall, Anne Quéniart, and Kelly E. Maier on medicalization and the female body. The collection does not leave us with a bleak vision for the future. The struggle, as Isobel McAslan emphasizes, must be “for our bodies and our minds” as well as *against* the dominant discourses, and articles in the third section suggest that women can reclaim the body.

Daphne Marlatt, for instance—in her sampling of “writing in the feminine”—summarizes the struggle described in both texts by asserting that “every woman we have read who has written about women’s lives lives in us, in what we know of our own capacity for life, and she becomes part of the context for our own writing, our own imagining.”

Visual Economy

Susan Swan

The Last of the Golden Girls. Lester & Orpen
Dennys \$24.95

Reviewed by Alan Lawson

“...like all good athletes, we shared the illusion that life is a game with rules, that a clear-cut judgement would cure us of our uncertainty about our strengths and weaknesses by dividing us into categories of winners and losers.” In Susan Swan’s second novel, the games, and especially the rules, are more interesting than the categories. Her first novel, the stunning *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* (1983), was more interested in “categories” and more interesting about they interpellate a subject and a society. Unlike the Nova Scotian giantess, Anna Swan, the “golden girls of summer” are not threatened with “emblem fatigue”; their rules, although they depend (for the most part) upon a complicity with the larger rules of patriarchy and capitalism, are of their own articulation if not of their own construction. They, and especially the narrator, Jude (“Dinger”) Bell, exhibit “relative autonomy”; they are not *simply* women-in-training under patriarchy.

The novel is divided into three parts: predictably “I: Losers” and “II: Winners,” but also (more tantalisingly) “III: Summer is Ended.” The games (like the relationships between the three central characters: Jude, Shelley, Bobby) are firmly located “in

the heat of summer,” a time out. The last section then will be about what happens when all the rules have been dispensed with, all the games have served their purpose, the uncertainties cured. And in a sense it is. Its implausible, hysterical dialogue, melodramatic action, and generically-confused changes of mode—the uneasy mixing of referentiality and surrealism—are the final play in the textual game of rule-making and -breaking.

For that is what is at stake in this novel. As well as the thematic interest of the rules of the game of love and life, as well as the generic interest of the female Bildungsroman with its commitments to realism, romance, and fantasy, there is a strong performative interest in loving beyond the rules of genre. Like Bobby’s baby, like the preposterous Big Dome, the whole text “miscarries” in an apocalypse that is not merely in the domain of narrative. The text-within-a-text of Jude’s “Karl and Monika” story of female victims in Part One is transformed into bizarre fantasies of Boadicea and triumphant female insects in the text in Part Two and finally becomes the narrative of the end-of-the-world *in and of* the text in Part Three. The game that ends with a terrible “blow” for Jude in part One is followed by a miscarriage and a literal “bun-fight” in Part Two, and a fully-realized rape and a “retreat” into a dome within a dome at the bottom of the bay at the end of the world in Part Three.

The games played in, or perhaps more importantly by, this novel are, like most games, concerned with their function as spectacle. Games can, but seldom do, exist without spectators; spectators can, but seldom do, remain detached from the teams they watch; most games have an umpire, a referee, who “keeps an eye on things.” And so it is in fiction, especially this one. Just as there is a generic “progression” (as suggested above) from Part One to Part Three, so there is a progression in the way in

which the visual economy of the text develops. It should be said plainly that this is an intensely visual novel: the reader delights in the visible evocation of adolescence, of summer, of Georgian Bay, of bodies, and places. In Part One, the reader is invited to join the narrator at one privileged vantage point after another: Look-Out Pine, Poison Ivy Point, Happy Hollow, to watch the boys in the outhouse, Bobby's breasts, Jay's tight crotch. The visual economy is concerned with the gaze and its manipulation—"what I'd do to get him to notice me instead of Bobby"—and with surveillance of a largely parental kind. The gaze is as often female as male (and the novel is interested in what the gaze might be), the boys are excluded from the games (almost) as often as the girls. Many of the games are about names, and almost all of them have names. And naming (like the ubiquity of rules), in a sense, over-determines the illusion of realism integral to the adolescent narrative that is motivated by anxieties about power, sex, and control.

In Part Two, the visual economy is less regulated, more risky and threatening. The section opens with an extended second person invocation of the reader as gazer ("Old Voyeur Eyes") in a scene that is, for a couple of pages, filled with androgynous bodies; the narrating subject delights in "the part of my being that is pure objectness." The situation and events are not so much described as presented to view. The illusion of realism is more energetically explicated in an increasingly precise notation of time and place ("Friday, 2:15 p.m."), in all the signs of a roman—clef, and in stage direction-like excesses of spatial and visual detail the further the novel departs from realistic narrative. The reader ("my ally and necessary witness" like the narrator herself, occupies a liminal space at the edge of the society of the text Jude is now a journalist writing the "authorised" history of the Cape family into whose history she

becomes increasingly written; like the reader, though, she remains just outside the official photographs, writer-observer, lower-upper middle class, androgynous. If the predominant sex in Part One is autoerotic, in Part Two it is voyeurism. But to be viewed is to be in danger when one has broken the rules; and in Part Two most of the rules of socio-sexual conduct get broken. The adolescent rules—"One: always appear unconcerned about the outcome. Two: do not, on never, grant an identity to the rival"—and networks of best friendship collide when the observing narrator is observed fellating one best friend's lover and bonking her other best friend's fiancé.

In Part Three, the narrative outruns the narrator. Like the reader, she is reduced to "looking through the peephole" as Bull Cape kills Jonah and rapes Sally; realism and fantasy are virtually indistinguishable as the narrator "sees" beyond categories. The pair of geodesic domes—into which they retreat under the leadership of a dubious swami when the destruction of the world is announced—end up on the bottom of the Sound, out of sight, beyond "the need to play [the game] to the end and damn the consequences." The consequences seem, in fact, to have played themselves out.



Mother-Tongue

J.G. Sime

Sister Woman. Tecumseh \$12.98

Reviewed by Valerie Legge

Sandra Campbell and Lorraine McMullen recently edited *New Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women 1900-1920*, a collection of early twentieth-century narratives that confirm the existence of a long tradition of women writers of short fiction in Canada. The 1992 edition of J.G. Sime's *Sister Woman*, a reprint of the 1919 edition, is part of the Early Canadian Women Writers Series, a project under the editorial guidance of Lorraine McMullen. These are important publications for they extend our notion of Canadian literature and our knowledge about women's lives during a period of upheaval and change. In the introduction to this rediscovered text, Sandra Campbell describes *Sister Woman* as "a landmark in women's writing in Canada." One hopes that this process of recovery and rediscovery of our literary foremothers begun by McMullen, Campbell and others will continue.

The fictional world that Sime creates in *Sister Woman* is postwar Canada during the early years of the twentieth century. In a journal entry of January 1, 1922 Sime's contemporary, Lucy Maud Montgomery, wrote, "the world is upside down and inside out." Sime believed that this upheaval was best reflected in the figure of the immigrant working woman. Montreal forms the ideal backdrop for stories which focus on women from different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds.

Many women writers of the short story tend to emphasize the text as performance because they privilege the orality of the narrative. As a result their stories are frequently what Ursula K. LeGuin calls "voice texts," dialogues of speech with silence. In *Sister Woman* Sime captures the rich inter-

play of women's voices as they meet and merge in a new land. The stories that constitute the core of the collection are either dramatic monologues or dialogues in which women talk to one another in order to find out who they are. They share their stories in an attempt to articulate the "mutual understanding that makes us sisters under our skin".

Sister Woman echoes the disparate voices of strong women who struggle "through the quick-set tangle of life" to live as best they can. With dignity and vision they survive poverty, unconventional relationships, sexual harassment, old age, loneliness, and the loss of lovers and children. Through work, laughter and the small ceremonies that regulate their lives, Sime's women affirm the inextricable mysteries of female existence: "We all have our turns —and our griefs and our happiness and our sorrow." Representing the full spectrum of a woman's life, these women choose roles other than that of wife and mother. Generally women who live independently of, or separate from, men for whatever reason have escaped notice or have been dismissed as interesting. Sime's narratives celebrate a wider spectrum of female experience than that which is generally articulated in mainstream fiction written during the early years of the twentieth century. Her stories focus on working girls, housekeepers, factory workers, dressmakers, widows, business women, old maids, and circus performers.

The cyclical nature of her characters' lives is reflected in an open-ended narrative. In "Union" a lack of closure serves to reinforce the protagonist's philosophical view of the world. When she comes to realize that beginnings and endings of things can never be found, Anne Jeffery begins to accept the complexity of living and loving without husband or child. Standing in her solitary room looking out at the vastness of the night sky, Anne intuitively embraces

something larger and more eternal than the prosaic present tense.

Sister Woman explores the rare yet significant moments when women's lives overlap or "rub" against one another. In "The Wrestler," Sime describes a hospital encounter between the narrator and a professional woman wrestler. At the relatively young age of twenty-seven, a female performer who has spent her life travelling with a troupe of performers is "worn and wasted" but not defeated by the curious and cruel twists of life. Like so many of Sime's characters, the protagonist is not a pretty woman. Hers is an inner beauty, a beauty of spirit that shines out from warm laughing eyes.

In "Shaping a Vehicle for Her Use" Gail Scott writes, "the fragments which survive out of [women's] difficult historical silence may become... stories... but they will have to be pierced by new conceptions of time, space and continuity." In *Sister Woman* J.G. Sime explores the continuity in the new contours of women's lives. Her narratives valorize and celebrate the differences while acknowledging the similarities in female experiences.

Imaginary Indian

John Steffler

The Afterlife of George Cartwright: A Novel.
McClelland & Stewart \$16.99

Daniel Francis

The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture. Arsenal Pulp \$15.95

Reviewed by Harmut Lutz

Both Steffler's novel and Francis' study are positive examples of how non-Native Canadians are self-critically analyzing their historical relationship with First Nations peoples.

In *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* Native people are the objects of the desires, fears and machinations of a title hero fashioned after a famous Canadian explorer-

colonist. George Cartwright (1739-1819) was an English adventurer, who gave the town in Labrador his name. Much like his more famous predecessor, Virginia's Captain John Smith, Cartwright tried unsuccessfully to establish himself as the expert on colonization in North America, and like Smith, he sought to win favour with the British crown by cashing in on the popularity of "his" Natives during their visit to London. While Smith's attempt ended tragically with the death of Pocahontas near Gravesend in 1617, John Steffler, in his version of the "Native princess"-myth, has the beautiful Inuit woman Caubvick overcome the small pox and return to Labrador as the only survivor of a group of four Natives who visited 18th century England as Cartwright's guests. Tragedy strikes after Caubvick's return to Labrador. Unwilling to part with her beautiful hair, which came off her head as a whole scalp during her illness, she carries it with her in a trunk, thus infecting her people with smallpox and killing them all.

Steffler complemented his reading of Cartwright's *Journal of Transactions and Events during a Residency of Nearly Sixteen Years on the Coast of Labrador* (1792) with fictional scenes of his own, which are, however, based on careful historical research on cultures and customs in eighteenth-century Britain, India, Germany, Minorca and Canada. His hero emerges as a zealous, ambitious and often vain country squire, seeking fame and fortune through British imperial military pursuits in Prussia, India, and elsewhere. To Cartwright, Labrador appears to be an ideal country, where his enterprises as fur trader, ethnologist, botanist, zoologist and governor of a small colony, all serve his ultimate goal of exploring the land with his hounds and hawk. His "housekeeper" is the self-reliant and educated Mrs. Selby, who reads *The History of Emily Montague* during their passage. She gradually becomes

independent from him and develops her own economic base in North America, whereas Cartwright grows increasingly negligent of his duties. He eventually loses his colony during the American revolution when privateers from Boston seize his possessions and leave him penniless. After ten years in Labrador, he returns to England impoverished and accepts an easy commission as a barracks master.

Steffler's novel is resonant with intertextual references to earlier North American myths and literary texts, which the author rereads from a contemporary perspective, a perspective presumably more enlightened, by feminism, and non-anthropocentrism. In general Mrs. Selby proves to be more perceptive and pragmatic than her male employer, unwilling to conform to the triple stereotype of refined English lady, household drudge and concubine, which Cartwright thought he had hired. Similarly, the Inuit people he trades with are far more adept at survival than Cartwright can ever hope to become. Wishing to "civilize" and transform them into useful partners in trade, he actually initiates their destruction. As such, the text is a parable of what often did happen to native people during contact. Steffler's novel is reminiscent of the visit of the "Four Mohawk Kings" to London in 1710 at the same time "foreshadowing the tragic trip to Europe by seven Inuit people from Labrador in the 1880s to serve as living exhibits in one of the itinerant ethnological shows organized by Hagenbeck's zoo in Hamburg: they all died of smallpox and never returned to Hebron.

The novel is set in the immediate present in Nottinghamshire, England, where Cartwright died in 1819, but where his presence still lingers at The Turk's Head Inn together with that of his hawk Kaumalak and his horse Thoroton. Subsequent entries all start with the date and weather conditions at the moments of his death:

"1819. May. Wednesday 19. / Wind s.w. light." The heterogeneous time structure of the novel facilitates at least six narrative voices. Two of these are Cartwright's "own": journal entries from Cartwright's lifetime and posthumous additions to the diary. Two narrative voices belong to an omniscient narrator: "events" in Cartwright's posthumous existence are told in the present tense, while occurrences from his life are told in the simple past. Besides, Steffler has added one short dialogue with Attuiock, Cartwright's closest Inuit friend, and two short corrective journal entries by an indignant Mrs. Selby. The narrative polyphony and the pensive, retrospective mood of Cartwright's posthumous considerations allow for historical comparisons and speculative "ifs." They invite critical reflection and cross-cultural and post-colonial insights and ironies, which make the book a historical, literary and intellectual feast.

Daniel Francis' *The Imaginary Indian* deals with "The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture." Such a study was long overdue. While scholars from the United States, Berkhofer, Billington, Honour, Nash and Pearce among them have addressed the issue for many years, and while there are substantial books by European scholars on the image of the Indian in literature and culture (Georgi, Klooss, Lutz, Rodenberg, Zolla), Canadian studies have been few: Monkman's and Goldie's books concentrate on the literary aspect of Indian stereotyping, and so do articles by Atherton and Williams (not listed by Francis). Francis' study is a first attempt to deal with the Canadian "Imaginary Indian" (as opposed to the "Native") in a broader cultural frame, and the book is best whenever it concentrates on specifically Canadian aspects, while the more general observations have little to add to what has been published before. Fittingly, the author starts by questioning the

images with which he grew up and relating them to the general context of how and why dominant society created its own picture of the indigenous population it dispossessed. Unlike most earlier studies from the United States, Francis quite self-critically tries to unearth the hidden motivations which underlay non-Native Canadians' need to create, embellish and appropriate the Imaginary Indian for their own ends.

Since the beginning of the country, non-Native Canadians have wanted Indians to transform themselves into Whites, to assimilate to the mainstream. But there has also been a strong impulse among Whites, less consciously expressed perhaps, to transform themselves into Indians. Grey Owl simply acted out the fantasy. Each time they respond to a sales pitch which features an Indian image, each time they chant an Indian slogan from their box seats, each time they dress up in feathers for a costume party or take pride in the unveiling of yet another totem pole as a symbol of the country, non-Native Canadians are trying in a way to become indigenous people themselves and to resolve their lingering sense of not belonging where they need to belong. By appropriating elements of Native culture, non-Natives have tried to establish a relationship with the country that pre-dates their arrival and validates their occupation of the land.

This, to me, is the central message. As the author points out from the start, it is a book about the fantasies and needs of Whites in Canada, not about Natives.

Francis' chapter on the work of Paul Kane and other painters who sought to capture on canvas a people they expected to be on the brink of "vanishing," suggests strong parallels with painters like Catlin, Bodmer, Bierstadt or Kurz, who did the same south of the line. Similar parallels could be found for Francis' observations on "Performing Indians," "Celebrity Indians and Plastic Shaman," or "Market-

ing the Imaginary Indian," whereas some aspects are uniquely Canadian, such as the use of "Indians" as "untamed" counterfoils for the Mounties who personified imperial law and order. The role of the Canadian Pacific Railway was crucial in disseminating photographs of the "typical" Plains Indian or in using totem poles in British Columbia Canadian tourist attractions, thus making totem poles part of the "Pan-Indian-mash" in which artifacts and customs of totally diverse Native cultures are lumped together as symbols of "indian-ness." Particularly enlightening is the chapter in which Francis deals with Pauline Johnson's role in creating the "Imaginary Indian princess," and in which he analyzes the motives lying behind the two most famous impostors: Archie Belaney, alias Grey Owl, and Sylvester Long, also known as Buffalo Child Long Lance.

Unfortunately, Francis stops with these two cases, rather than extending the list into the present to include the more contemporary Whites "gone Indian" or "gone Shaman," such as Adolf Hungry Wolf, Lynn Andrews, and Cam Hubert/Anne Cameron. Another illuminating chapter is the one on the "Indians of Childhood," showing how Seton's books and, perhaps even more importantly, his "Woodcraft Indians" movement lastingly informed the idealized image of the Indian as part of childhood fantasies. At the same time schoolbooks counteracted the positive image by depicting the First Nations people of Canada as "primitive" and "bloodthirsty," doomed to disappear before White civilization. While the Indian image in children's books, in films, schoolbooks, advertising or tourism has been analyzed in other contexts before, Francis' chapter on "The Bureaucrat's Indian" treads entirely new turf. It is illuminating to see how, before multiculturalism, the stereotype became an important prop in formulating and carrying out policies, which generally tended towards cul-

tural ethnocide since “Indians had to abandon their identity as Indians before they could become full Canadians. In other words Indians had to be destroyed so they could be saved.”

By contrast, Francis’ chapter on the Indian in literature is relatively weak, and one hopes that a larger study will soon appear in Canada. Likewise, Francis makes like use of theoretical works on stereotyping, prejudice formation, the relationship between ethnocide and genocide and so on. When he theorizes the psychological and ideological needs lying behind the formation of the Canadians’ “Imaginary Indian,” however, his book is almost painfully honest and self-critical. Both Francis’ and Steffler’s books offer insights into the process of mental decolonisation.

Abusing Lacan

Elizabeth Grosz

Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction. Routledge
US \$8.99

James M. Mellard

Using Lacan, Reading Fiction. U Illinois P
US \$12.99

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

The texts of Jacques Lacan (1901-81) are notoriously difficult to negotiate, and have provoked responses ranging from bewilderment to almost religious reverence. Deliberately obscure and labyrinthine, they necessarily estrange us, as we are confronted with Lacan’s studied otherness, an otherness by turns both absolute and engaging, stern and playful. Lacan’s writings provoke a correspondent dialectic of response in those who read him carefully, an opposition which may be ingrained, as Elizabeth Grosz argues, in the wandering mazes of Lacanian thought itself; that is, if we mean to make use of Lacan, we may either accept his work as paradigmatic, acceding his mastery over our own psycho-

analytic or critical discourses (a mastery which Lacan himself often encourages his readers to accept), or we may confront Lacan critically, refusing his posture of all-knowing otherness and instead entering into the deconstructive economies of desire which he describes (a critical posture which his work also encourages, as he refuses to accept the integrated subject or the satisfaction of desire within subjectivity). We may, that is, choose either to use Lacan or, in a sense, to abuse him. The latter of these two approaches seems most useful; accepting Lacan as discursive master delimits a psychoanalytic practice, but such an acceptance narrows Lacan’s applicability to critical work and undermines the most significant of Lacan’s achievements: the description of a split subject, of a primordial alterity, at the root of all discourse. These two monographs on Lacan, by Grosz and Mellard, fall on different sides of this critical divide.

Mellard is anxious throughout his work to mitigate the critic’s “anxiety of allegory,” a fear of mediation, of removal from the meaning of the aesthetic object; interpretation, he contends, is *de facto* representational, allegorical, and the critic needs not to struggle against the mediations of language in search of semantic authenticity, but to recognize and to explore the intertextual economies which that critical mediation entails. Lacanian analysis, since it confronts the topological natures of the unconscious and the text—of the unconscious *as a text*, for that matter—provides a functional means of dealing with that mediation, for Mellard.

The problem with Mellard’s approach is that, in attempting to overcome this hermeneutic anxiety, he tends to reinscribe—in a reversed form—and to deproblematize that same allegory. The literary text in each of his three case-studies, becomes an allegorical representation of the Lacanian subject. For instance, four

of Hawthorne's characters in *The Scarlet Letter* embody for Mellard the four aspects of Lacan's scheme of the split subject. Mellard relies overmuch on the Lacanianism of Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, to the detriment of Lacan's own work, and follows her appraisal of the "systematic regularities" of Lacan, working through his pseudo-algebraic diagrams of subjectivity without much question. Mellard's Lacan is a figure of regulation, not of critical disturbance, and this unqualified acceptance does a grave disservice to Lacan's work. Mellard does not "use" Lacan to trouble the questions of subjectivity that these literary texts pose; rather, Lacan provides him with answers and master-tropes with which to decode those texts, a practice which Lacan himself, despite his own deep-rooted narcissism, most often discourages.

Elizabeth Grosz's *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* describes the basis of Lacan's thought in a clear, organized fashion, and serves as an excellent guide to Lacan and to the first generations of Lacanians—particularly the feminists—who have followed his work. The book's first chapters deal with major issues in Lacan's work—language, the unconscious, the narcissistic ego, sexuality and the symbolic order. Grosz manages to avoid the obscurity and hermeticism which Lacan's "algorithms" and schema tend to entail. In the last two chapters, after a careful plotting out of Lacan's psychoanalytic practice, she addresses the problem toward which the title of her text points, the tense relation between Lacan and feminism. Accepting, for instance, the primacy of the phallus in discourse must be problematic for any reader claiming to be a feminist, though, as Grosz shows, some readers—of whom Ragland-Sullivan is representative—argue for the neutrality of the phallus, despite its "biological" origins as a trope. Grosz suggests that we need to be much more critically wary of claims of Lacan's neutrality or

objectivity. She points, finally, to "radical interrogations" of Lacan by Luce Irigaray as examples of how Lacanian thought may be used—and understood as critically functionalized without narrowing and disciplining one's own incursions into the discourse of subjectivity. Grosz herself does not undertake such a criticism, closing her own text with a series of open-ended questions regarding Lacan and female sexuality, but she does point to a necessary interrogation of the subject initiated by Lacan.

How useful, then, is Lacan for the criticism and interpretation of Canadian literatures. Certainly not very useful at all, if we restrict ourselves to the interpretive modes offered by Mellard. Psychoanalysis, conceived as a masterful science of cure and meaningful interaction, does little other than illuminate its own practice when it is applied to any textual object, and could offer no clues as to the constitution of the Canadian subject that were not aspects of a universalized subject to begin with. If, however, we approach Lacan's work as Grosz encourages us to do, not as a master-discourse but as a troublesome, radical, critical rendering of a subjectivity no longer at ease with itself, then his work may indeed enhance Canadian literary studies. Lacan's major achievement is to have described the split subject, the "I" which is not closed but continually otherwise than itself. If the persistent question in Canadian criticisms has been to define a Canadian subject, to find a response to the questions of who or where "I am," then Lacan offers Canadian readers a means of dealing with the nature and status of that question (rather than, as has been the case generally, of tendering countless inadequate answers, ranging from the mythopoeic to the existential). Lacan can supply Canadian criticisms, that is, not so much with a model or paradigm of subjectivity *per se*, as with a highly developed analogue to its own critical practice.

Confessions

Clark Blaise

Man and His World. Porcupine's Quill \$12.95

Patrick Lane

How Do You Spell Beautiful? And Other Stories.
Fifth House n.p.

Clive Doucet

The Priest's Boy. Black Moss \$14.95

Reviewed by Michael Mason

The need to escape from one's origins and, much later, the desire to return to them, are part of shared human experience that many of us can understand. Sometimes in the outward journey we had little choice—our parents emigrated. Returning may be hard for their descendants if origins are lost or the old homeland has altered. Clark Blaise has written of such anguishes before, and they appear in this most recent and multifaceted collection.

Through his narrator we look at people who have grown beyond the nation-State and strive for a world-outlook that sees the glitter of American sophistication as superficial compared with the multiplicity of Europe or the universality of India. Blaise's narrator, in his various guises, feels inadequate, inferior, in the presence of cultivated Indians who speak many languages, though his own origins as well as long-cherished experiences lie deep within Europe. But "After India, Europe is a bore." In fact, he is rootless, discontented, trying to overcome "the accumulated guilt and incomprehensions of my life." His distant relatives from India see in America, narrowly English-speaking though it is, "the place and people they most admire." He finds them "too exquisite for the mall-culture America I know."

Studies of people in love expose their vulnerability. Blaise opens their souls with surgical frankness. In his title-story a Canadian wanders to a remote part of India, having "lost his bearings" since leaving

Winnipeg. Restless in his self-imposed exile, he meets by coincidence a woman from Quebec whom he already knows. Unfortunately for him, his host comes to believe that "an uprooted man is the principle of corruption and will spread it wherever he goes." Generally applied, this remark would be a fine excuse for ethnic cleansing; but the uprooting can occur within one's own people. It needs only coincidence.

Thus Alex, in *Snake in Flight over Pittsburgh*, is a social exile in his own country. The only child of poor and struggling parents, he has been adopted emotionally into his friend Terry Franklin's healthy, long-established family. He worships at a distance Terry's twin, Francesca. A Harvard man with an aunt who knows the Franklins accompanies her to a charity to which Francesca accompanies her mother, "and like a drunk swerving over the centre -stripe, ther'd been a horrible, utterly unnecessary collision, resulting in marriage." Coincidence had operated. It's better to tell the truth in time. Eventually you have to anyway.

Patrick Lane's stories are also confessionally open. His people of the B.C. interior, often somewhere up from Kamloops or Clearwater, are usually unhappy. Not of the professional or business middle-class, as with Blaise, they are working-folk of no community. They exist in a conglomeration sometimes represented as a company town, though this is complimentary term for a sawmill operation with a surplus of men.

In these martyrdoms, as of the crucified victim in the quietly horrifying title-story, most of the central figures are men. In "Blue" the grief of an elderly widower is tinged with bewildered resentment. On a different plane, "The Babysitter," with sexual abuse of children, and "Marylou Had Her Teeth Out," in its brutality to women, are rivals for the worst slob in the collection. For those who commit the unspeakable, forgiveness is just not an option.

Revenge at such times is a kind of escape as well as wild justice, and even escape may be possible, with luck. In "Burning Wings" young Billy, "a kind of lost kid who did odd jobs down at the mill," falls in love with a girl whose owner—this is a raw and savage society—has handed her to a pervert to debase as he wants. The narrator is a mature man whose advice is good: "She's a girl who's got herself all tied up in the middle of grief and there's nobody can get her out." give up ideas of a rescue mission. Billy goes anyway, and perhaps her and the girl escape to at least a less polluted existence. In the collection's most ambitious tale of "The Bear" the idea of revenge offers some relief as the narrator with wry humour makes his own lumbering progress to a conclusion he had tried to avoid by laborious planning, but was fated to succumb to in the end.

Conclusions are exceptional in Lane's stories, because life in these portraits will always be the same numbing toilworn dreariness as it is in "Irene Good Night," where a wife meditates on the husband she endures in spite of frequent beatings. The idea often emerges that most of the people would not be where they are if they could only be somewhere better. A few would be misfits anywhere, but all of them are prisoners engaged in their social and economic situations and often with no other way of coping than with angry futile yelling. However, being human, they are complex creatures, and just as tormented as Blaise's self-lacerating intellectuals.

So, throughout these stories, humanity struggles against its own inhumanity. Clive Doucet's tales are of a village community in Cape Breton long ago. To be exact, in 1937, and therefore pre-TV and so prehistoric. "Talk is the spice of life" in this little Depression-era fishing community. The lives told are especially those of Father Aucoin the priest and, among his flock, of Daniel Boudreau his assistant, The Priest's

Boy himself, and of Philibert the Matchmaker, the priest's cousin, "that odd character, the matchmaker with the cranky wife." For it is not utopia. A great nuisance to Father Aucoin is Albert à Didier, the Tory businessman who smuggles in rum from St. Pierre et Miquelon to corrupt the voters at election time. Fortunately the village, if no wiser than the greater world of which it is a microcosm, is just as crafty. Albert has annoyed William Doucet, otherwise Grandfather, who does his own police-watch for the hiding-place of the rum and then celebrates with it in company with many other supporters of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Philibert also is worldly-wise and also more persuasive than his cousin the priest. Reminiscing about him many years later, Philibert says that in those days Father Aucoin was young, often ineffectual, even wrong. Of course, as Philibert explains, he had no wife. But he did some good things. Probably as a very young man he had been allowed a glimpse of Heaven and had never been able to achieve it again. That had happened once to Philibert himself as he'd escorted a girl down the hillside to marry another man, and "she'd died with his first child."

Encounters in the village are usually less ethereal than this by Philibert; and people sometimes escape from the confines of it to the great world of Halifax and even to the Boston States. The Priest's Boy himself does so rather than become a second Father Aucoin and this, though a liberation, is also a sad note in the story. Finally, Philibert, who has survived his cousin, looks back with a regret we can recognise as part of the human cursedness that is a seam through so many of these writers' stories: "I miss my cousin. There's no one to go to war against now."



Elle sera poète

Liliane Blanc

Elle sera poète, elle aussi! Les femmes et la création artistique. Le Jour n.p.

Reviewed by Ann Pearson

The stated intention of Liliane Blanc's book is to give an account of the too often overlooked contribution of women writers, musicians and artists to the (Western) cultural heritage, though the book's emphasis on their lives rather than their works places the focus on the perennial question why there have been, comparatively speaking, so few. Blanc describes the enormous social and psychological obstacles they faced, not least from male hostility towards any woman who ventured beyond the domestic sphere, a misogyny amply illustrated in the quotations scattered throughout the text from the Fathers of the Church to the confrérie of 19th-century French writers. Not all males were equally prejudiced, however—Stendhal, for instance, remarked that mankind's intellectual capacity as well as its chances of happiness would be doubled by the granting of equality to women, and Rimbaud, from whom the book's title is derived, looked forward to the day when women, released from their ancient servitude, would explore unknown realms in poetry. Blanc devotes a chapter ("*Les filles à Papa*") to what she sees as the vital role of the father in the destiny of the woman artist (Mothers, she claims, with a few notable exceptions such as Colette's and Mme de Staël's, were rarely encouraging). Fathers like Angelika Kauffmann's, however, a painter himself, who encouraged his daughter to adopt male clothing in order to attend classes barred to women, were in the minority. More common was the case of Fanny Mendelsohn, whose father (and brother) encouraged her talent within the confines of the family circle but placed an

absolute embargo on a musical career. Even more fatal to the woman artist's development, Blanc suggests, was the love of a fellow artist. More often than not, his jealousy and egoism coupled with her own self-doubt and feminine self-abnegation would lead her to subordinate her talent to his in the role of muse and provider of domestic comforts.

Directed at the general reader, Blanc's rapid but entertaining survey of women in Western culture from Antiquity to Modernism aims to make known to a wider public the names of women artists still mainly confined to academic circles. A significant number of Canadians find their place here—Emily Carr, sculptors Sylvia Daoust, Florence Wylie and Frances Loring, composers Barbara Pentland and Sophie-Carmen Eskhardt-Gramatté, along with writers Laure Conan, Anne Hébert, and Gabrielle Roy among others. Somewhat surprisingly, no anglophone Canadian writer receives any mention, though well-known figures of the English speaking world such as Woolf, Mansfield and Gertrude Stein are included.

Blanc does not escape a tendency which she herself criticizes in the discussion of creative women—concentration on the biography rather than the work, particularly when that biography offers the romantic appeal of sexual rebellion, as with George Sand or Lou Andreas-Salomé. Any attempt to cover such wide ground in a short space inevitably leads to omission and over-simplification—Austen and the Brontës get a look-in, but George Eliot is only mentioned in connection with her male *nom-de-plume*. It is easy to damn Plato with a one-sentence quotation but it does the uninitiated reader, no less than the philosopher, a disservice to ignore the discussion of women in the *Republic*. Nonetheless this is a book to stimulate further exploration.

Cultural Differences

F.G. Paci

Black Blood. Oberon \$15.95

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Poetry. Selected and Translated by Antonino

Mazza. Exile Editions \$15.95

Reviewed by Joseph Pivato

Italian-Canadian writers continue to publish at such an enormous rate that it is not difficult to keep up with the titles that appear. Add to this fecundity the great variety of their works: novels, plays, novels, poetry and essays, in English, French, or Italian and in translations. These two books are good examples of this diversity: Mazza's translation of Pasolini is a first in Canada, and Paci's *Black Blood* is his fourth novel, one that begins a new series on the life of Marco Treccoci. The second volume, *Under the Bridge* has appeared to a good critical reception. Mazza too has published another volume of poems, his own, *The Way I Remember It* (Guernica).

Black Blood is a novel in the confessional mode that explores the early life of Marco Treccoci, Markie, in Sault Ste. Marie. The young Markie is aware that his Italian parents are different from the English Canadians in town, but this sense of otherness is confused in his mind with his own evolving sense of individual identity. He confesses, "I suppose the seeds of disobedience had been planted as soon as he had commanded me to stay away from the garden." Markie feels guilty about his sins, but often confuses sin with moments of revelation about life. These stope in his journey of exploration are marked by his contract with outer people: his sexual initiation with Judy Miller the Caterpillar, punishment at the hands of his father, playing hockey with his friend, Perry, stealing from the stone garden with Rico, the fight between Perry and Rico over Maria, Markie's physical attraction to Katie and Perry's tragic

death. Paci's powerful, plain prose style makes each scene live. We are made to feel the thrill of Markie's first hockey game with the city team: "Waiting on top of the boards in my borrowed equipment, my heart pounding so fast I thought I'd choke..."

In Paci's other novels, *The Father*, and *Black Madonna*, the children often feel ashamed of their Italian immigrant parents, and then are tortured with guilt and hate themselves for this betrayal of family loyalty. In *Black Blood* Markie is too young and naive to feel these complicated emotions. Instead feelings and actions are simple and elemental. They take on a mythical quality: the theft in the stone garden, the black blood of sin and the writer's art.

Since Mazza published Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poetry*, he has been awarded the 1992 Italo Calvino Prize for the English translation (his edition of Montale poems, *The Bones of Cuttlefish* (1983), for instance, went through several printings). Mazza selected and translated the poems for this edition, which includes Pasolini's essay, "To the New Reader," Mazza's Afterword, "Prophecy Versus Memory: Towards a New Pre-History," and notes. The volume serves as a very good introduction for North Americans to Pasolini's writing.

The poems are selected from a number of collections by Pasolini, beginning with *New Epigrams* (1958-59), and *Uncivil Poems* (1960) and including verse from *Trans-Humanize and Organize* (1971). The Italian poems of Pasolini are characterized by protest and criticism against the powerful institutions in Italian society: the Catholic Church, the Christian Democratic Party and an impersonal government machine. Mazza's translations have captured Pasolini's voice in English, the balance between anger, resignation and despair. To a pope Pasolini writes, "How much good might you have done! And didn't bother to: you the greatest sinner." He spares no one with the sharpness of his attack:

Land of starving, corrupted infants,
governors hired by landowners, reac-
tionary prefects,
third-rate lawyers with dirty feet and plas-
tered with brilliantine,
liberal officials as dishonest as their big-
oted uncles,
a barracks, a seminary, a vacant beach, a
brothel!

During WWII Pasolini fought against
the Fascists (his brother was killed as a par-
tisan in Friuli), and though he wrote about
Marxism in his collection, *The Ashes of
Gramsci* (1957) he was also very critical of
the PCI, the Italian Communist Party:

I have always opposed the PCI with fer-
vor, waiting
for answers to my objections, in order to
proceed dialectically!
No answers arrived....

Pasolini was murdered on a beach in Ostia
near Rome in 1975. He is now remembered
both for his provocative writing and his
films such as *The Gospel According to Saint
Matthew* (1964), *Medea* (1969), *The Decam-
eron* (1971), and *Canterbury Tales* (1972).

Pasolini is particularly interesting for the
problems of translation and languages that
his work raises. His first collection of
poems was written not in Italian, but in
the Friulan language of Northern Italy, a
language with an oral literature and a peas-
ant folklore. By translating Pasolini, Mazza
has introduced a model for Italian-
Canadian writers that is closer to the peas-
ant origins of their immigrant parents, the
parents about whom Paci has been writing
for fifteen years.



Munro Tapes

Interview with Alice Munro, audiocassette, prod.
The American Audio Prose Library (71 minutes),
n.p.

Alice Munro Reading "The Progress of Love",
audiocassette, prod. The American Audio Prose
Library (70 minutes), n.p.

Reviewed by Beverly Rasporich

The Alice Munro audio recordings, pre-
sented by the American Audio Prose
Library, are a useful supplement to class-
room instruction both at the secondary or
university level. At the same time, they are
a gift to those readers and admirers of
Munro who would welcome spending a
few hours being pleasantly entertained. Of
particular interest to the general public is
the tape in which Munro reads her own
work, the short story "The Progress of
Love," a tale of three generations of women
situated in familiar Munro territory"
smalltown Southwestern Ontario, pub-
lished in a collection of the same name in
1986. For this listener, the surprise in the
reading came with the unexpected nuances
and tones ascribed by the author-reader to
her characters' thoughts and words. In the
capacity of oral story-teller, Munro added
another dimension to an already multi-lay-
ered story; perhaps even she realized a dif-
ferent one. In any event, to hear Alice
Munro read "The Progress of Love" is a
rare treat.

The second tape, Munro-in-interview, is
equally enjoyable, as well as being infor-
mative. Although she has been well inter-
viewed over the course of her literary
career in Canada, Munro most often man-
ages to do in each what she does with her
fiction, that is to recast her same materials
with provocative, engaging and contem-
plative differences, or with slightly new or
updated angles of vision. This interview is
no exception as she responds with warmth
and vitality to questions on such familiar

topics as the writing process and indicates her concern with surface detail and the illusion of autobiography; feminism; mother-daughter relationships; region and place; the relationship between life and art.

If the interview tape is to be used in the Canadian classroom, however, as a single introduction to Munro the person, it is well to know that only skeletal biographical information is provided, and that it is an American production. For those of us who, in the first instance at least, prefer to contemplate the art of Alice Munro as a national treasure, it is a bit grating to hear the interviewer introduce her, in American opinion, as “world class,” and with an approving quotation from the *New York Times*.

A Double Life

Catherine Sheldrick Ross

Alice Munro: A Double Life. ECW n.p.

Magdalene Redekop

Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro. Routledge n.p.

Reviewed by Beverly Rasporich

The objective of the Canadian Biography Series is to provide short, readable biographies of Canadian personalities that will interest and entertain students and general readers alike. Catherine Sheldrick Ross's book is a wonderful model for the series. Ross begins with the general organizing theme of Munro's double life, that is the “lifelong split between ordinary life and the secret life of the imagination,” quickly develops some variations on this theme of doubleness and occasionally touches on it as she anecdotally recreates the progress of Munro's own life and work in short (1-3 page) highlighted “chapters.” The result is a good, well-written read.

There are a number of positive features of Ross' rendition of Munro. First, she has injected new autobiographical material that she has obtained in interview with the

author, at the same time gleaning significant revelations and observations from other interviews, both published and unpublished. Although the Munro who emerges here is not substantially different from the one that critics and the public have come to expect, her personality, and its development, is fleshed out by details Munro has chosen to reveal to Ross—such recollections as that of her father-in-law's response to her as a girl with no breeding, or the effects of her of the extraordinary timidity of the Laidlaw side of the family, or her own recent return to Vancouver in 1990 to arrange for a tombstone for her daughter Catherine who died in infancy.

Ross has also managed to satisfy, in part at least, some of the other stated objectives of the series, which, given the short length of the texts would seem to be unrealizable. These include the identification of some of the major cultural, historical and intellectual events that have shaped the subject's life. The biographer has been able to establish some historical and cultural context for Munro's life, partly through the use of photographs and through such ingenious device as presenting Alice Munro country: the area of Huron County around Wingham which the author fictionalizes, through brief news reports from the *Wingham Advance-Times* and an early map of the town, with local landmarks identified as to place and use in Munro's stories.

In fact, a major thrust of Ross's biographical method is to link Alice Munro's life as she has reported it with the fiction she has created. Her full length fictional works are treated as separate “chapters” and are briefly discussed in relation to Munro's own life-narrative, with connections drawn between fictional and actual characters and events. Ross weaves these connections smoothly into the Munro story, concluding the book with an unforgettable climax for herself and the reader, as she relates how in company with Munro

the two of them happened by chance on an eighty year old woman who was the original model for one of Munro's most memorable characters in her early work *Dance of the Happy Shades*.

As Ross herself emphasizes, Munro is a woman who admits to leading a double and deceptive life and to being wedded early on to the notion that her real life had to be hidden and protected. This is a good biographical introduction to the surface realities of Alice Munro's life and to Munro's own carefully staged construction of them, but not unexpectedly full tellings of the double life remain to be told.

Mothers and Other Clowns: The Stories of Alice Munro by Magdalene Redekop is a re/visioning of Munro's fiction from a feminist perspective with an emphasis on the "figure" of the mothering clown and mother-daughter relations as central to the fiction. Redekop's intention has been to "excavate" an aesthetic of comic vision that revolves around mother figures; she succeeds in doing so through close readings of a selection of stories that offer a distillation of the aesthetic. The text is broken down into Part I—The Argument, Part II—The Readings, from Munro's seven published collections, and a Postscript wherein the author describes the dilemma of writing on a living fiction writer and replays her own methodological rationales.

The structure of the analysis is quite remarkable in that the critic mimes what she sees as the circling and repetitive movement of Munro's fiction and by so doing, abandons the critical structures of patrilinear logic and sequentiality. As critic, she adopts the playful, elliptical, circuitous stance in discourse that she reconstructs in Munro's own fiction. There are a number of consequences from this procedure, one being that her literary analyses are difficult to paraphrase. As a feminist critic and a female writer, Redekop is also confounded to some degree by the

dilemma of positioning the author as subject/object, as subjective/objective; she comments on the latter, revealing honestly in the postscript that her own private experiences have shaped her readings of Munro and that "the more visceral my subjective response to a particular image or story, the more I worked to find some objective context in literary history—the medieval festival of fools, the art history of the grotesque, etc." To some extent, however, the shaping of the objective context emerges here as gratuitously personal, and occasionally self-indulgent.

As I read the text, a weakness of the analysis is the author's penchant for what appear to be random scholarly connections and analogies, rambling asides (note the extensive use of parentheses) and a curious tautological interest in referential naming: "The names of Prue and Rose... suggest the daughters of Mrs. Ramsay in *To The Lighthouse*." Allusive echoes from elsewhere are idiosyncratically and not always convincingly read in to Munro's fiction as, for example, a quotation by Leonardo da Vinci, quoted by Gombrich, applied to "The Progress of Love" with the undue speculation that "Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, indeed, may actually have been on Munro's mind."

Still, Redekop's critical practices clearly offer challenges and provocations that are well worth discussing, and her delineation of the space created by Munro's stories as a narrative float parade of mock mothers and clowns is critical invention of notable originality. Her readings of the text insist on reconsiderations of narrative sequence, and her insistence on the central position of mothers and mothering in Munro's fiction is timely and well-taken. Most importantly, the parodic and feminist aesthetic possibilities of Munro's art are rightfully placed by Redekop at the head of the critical parade.

Poet & Polis

Irving Layton

Dance With Desire: Selected Love Poems.

Porcupine's Quill \$12.95

David Lewis Stein

Taking Power, Lester \$18.95

Reviewed by Norman Ravvin

Irving Layton's early volumes—angry, incendiary books all—could not have prepared us for the tendency in recent years to collect Layton as a love poet. It is almost as if there is a movement afoot to replace our image of the man as purveyor of Nietzschean gestures condemning cultural hypocrisy and anti-semitic pretension, with the image of the poet aging randily, an ever-fixated sexual adventurer. The latter persona is played to the hilt in *Dance With Desire: Selected Love Poems*. The collection is prefaced with one of Layton's provocative forewords—in this case a celebration of his Grade Six teacher, Miss Benjamin, who is said to have "awakened" his "erotic impulses." The collection is also handsomely illustrated with Richard Gorman's drawings of bodies at love.

Before offering a response to the poetry itself, I must say that in trying to decide how this collection fits into Layton's impressive oeuvre, I discovered that the text itself has quite a history. Among the collections devoted to Layton that have appeared since 1980, *Dance With Desire* has had, in various forms, three previous incarnations. The present text is an almost exact reprint of a 1986 collection, issued by McClelland & Stewart under the title *Dance With Desire: Love Poems*. The editors at the Porcupine's Quill have made minute changes to the order of the poems, added three works, and included Layton's bawdy paean to Miss Benjamin. The latter piece, however, appeared in a 1980 M&S collection called *The Love Poems of Irving Layton*, which was itself resurrected in

almost identical form in a 1984 edition from Mosaic Press.

With my interests in Layton being anything but bibliographical, I must say that this curious repetition within such a short period of very similar manuscripts, did prove a distraction in my reading of the most recent version. What has been the impetus behind republishing such similar collections; and beyond this, why the urge to gather up Layton's "love poems" and make of them a special breed? The motive behind the latter project appears forced at best upon reading the most recent effort at celebrating Layton's dances with desire.

In an introduction to *Fornalutx: Selected Poems*, the other major collection of Layton's work published in 1992, Brian Trehearne is correct in his appraisal that no "other Canadian poet has written so many poems of damnation and disgust...." Even Layton's poems of desire are often staged as broadly ironic barbs, as the kind of outburst of honesty and dynamism that is rarely found in the wider tradition of love poetry. In this way, he has brought a unique vitality to the genre, but what he has wrought has very likely exploded the genre, and an unreflective gathering of such emotional shrapnel may not serve the poet or his readers very well. Trehearne castigates Layton's critics for striving to canonize the poet as a "romantic individualist," leaving no room for "the social, political and economic excoriations" he has been launching since the beginning of his career. Such excoriations erupt constantly throughout *Dance With Desire*. At their most extreme, these eruptions are shocking reminders of how much Layton is willing to throw at the reader in a few spare and haunting lines:

I can make poems only out of chaos,
out of hurt and pain.

I sing loudest when my throat is cut.

I would even go so far—at the risk of

sounding like Miss Benjamin—as to argue that a poem like Layton’s much collected “The Convertible” is anything but a love poem. There is, in this virtuoso piece, a good measure of self-love, but beyond this the reader is reminded of Layton’s many missiles of contempt aimed at what he sees as the hypocrisies of bourgeois culture.

If *Dance With Desire* offers a glance backward over what becomes of a poet’s work, David Lewis Stein’s *Taking Power* provides a portrait of what becomes of a city. *Taking Power* is Stein’s first novel, though he has been a chronicler of Toronto life for the Toronto Star for a couple decades. His novel is Dickensian in sweep, capturing the turbulent and prosperous seventies from the point of view of a large cast of characters. Beginning with a portrait of a group of activists who succeed at blocking a proposed expressway that would turn Toronto’s downtown neighbourhoods into a ghost town, then retraining his sights on the politicians, lawyers and real estate moguls involved in the battle, Stein shows us a vast panorama of civic life. The voices that make up this tableau almost always ring true, and Stein assuredly owes his sharp ear for biker slang, hookers’ complaint and lawyers’ logic to his years on the city beat.

The rejection of the Spadina Expressway—Stein, for no apparent reason, calls it the Berryman—represented a turning point in civic planning in Toronto; the eclipse of suburb-minded council members who saw moving traffic in and out of the city’s core as their preeminent job. There is no doubt that the future that awaited Toronto *with* the expressway can be viewed in Detroit, where neighbourhoods, bisected by causeways, withered and lost their vitality as soon as they became commuter corridors.

Stein follows the participants involved in the expressway battle through a decade of personal challenge and change, maintaining a sensitivity—at times measured, at

other times whole-hearted—for the predicaments of individuals on both sides of the fight. Clearly though, he is inhabited by a reformist spirit, the urge to preserve, to hold citizens’ interests dear, and by a belief in a city where the public speaks and is heard.

One effect of Stein’s breadth of social vision is a loosening of the novel’s focus on Toronto. Once the expressway battle is won, much of what his characters experience could take place in any large Canadian city, and in this way, an opportunity to deepen the portrait of Canada’s most often derided metropolitan area may have been lost. But to its credit, I finished reading *Taking Power* on a late March afternoon when spring had finally come to Spadina Avenue; there was a buzz in the air of life returning and of a revelling in the light and warmth, and assuredly, there are moments in Stein’s novel that capture that buzz.

Two Germans

Ray Smith

A Night at the Opera. Porcupine’s Quill \$14.95

J.P. Stern

The Heart of Europe: Essays on Literature and Ideology. Blackwell us \$29.95

Reviewed by Norman Ravvin

Ray Smith’s novel, *A Night at the Opera*, ends on a bittersweet note, as a husband and wife share a moment of pathos-laden understanding, holding hands in the “soft, seductive” light of late-afternoon. But like much of his book, Smith’s sentimental conclusion leaves a curious aftertaste that lingers and makes *A Night at the Opera* a uniquely difficult work to characterize. Smith is doing something very different from most contemporary novelists, and his book stands, strange and uncategorizable, alongside other recent Canadian works. It is a shame, however, that this uniqueness is not necessarily an asset.

A Night at the Opera is an historical farce portraying the antics of a 19th-century German composer named Carl Maria von Stumpf. Stumpf's ribald tale provides Smith with the pretext for telling the even more antique German tale of Graf Walther, the founder of Stumpf's hometown of Waltherrott. In addition to being a figure of local renown, Walther is a foul mouthed medieval boor of Monty Pythonesque dimensions. The married couple we see at the novel's close—contemporary Waltherrotteners—are really little more than narrative tokens Smith uses to dip back into the high farce of German history and legend.

It may be this very leap of narrative focus that makes Smith's novel so odd. Present-day Waltherrott is most concerned with the implementation of a new tram system, under the management of men who fatuously accept that they live "in an age of administration." Recent German history is charted by a mere blip—a single paragraph in the novel—and the running joke of Smith's parochial town is that its inhabitants are the latter day descendants, in their love of both ribald humour and good beer, as well as in their dim-wittedness, of the ridiculous Stumpf and Graf Walther.

There is something disheartening about Smith's light-hearted stew of contemporary, historical and mock-historical concerns. Without a doubt, there is a strong tradition in Canadian letters of novelists making startling use of history (Bowering's *Burning Water* and Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* come to mind). But unlike *Beautiful Losers*, where historical events are ironized, mythicized and put to use in an original secular vision of cultural upheaval, Smith plays his historical and contemporary material for the same laughs. The manager of Waltherrott's new tram system is a braggart and a buffoon. The composer, von Stumpf, is a self-mocking profligate whose first words are "I shall blow my brains out.

If I can get my hands on a pistol I shall blow my brains out, splatter them upon the ceiling of this wretched room." And Walther, the 14th century hell-raiser, is a broadly drawn spitter of such oaths as the following:

It is too soft a punishment for traitorous priests and nuns to be heaved from their parapet to have their bodies broken on the rocks below, but by all the gods I will do it in an eyeblink if you cross me now, you pustulant offal of a diseased swine.

Walther's bluster is often funny (as is such blarney when we hear it from John Cleese or Yosemite Sam), but it is Smith's favorite mode and it begins to wear thin. The novel's satire is innocent and is never aimed—I think one can say this without qualification—at any political target. This certainly puts *A Night at the Opera* at odds with recent trends in fiction, and it leaves Smith in the awkward position of maintaining a tone of high zaniness that readers may find trying. It is not the absence of any serious comment on recent German history that makes Smith's novel so strange, but the apparent absence of any serious concerns at all.

In J.P. Stern's collection, *The Heart of Europe: Essays on Literature and Ideology*, Germany appears under a very different guise, though Stern's essays are no catalogue of atrocity and recrimination. The author, born in Prague and head of the German Department at University College London for fifteen years, has an uncommon ability to portray the lives of Germans as they were before World War II. He turns to the literature of those years to examine the yearnings and tensions that beset the inheritors of Schiller, Goethe and Rilke, and he is particularly revealing in his portraits of Czech-German culture and of the nationalist—ultimately chauvinist—claims that rent this short-lived entente.

The varied essays collected in *The Heart of Europe* appeared between 1958 and 1991, and they constitute a thought-book for our

time. Stern's examination of German and Czech nationalism, and his attention to figures who stood against the rising tide of violent national claims, provide an excellent context within which to view the present Balkan tragedy. In his literary essays, Stern betrays an excellent eye for the role of ideology—what he calls an age's "system of convictions"—in guiding literary production. For Stern, the writer of influence is one who can "embody and perhaps explain the possibility of nonconformism in the face of the ideologically dominant..." Within this rubric, he offers excellent essays on Musil, Freud, and Havel, while saying much of interest about the societies in which these figures developed their craft. It is this method, of combined literary and social analysis, that makes Stern's treatment of things foreign and near-forgotten very timely. He is a brilliant recorder of the ways we live with, and against, our social surroundings. Although his writings are largely concerned with a now vanished Germany and the contorted nationalisms of Bohemia and Moravia, we see much of ourselves in Stern's portraits.

Lucy & John

Elizabeth Rollins Epperly

The Fragrance of Sweet-grass: L.M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance.

U Toronto P \$35.00

Michael Hurley

The Borders of Nightmare: The Fiction of John Richardson. U Toronto P \$40.00

Reviewed by Catherine Sheldrick Ross

Elizabeth Rollins Epperly and Michael Hurley have each written the first scholarly and comprehensive study of their subject that concentrates on the literary texts rather than on the biography. Both books are labours of love by scholars who respect their material. Epperly, who describes herself as a "Montgomery fan for more than

thirty years," has previously co-edited *My Dear Mr. M.*, a richly suggestive collection of Montgomery's letters written over a forty year period. Hurley's admiration for Richardson, sparked by James Reaney's famous course at Western on Ontario literature and culture, has already borne fruit in a Ph.D. thesis from Queen's (1986), also entitled "The Borders of Nightmare." Both Epperly and Hurley have taken the scholarly apparatus of textual analysis and brought it to bear on authors who, for the most part, have been treated as popular but unliterary writers of uneven quality.

Criticism generally has had trouble knowing what to make of these two compelling storytellers who wrote specifically to please a large, popular audience. "That Anne-girl" brought Montgomery royalties of \$7000 in 1919, at a time when school-teachers could expect to earn \$200 a year. Richardson's energetic Gothic romances won him enthusiastic readers in New York and Philadelphia (although he did remark in disgust that he might as well have published "in Kamschatka" as Canada). Meeting this challenge of popularity head-on, both critics, in their introductory paragraphs, make claims for their authors' special hold over the Canadian imagination. "L.M. Montgomery's writing changes people's lives," says Epperly. She examines how Montgomery's twenty bestselling books balanced, with differing degrees of success, the insatiable demands of readers and publishers against Montgomery's own goals as a writer. Hurley identifies Richardson as "an early cartographer of the Canadian imagination" and traces how Richardson's characters have spawned literary descendants in characters by authors as diverse as Grove, Atwood, Kroetsch, Davies, Reaney, Wiebe, and Marian Engel.

As great storytellers, Montgomery and Richardson were attracted to two of the most enduring patterns of romance—the comic story of the abandoned child who

finds a home and identity and redeems the world around her and the tragic story of the hero's descent into a nighttime world of horror, fragmentation and loss of identity. The "Sweet-grass" and "Nightmare" in the titles of Epperly's and Hurley's books act as a kind of shorthand for these two romance patterns rendered in two contrasting literary genres—domestic comedy and Gothic horror. Further contrasts, evident from Epperly's and Hurley's analyses, include Montgomery's wish-fulfilment plots vs. Richardson haunted demonic vision; the pastoral island garden vs. the dangerous border river; and female experience vs. male experience.

Epperly focuses her attention on Montgomery's heroines, their "romanticized interconnections between self and home," and their participation in plots that invert and then reinstate generic expectations. She discusses all twenty of Montgomery's novels, examining the eight Anne books in Part I, and three Emily books in Part II, and the various others—Jane, Valency, Pat, Kilmeny, Marigold—in Part III. In these books, Montgomery taught generations of readers to read nature through the eyes of the imagination. Epperly examines how Montgomery's heroines, and sometimes her narrators, see the world through a filter provided by Tennyson's reworking of chivalric tales and by idealized, late-Romantic descriptions of nature. In a 1905 entry in her diary, Montgomery contrasts the "commonplaces of life" to "a kingdom of ideal beauty," saying that sometimes she "seemed to catch a glimpse of the enchanting realm beyond—only a glimpse—but those glimpses have always made life worthwhile" (*Selected Journals*, Vol I: 301). Epperly's close textual readings highlight descriptive passages that many readers would probably prefer to skip over—those in which Montgomery tries to recapture this ideal kingdom through images of precious stones, bril-

liant colours, sunsets, and adjectives such as "misty," "filmy," and "ethereal."

Where Epperly examines variations in Montgomery's growing-up story of a heroine, Hurley discusses Richardson's work as the origin story of a nation. He spends most of his time on what he calls "the five-volume, 1,430 page... national prose epic" of the founding of Canada, composed of *Wacousta* (1832) and *The Canadian Brothers* (1840). Together these two books cover a fifty year period beginning with Pontiac's resistance to the British takeover of the French fur-trading empire in 1763 and closing with the Indian-English alliance against the Americans in the war of 1812. Familiar with this world of the Indian and fur trader through his grandparents, Richardson was a sixteen-year-old soldier in the British army when Detroit surrendered to Brock and Tecumseh. Richardson translated this historical material into the genre of Gothic horror. As Hurley's title suggests, Richardson's work is dreamlike, involving a descent into a nightworld, where coincidence has its own logic, identities shift and dissolve, and sudden horrors spring at you out of the dark.

Hurley is intrigued by the way that portraits, rings, masks, uniforms, prophetic curses, familiar animals, and other such emblems of romance are all made part of the larger organizing pattern of the "struggle-of brothers" motif. De Haldimar's betrayal of his friend Reginald Morton back in the Highlands of Scotland releases the polarized energies that drive Richardson's two-book epic to its tragic conclusion. In a paper presented at the John Richardson Conference at Western in 1977, Hurley saw de Haldimar and Morton/Wacousta as representatives respectively of the civilized English world of military etiquette, law, reason, and geometric squares and the Indian/Highland world of spontaneity, nature, passion, and circular forms. In the present book, he

develops this opposition further, drawing on work by men's movement writer Robert Bly and Jungian analyst Marion Woodman. Colonel de Haldimar is read as a stoney senex-Zeus figure representing the patriarchy, while Reginald Morton/Wacousta is both the watery Poseidon figure and Iron John, avatar of the deep masculine. Hurley sees these two figures as inextricably linked, hence the repetition in his analysis of certain key phrases: border river; balancing of opposites; double vision; divided voice; dual worlds; blurred boundaries; topographical dichotomies. Hurley's book makes a strong case for the importance of Richardson's national epic that begins in *Wacousta* with a "sudden and mysterious introduction" of the terrifying stranger Wacousta within the walls of de Haldimar's fortress and ends in *The Canadian Brothers* with the descendants of Wacousta and de Halidmar falling together over the abyss at Queenston Heights, where their bones, mixed with those of slain American soldiers, achieve a gloomy apotheosis: "The picked and whitened bones may be seen, shining through the deep gloom that envelopes every part of the abyss, even to this day."

Grace & Gall

Thomas King

Green Grass, Running Water. HarperCollins \$24.95

Trevor Ferguson

The True Life Adventures of Sparrow Drinkwater. HarperCollins \$24.95

Reviewed by William J. Scheick

In the beginning there was only water, begins Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*. Human life emerged from a swamp, begins Trevor Ferguson's *The True Life Adventures of Sparrow Drinkwater*. What is *aqua pura* in King's narrative is *aqua regia* in Ferguson's novel. The result is two works as different as day and night.

Green Grass features four timeless natives, at once male and female, who represent mythic forces. If these four escapees from a mental institution seem in their odd way driven by some cosmic purpose, the Canadian Blackfoot family with whom they interact seems adrift in time. This family and its acquaintances are characters in search of a theme, for a life-plot that truly includes them; for as natives, they find themselves playing minor, barely observed parts in another culture's version of reality. Their own story, the life-narrative in which they had major roles, has been lost, at least temporarily. In the scheme of things that version still exists, apparently submerged in the reservoir of mythic lore that comprises humanity's collective memory. And shards of this sunken heritage surface in the variation of reality presently "dreamed" into existence by Anglo-American culture.

The hope King's book offers his culture resides in the perception of existence life as "running water," as an incessant flow of uncontainable possibilities. Even if Anglo-American culture seeks to obstruct this origi-native fluidity, to make adamantine its present version of reality through "power and control," in fact (as the escapees, the re-edited video western, the resistance to filming the Sun Dance, and the rupture of a damn in the novel mutually suggest) reality is as unconfined and as mutable as gushing water. Everything has been and will always be "potential" or imagination." Since, accordingly, "there are no truths... only stories," then narratives like King's novel may contribute to a revision of the present that better includes native experience and better fulfils their search for a theme, a purpose.

In the meantime/mean-time, King prescribes benign humour in response to "more than [one's] fair share of bad luck." Humour is gentle resistance; it is also tolerant hope. Just wait and remember, he

implies, and the present rendering of reality will eventually burst its imaginary bounds. Possibly the next life-narrative will integrate Native-American and Anglo-American cultures into a richer life-story for both.

I have spent the space allotted to me here not to divulge the plot of King's book, but to intimate its profundity. Nor is this book only a novel of ideas; it is an intricately textured work of art. In *Green Grass, Running Water* Thomas King has given us a wonderful/wonder-full books, as timeless as the mythic vision at its heart.

In contrast, Ferguson's *Sparrow Drinkwater* is heartless in its corrosive parody of the rise and fall of infamous Canadian businessman Norman leBlanc. Most of the story centres on the unsound protagonist's search for his demented mother and paedophile father (who sired the boy while disguised as great black bird). The chronicle is a long one full of cul-de-sacs, including blind-alley allusion to myths. Such a manner may represent the narrator's deranged mind, but (if my experience is typical) it also undercuts the reader's alertness, which eventually collapses into tedium.

The publisher's promotional commentary promises a "tale peopled with endearing" characters. Hardly. The swamp world, as reflected in this book, is indeed "unfit for human habitation"; it is a place where "without greed, we humans could never ascend from chaos, we'd be stuck in the mud of our beastiality forever." A witch, who may or may not be reliable, makes this point in the novel; but everything in the book, especially given the absence of even a hint of an alternative vision, in effect makes this Ferguson's statement as well.

In *Sparrow Drinkwater*, in short, human sentiment is displaced by the author's acidic and nearly Calvinistic temperament. Attitude predominates, plenty of attitude, profligately disseminated in a superfluity

of style. What purpose, one wonders time and again, is served by such an excursion? Finally, I did not care even about this last question.

Ferguson's undertaking may be someone's cup of tea, but it is not mine. I prefer grace rather than gall, and the company of human warmth. I found both in the aesthetic splendour of King's *Green Grass, Running Water*.

Woman—Identified

Lee Felming, ed.

Tide Lines: Stories of Change by Lesbians.

Gynergy n.p.

Betsy Warland, ed.

InVersions: Writing by Dykes, Queers & Lesbians.

Press Gang n.p.

Reviewed by Sue Schenk

Both *Tide Lines* and *InVersions* are welcome additions to the growing number of books that explore the diversity of lesbian experience. Although they are generically different (the first is fiction and the second essays), these collections are united by their shared focus on the personal and its intersection with the political.

The stories in *Tide Lines* are, as the subtitle suggests, about change; they record and illuminate moments of recognition that open doors to new ways of being—in the self and in the world. Or, more accurately, in the lesbian self, in the heterosexual/homophobic world, for as Lee Fleming points out in the introduction, "all the changes explored in these stories happen *because we are lesbians*." Many of the experiences we encounter in this volume, then, are ones immediately recognizable to those of use who are woman-identified: "coming of age," "coming out," and finding a place in lesbian community and culture.

In one of my favourite stories, "Cerisy's Sphinx" by Brenda Brooks, for example,

two tomboys meet at a birthday part when they are ten, and become fast friends as a result of their mutual distaste for poodle skirts. Growing up, they share code names (“Blue” and “Skeezix”) and secret haunts, and make promises unto eternity: “never tell our horses’ names. Don’t tell any boys about the beaver dam we found... Say the same two words, at the exact same time as each other before going to bed every night.” The two words, “Cerisy’s Sphinx,” name a moth whose open wings, “filled with swirls of grey, amber, pink and tawny-brown,” invoke “the unnameable tug of the body” in the now thirteen-year-old narrator, and the two girls spend the summer nights together literally and figuratively searching for the Sphinx. This tale of sexual awakening becomes a tragic story of loss, however, when the brutal death of her friend leaves the narrator for years afterward unable to communicate her sorrow, to tell “about the undeniable tug; about Blue and how I loved her.”

Other stories in the volume point to the difference that exist among lesbians and within lesbian communities: differences of race, class, age, ability and belief systems, to name but a few. In “Alama’s Daughter,” K. Linda Kivi reminds us that “not all of us were raised on pumpkin pie, Peter Rabbit, Mother Goose and wheat bread.” Indeed, Kivi’s narrator must “hunt down” lingonberry jam—reminder of her Estonian heritage—in “obscure, side-street delis” because it isn’t available in her mainstream food co-op. Blindness to cultural differences is also the subject of Nancy Darisse’s “Fluency Process,” in which two women “camp out” in each other’s culture with different levels of success: “Surrounded by my anglophone world, she came prepared for almost any weather. Her backpack of English contained many secret pockets and carried an impressive weight of tools and ideas... In *L’autre camp* I could barely survive. My backpack was embarrassing, tiny

and fragile.” Although the story is set against, and underscores, the formidable and longstanding backdrop of francophobia in Canada, it nevertheless ends with the narrator’s positive declaration of her willingness to change: “I want to be a fluent speaker.” Likewise, these stories ultimately speak of our need to change: to embrace and learn from our many differences, to mend and strengthen our own fragile cultural backpacks.

In Versions: Writing by Dykes, Queers & Lesbians is also marked by this dual focus on our shared experiences and our differences, although here the common thread or theme is writing, rather than change. Not that writing and change are mutually exclusive, of course; indeed, as Betsy Warland points out in her introduction, “through our prose and verse we subvert the his-and-hers monogram version and convert readers to new ways of seeing and being.”

The twenty-four texts that comprise *In Versions* were contributed both by well-known lesbian writers (like Beth Brant, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Jane Rule, Mary Meigs, Daphne Marlatt, Anne Cameron, and Nicole Brossard) and by others whose names are perhaps are less familiar. Publication lists provided at the end of each essay/text make the primary works of each author, as well as selected interviews, critical articles and reviews, easily accessible to the reader; this is a particularly important service, I think, in terms of bringing lesbian writers to the attention of a wider audience. The texts themselves are divided into four sections, which represent, according to Betsy Warland, “four basic places of speaking.” In “Embodying Our Words,” the central focus is on attaining a personal voice which grows out of, and reflects, the writer’s sexuality and related life-experiences. In “Head Winds,” the texts are essentially responses to “personal, literary and political external resistances to this intact, articulated writing

presence," while those in "Site Reading" study the "cultural, political, creative and philosophical practices generated out of our particular embodied voices." Finally, the writings in "Questions Beyond Queer" articulate other significant aspects of the writers and their work (like race, class, and belief systems) that often go unnoticed in lesbian/feminist interpretations.

While all of the essays/texts in this volume are interesting and insightful, to my mind it is the final section, "Questions Beyond Queer," that has the most impact. Here Irene Klepfisz speaks of the need to bring Jewish content into her work, Sarah Schulman talks about AIDS activism, and Barbara Wilson contemplates the absence of work and class issues in contemporary lesbian literature, noting that "there are other ways to be invisible than to be a lesbian." In "Askenet: Meaning 'Raw' in My Language," Chrystos talks about some of the concerns she has as a writer "which fall outside the realm of accepted discourse" in the (white, middle-class) lesbian community, and about how the kinds of "self-censorship" that result are "more frightening to me than those of a sexual nature." It was Gloria Anzaldúa's essay, however, that really made me sit up and take notice; her words cut straight through my white, almost-middle-class, highly-educated consciousness. Anzaldúa writes:

For me the tern lesbian es un problema... "lesbian" is a cerebral word, white and middle class, representing an English-only dominant culture, derived from the Greek word lesbos... When a "lesbian" names me the same as her she subsumes me under her category. I am of her group but not as an equal, not as a whole person—my colour erased, my class ignored.

She also takes to task the very concept of a "lesbian writer" (and thus the anthology's foundational premise) and criticizes the predominantly white, middle-class acad-

emy for its role in producing theories that "make abstractions of us coloured queers" and "limit the ways we think about being queer." Even closer to home for me, she points out that "certain tropes that are considered lesbian properties—the coming-out story, the lesbian couple relationship, the break-up—have become formulaic," but this "formula is very white and mostly middle class." So, my own earlier assertion that "Many of the experiences we encounter in [*Tide Lines*]... are ones immediately recognizable to those of us who are woman-identified" is apparently not true. Or, at least, it is only partly true—a limited view from a more privileged position. Thanks to Gloria Anzaldúa, though, I can feel my perspective sharpening, my horizons widening.

Claims of Loneliness

The Journey Prize Anthology. McClelland & Stewart n.p.

Things As They Are? McClelland & Stewart n.p.

Reviewed by Jim Snyder

The Journey Prize Anthology is the fourth annual collection of the best short fiction from Canadian journals. Even before reading any of the stories, it is heartening to scan the list of the twenty-eight journals that submitted entries this year; that so many venues for new fiction and young writers exist does much to explain the continuing strength of short fiction in Canada. As with the past collections, these dozen stories are notable as much for their variety as for their quality. This year, however, there is a very marked parallelism linking many of the stories: the subject matter is almost uniformly dark and distressing. Virtually all of the stories focus on death, violence, pain, repression, abandonment, loneliness, suicide, hopelessness, and bleak despair, typically featuring a desperately

dysfunctional family at a breaking point. There are almost no stories about warm kittens and fuzzy bunnies. Somewhat paradoxically, one of the other connecting threads is a strong emphasis on religion—especially Catholicism—and its false promises and many failures. To foreground the despairing outlook of most of the stories is not to diminish their quality; nevertheless, I wonder at the unremitting bleakness of young writers' vision.

The opener, Judith Cowan's "By the Big River," is a pensive mediation on the fruits of a life spent in service to others: anxiety, loneliness, and an unexpressed but deeply felt longing for death. The woman waits by the phone for word from one of her offspring as she watches an unidentified man walk into the icy St. Lawrence. This first story establishes several of the characteristics of many of the stories: parents missing mates or children (or children missing parents), the failure of ritual or religion to provide meaning, the omnipresence of pointless violence and death, and the nihilism of the conclusion. Suicide is offered as the only reasonable response to the continuing pain of existence.

Steven Heighton is the most obviously gifted technician of the eleven authors included here. His two stories are complex and layered. They tend to leave the reader relatively detached, however, which may explain why he has appeared in three of these anthologies without winning the final prize. But regardless of the whims of prize-giving, the stories are a pleasure to read. "A Man Away From Home Has No Neighbours" and "How Beautiful Upon the Mountains" draw on Heighton's tenure in Japan (another common factor—a majority of the stories are set in places other than Canada) and take as their primary structural principle the multivalent readings of a single image: the title phrase in the first case, and the notion of 'flying' in the latter.

Rozena Maart's "No Rosa, No District Six" is the most ambitious of several stories which are narrated from a child's perspective, here the voice of the young South African girl. Still, much of the bulk of the story, related by a third-person narrator, seems to be unfortunately overwritten. Everyone shares my opinion: this story won the overall prize.

Enjoyable and impressive though this collection of stories is, the difference between these journeymen works and those by an accomplished, veteran writer is clear. The ten tales in Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Things As They Are?* are striking for the deft and apparently effortless manner in which he evokes a sense of time, place and character; he doesn't oversell, doesn't over-write—prairie sense of economy. Most of the stories are about misplaced trust—trust placed in parental figures who betray it—but these figures typically have some redeeming feature, most often that they clarify the harsh nature of adult experience for the child. Many of the stories are about a younger sibling or the child inheriting the weight of a parental character's dream, and focus on the struggle of the younger character to cope with the burden. As the characters grow, they come to know that the failings of the parents are only those failings of people who have been down the same road. Finally, the stories are about the difficulty of being human—whether parent or child, care-giver or needy—of constantly reaffirming one's importance in a world which seeks to diminish all of us; the real challenge is to affirm this importance without diminishing others, dragging others down.

"Teacher," for instance, is about a misfit child who is locked in an apparently motiveless power struggle with his new teacher. The resolution does not focus on the child's victory (which necessitates a precipitous fall from innocence into the unreasoning need for power that the

teacher shares) but on the child's recognition that the teacher is almost equally childish in her need to assert her control.

The title story, "Things As They Are?" makes the emphasis of the entire collection clear: the question mark foregrounds the questionable notion that things are merely or simply what they appear to be. Jack Greer, the blocked writer, is stymied because he seeks to set down in print the world as it is, untinged by romantic ideals or foolish faith in things unseen; but like most of the book's characters, while Jack finds a certain comfort in his isolation, he also discovers its confining limitations. Against the "famous objectivity, the pitiless refusal to delude oneself, to see clearly and not lose heart... The acceptance of things as they are," Vanderhaeghe opposes the possibility that the spiritual essence of a person is not adequately manifested in external reality: "yes, said Greer to himself... Things as they are. But did things outside a man or woman simply mirror things *inside*?"

Canon-Building

Robert Lecker, ed.

Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value.
U Toronto P \$16.95

J.R. (Tim) Struthers, ed.

Canadian Storytellers, Volume I: New Directions from Old. Red Kite \$27.50, \$17.50

Reviewed by Susan Spearey

Considerations of the formation, revision and/or deconstruction of canons have in recent years come to the forefront of critical debate, where culture-specific institutionalisations of value—which often run along national(istic) lines—have become a recurrent focus of concern. Although British and American canons have been theorised at length, no "sustained enquiry" into their Canadian equivalents has yet been produced. With this bibliographical

gap in mind, Robert Lecker has put together a volume which investigates from various critical quarters "our standards of excellence, our understanding of form, indeed our ideas about the function of literature." *Canadian Canons* goes far beyond exposure of the assumptions, ideologies and power structure which inform the selection processes through which literary merit is accorded to certain writers and texts to the exclusion of others. Each contributor, in different ways, challenges notions of national identity which Canadian canons have traditionally both relied upon and advanced, while simultaneously exploring a number of related issues and problems. Leon Surette examines models of tradition in terms of "continuity" and "breach," as the mutual relationship between canon-building and nation-building is traced out; Dermot McCarthy envisions these interrelated projects as enacting the construction and elaboration of "various metaphor-systems of organic growth" through which a national literature and a national coherence are "(con)fused"; Carole Gerson catalogues a series of manoeuvres within the literary establishment and its supporting institutions which, in the process of canon formation, have excluded or marginalised women; and Stephen Scobie engages with canons more obliquely as he treats the poetry and public images of Phyllis Webb and Leonard Cohen in terms of their respective affiliations with modernism and postmodernism. The role of a national theatre in a nation-building enterprise—whether Canadian or Quebecois—provides the focus for essays by Denis Salter, Richard Paul Knowles and Lucie Robert, who variously examine the influences of parent cultures and of American traditions, the structures which underpin regional and repertory theatre, and the effects of canonisation on potentially subversive texts. Returning from performance

to poetry and prose, Caroline Bayard argues that Quebec's post-Quiet Revolution writers who have called for independence have undermined their own endeavour by structuring their works so as to privilege history's power to shape them, over their own power to shape history. Donna Bennett and Lawrence Matthews both take the 1978 Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel as a point of departure: she to argue that discussion of value is often confused with genre definition; he to contend that canonised Canadian writing ignores much about twentieth-century developments in the art of fiction. Sherry Simon explores critical revisionism in Quebec in the 1980s; and Lorraine Weir takes issue with Linda Hutcheon's theories of Canadian postmodernism. The essays, overall, are extremely challenging and theoretically sophisticated; the order of their arrangement allows at once for the elaboration of specific topics and themes and the juxtaposition of divergent critical positions and voices. Lecker's editing is impeccable, and his introduction provides concise summaries of each contribution as well as engaging with the import of the various stances adopted by the contributors. *Canadian Canons* is ultimately as valuable a tool for the Can Lit novice as for the seasoned Canadianist.

In the second collection under consideration, Canadian writing is theorised in markedly different terms. The aim in launching the *Canadian Storytellers* series, according to editor J.R. (Tim) Struthers, is to address, from a critical standpoint, the urgent need to recognise and honour the tradition of storytelling in Canada, and to celebrate the unlimited possibilities that short fiction has to offer. In the inaugural volume, *New Directions from Old*, Struthers sets about this task by compiling a variety of material ranging from an interview with Rudy Wiebe which touches on Wiebe's connections with and require-

ments of the story as a writer, critic and editor of anthologies, to George Woodcock's "Acceptance of a Dedication," in which a shift in readerly emphasis from content to form is mapped out; from Sam Tata's photographic portraits of those "Border Crossers" whose multiple affiliations have enriched Canadian storytelling, to John Metcalf's questioning of the existence of a tradition in Canadian fiction; and from Estelle Dansereau's investigation of the effects attending the transposition of tales from oral to written form, to Leon Rooke's playful metacritical stories in which the relationship between critical analysis, writing and reading is explored. The collection also includes John Orange's memorial tribute to Ernest Buckler; an intriguing examination by E.D. Blodgett of the viability of generic analysis with particular reference to two of Ethel Wilson's novellas; Michael Darling's exploration of the possibilities afforded by verbal irony in the stories of Mavis Gallant; Simone Vauthier's charting of the shifts between fictional closure and autobiographical opening in a 1971 Norman Levine story; and a consideration by Louis K. MacKendrick of the "expressive range" of Metcalf and Rooke's *81: Best Canadian Stories*.

Struthers quite rightly acknowledges the importance of the media, the academy, and Canada Council and other such award-granting bodies to the advancement of storytelling in Canada, but neither problematises the authority of these institutions, nor calls into question the political or ideological implications of the power they wield. His introduction provides good coverage of developments, both domestic and international, pertaining to the recognition of Canada's stories and storytellers, but his citing of historical "landmarks" at which such recognition is achieved, in combination with his explicit goal for the *Storytellers* series of furthering such widespread acknowledgement, leaves one with

the rather uncomfortable feeling that the volume, whether intending to or not, becomes an exercise in canon-building. It appears to legitimate Canada's storytellers by creating for them a space within academic jurisdiction, and by celebrating their accomplishments in terms of the international reputation they now enjoy, and the proliferation of prizes and grants increasingly available to them. The frequency with which the writers and texts in question are hailed as "world-class" certainly seems unnecessary. While differences between Anglophone and Francophone uses of the story are documented at various points in the collection, and distinctions which run along regionalist lines also occasion comment, the subject of storytelling amongst native peoples and immigrants—particularly newcomers deriving from cultures with strong oral traditions—is conspicuously absent from the account. These are perhaps issues that later volumes will address in more detail. At the same time, *New Directions from Old* unquestionably attains the aim it sets for itself of opening up numerous possibilities for the understanding and appreciation of the Canadian short story, and hints at exciting things to come.

Black on White

Mark Frutkin

Acts of Light. Cormorant \$10.95

Ken Norris

Alphabet of Desire. ECW \$12.00

Robert Kendall

A Wandering City. Cleveland State U Poetry Center \$8.00

Reviewed by K.P. Stich

Frutkin and Norris are by now well established names in current Canadian literature; Kendall is a new voice. Canadian by birth and upbringing, he is a freelance writer living in New Jersey. His *A Wandering City* won the Cleveland State

University Poetry Center Prize for 1991. The three books under review here all respond to the romantic imagination's seeming loss of bargaining power in the market-place of life-poetry.

The four sections of *Acts of Light* attempt to translate perceptions of chaos and silence into synaesthetic experiences of linguistic enlightenment. Frutkin's word-making draws on archetypal symbols and eclectic borrowings from various non-European cultures. The first section, "The Watering Hole," focuses on Rimbaud's African interlude, one of his many escapes from intellectual despair:

Rimbaud is a white
 Sky reflected in the watering hole,
 All the beasts have come
 And fallen into it.
 For a while they continued
 As words but the words fade.
 Page with a strange thirst.

Such exotic thirst for the meaningful action of words has Frutkin weave his metaphysic of "African Cloth," the title of the second section. From his inspirations by a mythic Africa—"mother of breath / earth of the first word / first fire..."—Frutkin moves to "Spontaneous Combustion," his third section, where he consequentially plays with the fire of magic to undo or renew language and spirit:

The mouth storms
 The brain bursts into flame
 Words released and ghosted
 From the body of the norm.

Section four, "Acts of Light," dramatizes the extremes of such enlightenment in a sequence of visions of Dante, at age thirty-five, exploring the hermeticism of eros. In the process, the primal conjunctions of matter and imagination, body and desire, may yield "acts of light" and "forests of script." Frutkin's imagistic, often surreal, and always sensually concrete poems are about the quintessence of poetry. They

thrive in no small way because of the enticing collage of biographical glimpses of Rimbaud and Dante in the quest of light or, in Whitman's phrase, *primal ink*.

Alphabet of Desire presents a comparable quest for order in two sequences of prose poems which together form something like Norris' veiled journal from January 1 to December 31, 1990; that is to say, from anticipation of spring and renewal of the controlled imagination, back to the snows of winter, with the possibility of desire as seemingly the only defence against winter's clarity concerning death. Norris records his will to form, "to flesh out the idea in language," in carefully interrelated events, understandings and misunderstandings important to him or, rather, his speaker's view of life. Above all, there is the interchangeability of his desire to love life with his desire to write or fulfil his life-story. The whiteness of his unwritten page is not that of Frutkin's Rimbaud in Africa; Norris' "pulse of language" follows Melville whose public defeat as a writer after the publication of *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre* becomes a subtext of *Alphabet of Desire*:

Spectral whiteness. How do I vanquish
this ghost?
Blank faces folding blank paper. The
whiteness of
the whale. Snowfall on Mount Greylock.
Five hundred
empty pages blackened by hand.

Writing as a voice from the attic, "blackening the pages," Norris' persona prefers not to copy or to give in to the advertised "unreality" of "living trouble-free, missing everything," but to be looking instead for signs of "emberfire, winterfire ... to permit another season" for the writer's will to transmute existential ignorance. Paradox, thematic variation, imagistic precision, playfulness, and veiled autobiographical intensity keep the "proses" (prose-roses?) of Norris' "tree of language" growing

beyond the book's personal framework of frost and fire.

Kendall's collection presents life not through an attic window in the country but through many windows as well as open vistas, real and imagined ones, movie and TV screens, and all with potential looking-glass effects. His main focus is on an entirely urbanized milieu, "the edge of the world," where everyday existence and the reality of the imagination are for sale in a bargain atmosphere of inverted values and possibilities. Kendall's tricks of inversion mock the modern mind's ability to ask metaphysical questions that cannot be answered for easy profit: "It's sad to see our inmost searchings let go / at cost, even though out quality / is unsurpassed and stops at nothing." Man and woman find themselves imprisoned, even in dreams, by "endless walls / that shut out every thought of light." Thus, "Can you hear that it is raining outside?" may be the most hopeful line in a haunting city world in which hope, imagination and sympathy have been boxed in like bargains or poured into liquor glasses for easy consumption and with the result that humankind's heart is found "clinging to the world by an all-night Bar and Grill."

Unlike Frutkin and Norris, Kendall does not explicitly seek comfort in the companionship of writers who have been at the edge of poetry, if not history. Yet there are echoes of e.e. cummings in several of Kendall's experiments with inversion and linguistic order; there are constant reminders of the Surrealists, though the magic power of their rebellious imagination seems fit now for only a window display in a world become bargain city; above all, there are ironic allusions to Carman and Hovey's vagabond songs in Kendall's guiding metaphor of "a wandering city," of course, and in a pivotal poem called "Song of the Open Door," with its speaker concluding:

I've walked for days.
 No route leads away from me.
 So here I am, as always, back at my
 bolted door.

Kendall's discounting of day-dreams and night-thoughts ends in images of "desperate bargains" and drowning—without mermaids. His urban nocturnes directed against stasis in life-poetry also bring to mind some of Charles G.D. Roberts' New York poems and Lampman's "The City of the End of Things," with its poet-idiot left staring into eternal night alone.

Kendall's mock-whimsical poems about darkness of the head and the heart make good complementary reading to Frutkin's historicist ventures into light-making and to Norris' spells of light from the attic, that traditional sanctuary for poets. Moreover, the three volumes at hand are timely examples of Canadian literature's wide-open market for non-nationalist voices and values.

Novel Guides

George Woodcock

Introducing Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel. ECW \$18.95

W.J. Keith

Introducing Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman. ECW, \$14.95

Reviewed by Nora Foster Stovel

Canadian Fiction Studies, published by ECW Press, represents a new series of guides to Canadian novels. What novel could be more appropriate to launch this new series than *The Stone Angel*, possible the great Canadian novel? And what critic could be more appropriate to introduce the novel than George Woodcock, a founding father of Canadian Literature and the literal founder of the journal of that name? Certainly Woodcock's guide to *The Stone Angel* is an excellent introduction to Canadian Fiction Studies.

Each volume in this useful series includes a section on the author's life, the importance of the work, its critical reception, and a full reading of the text interpreting characters and themes, structure and style, plus the useful apparatus of chronology, bibliography and index, for students, teachers and general readers. Despite the standard format, however, all the critics put their individual stamp on their work. George Woodcock's reading of *The Stone Angel* is indeed distinctive.

In the opening section on "Laurence's Life and Work," Woodcock, an intrepid traveller engaged in writing his autobiography, emphasizes the autobiographical origins of Laurence's writing, especially the travels in Africa and elsewhere that inspired her insight into "the heart of a stranger" as well as her native Canada. The second section on "The Importance of the Work" claims that *The Stone Angel* has the particularity as well as the universality that distinguishes lasting works of literature, such as *The Odyssey* and *Don Quixote*. Woodcock isolates four ways in which *The Stone Angel* has been important to the development of Canadian fiction. First, Manawaka provided the emergent Canadian with "myths to sustain our convictions," giving us a figurative place to stand on. Second, it helped to shift the dominantly male voice of Canadian fiction to include female voices. Third, Laurence's experimentation with time structure opened up new technical possibilities of Canadian novelists. Fourth, *The Stone Angel* articulated the theme of survival, so central to the development of Canadian literary identity.

Woodcock's section on "Critical Reception" typifies his individual approach to the standard pattern. He begins by investigating the author's intentions, both conscious and unconscious, as factors in considering any work of art. First he addresses the unconscious elements that he

has discerned in Laurence's Manawaka novels, citing Carl Jung's theories of the collective unconscious and archetypal patterns as authority. Next he specifies the four elements and four humours that he has discerned in each of the Manawaka novels, beginning with Hagar's choleric temperament and its link with the novel's primary element of earth, including stone, in *The Stone Angel*. Then he addresses Laurence's declared intentions in a number of her own essays. Finally, he offers a brief but useful bibliography.

The central section of the guide, the "Reading of the Text," is subdivided into segments: "The Double Plot," "Character and Realism," "An Architecture of Time," "A Cluster of Themes," "Originality and Origins," and "Madame Bovary...?" In "The Double Plot," Woodcock defines the dual pattern of Hagar's present action and past recollections, but adds a third plot—the external view we get of Hagar from her encounters with other characters. In the section on "Character and Realism," Woodcock offers a concise history of the development of character in literature, beginning with Theophrastes, and isolating three stages in the development—character as type, as humour, and as mask—and showing how Laurence employs them all, especially the mask. He discusses the importance of the female protagonist as narrator and her role in determining the recollections to be recounted, with memory itself as a creator of fictions. In "An Architecture of Time," Woodcock defines two forms of time, physical and mental. Time, he asserts, is Laurence's primary method of structuring her novels, beginning with the dual time scheme of past and present paralleled that distinguishes *The Stone Angel*. In "A Cluster of Themes," Woodcock emphasizes the primacy of character in Laurence's fiction and her practice of allowing themes to arise organically out of the character's dilemmas. Finally,

"Originality and Origins" provides a useful sketch of Laurence's literary influences.

The final section, "Madame Bovary...?"—based on Gustave Flaubert's famous *mot*, "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*"—addresses the relation between author and character, Margaret Laurence and Hagar Shipley, emphasizing the significance of speech, both inner and outer voices, in *The Stone Angel* and all Laurence's writing.

W.J. Keith's introduction to *The Edible Woman* is more modest in tone than Woodcock's guide, partly because *The Edible Woman* is an apprentice work, albeit a brilliantly precocious one, compared with *The Stone Angel*, Margaret Laurence's mature masterwork. But perhaps there are other reasons.

Faced with the need to write one thousand words justifying "the Importance of the Work," Keith offers five: "it is a good novel." In explaining the text's importance as political commentary on "our Western-urban-capitalist-industrialized-materialist democracy," however, he has not only written the requisite number of words, he has also concluded that *The Edible Woman* constitutes an "important" work: "The artist's ideal, then, would seem to be to teach in the very process of delighting. *The Edible Woman* does just that. It is a good novel because it is well written; because it is well written it can expand our imaginative awareness; and because it expands our imaginative awareness it may be considered "important."

Keith's method in composing his critique is inductive, rather than deductive—appropriately, after castigating critics for programmatic readings of the text that "neglect its artistic subtlety" in his section on "Critical Reception." As if teaching the novel to a class of freshmen, he explicates chunks of chapters. Modest as this method is, this master teacher not only offers an interpretation of penetrating insight, but also an example of teaching as an art form

in itself. The critic too, then, teaches and delights *and* delights in teaching. By focusing on Atwood's mastery of comic techniques of parody and satire, Keith convinces himself (and us) that *The Edible Woman* is indeed an "important" text: "*The Edible Woman* [is] a youthful, exhilarating, and intellectually challenging novel that shows one of Canada's most distinguished contemporary novelists at the height of her inventive powers."

Found Again

Nicole Brossard et Lisette Girouard

Anthologie de la poésie des femmes au Québec.
Editions du Remue-ménage n.p.

Yolande Grisé et Jeanne d'Arc Lortie

Les Textes poétiques du Canada français: 1606-1867. Volume 5: 1850-1855. Fides n.p.

Reviewed by Jane Tilley

It is always interesting to see who has "made it" into an anthology—especially with regard to traditionally under-represented women writers: in the case of the *Anthologie de la poésie des femmes au Québec*, the encyclopedic nature of the text offers a welcome change from the usual pattern and allows the inclusion of women poets other than those very few whose acceptance into the canon has been assured. This, the first anthology of women's poetry from Québec, includes works by 128 poets, chosen, primarily, for the quality of their writing, but also—according to the editors—in some cases, for their thematic exemplariness or for the originality of their approach to a given subject. Beginning with the spiritual writings of Marie Guyart (better known as Marie de l'Incarnation), of 1677, the text offers an historically representative overview of poetry by women in Québec over the past 300 or so years. The arrangement of the poems in chronological order according to the birth date of the writers

allows the poems themselves to illustrate the evolution of Québec women's writing, as well as the socio-political, religious, and personal concerns of the women writing throughout the history of Québec.

Many of the earlier poems are infused with a sense of nationalism which manifests itself, in part, in the romantic, picturesque images of nature and descriptions of Québec, as in "Le Saint-Laurent" by Madame Boissonault and "Les Marches naturelles de la rivière Montmorency" by Anne-Marie Duval-Thibault, while the nostalgic, wistful poems of Blanche Lamontagne-Beauregard mark the beginnings of regionalism in literature from Québec. The poems of Atala, Simone Routier, Jovette-Alice Bernier and Hélène Charbonneau, among others, bring into play concerns of a more existential quality.

The poetry of the ten years preceding the appearance of *Le Survenant* and *Bonheur d'Occasion*, a period which corresponds with the beginning of Duplessis' first term of office, is dismissed—perhaps regrettably—by the editors as mediocre and "domestic," with the notable exception of work by Anne Hébert and Rina Lasnier, both of whom are well represented here. Later poets include Thérèse Renaud and Suzanne Meloche, the two women participants in *Refus global*, the manifesto of the "Automatistes." The poets writing in the revolutionary period of the sixties and seventies explore and re-evaluate—with the increasing liberation in the air at that time—their own nature and identity, while becoming more politicised. The raising of feminist consciousness becomes increasingly apparent in both the content and form of the works that follow: women's sexuality is discussed and not shunned, while the writing itself takes on the fluidity and subversiveness of "l'écriture au féminin." This can be seen in the works of Nicole Brossard and Madeleine Gagnon, and in the poems in prose or poetic prose

by France Théoret, Geneviève Amyot and Carole Massé, among others, which refuse the order of logic and linearity, and, finally, in the mystical and playful writings of Yolande Villemaire.

By offering a re-edition of poetic works by women in Québec, Brossard and Girouard have rediscovered and reclaimed the legacy of these women writers; all of them are previously published and many played a significant role in the artistic and cultural communities of their time. The *Anthologie* places the poems in a new and positive space, thus liberating them from the secondary position to which many had been unjustly relegated, and, while not for a moment suggesting that every one of these poems is a “master,” the text acknowledges and pays homage to the wealth and variety of women’s contribution to writing in Québec. By bringing these poets together in a positive context, the *Anthologie* may well play an important role in the re-evaluation of the canon.

The fifth volume of the mammoth twelve-volume project, *Les Textes poétiques du Canada français: 1606-1867* is an exhaustive collection of the poetic texts produced during the years 1850-55. The text contains 311 pieces, faithfully reproduced and arranged, as far as possible, according to the date of writing. Of the seventy or so writers, only a very few are women (although it is possible that some may be hidden among those who chose to shroud their identity in anonymity). Those poems which were written as songs or which, later, became lyrics are accompanied here by the name of the tune for which they were intended.

In keeping with the preoccupations of the mid-nineteenth century, a time the editors refer to as the “second wave of Canadian romanticism,” many poets here are typically concerned with love and death, while the beauty and cruelty of nature and the seasons (especially winter) have also

become significant themes. The relationship between the former French colony, now under British rule, and “la France oublieuse” is also an important topic of the poems in this collection: Octave Crémazie’s nostalgic poem “Le Vieux soldat canadien,” of 1855, which marked the arrival of the “Capricieuse,” the first French ship to visit Québec since the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, is perhaps the most famous, while Adolphe Marsais, whose work constitutes nearly one third of this collection, dedicates a number of poems to the same subject.

This text, as part of a twelve-volume series, is a valuable research tool, offering, ultimately, the “complete” poetic works of French Canada, over 260 years, in an accessible format. It will no doubt prove a veritable Bible for those working on or simply interested in French Canadian poetry and culture.

Early Modern

A.M. Klein

Complete Poems. Ed. Zailig Pollock. 2 vols. U Toronto P \$125

Reviewed by Brian Trehearne

A.M. Klein’s *Complete Poems*, edited by Zailig Pollock, should establish the standard for all future scholarly editing of the major Canadian poets. The completeness of the edition is inarguable; only a few manuscript poems, such as “occasional verses, which Klein produced on demand for members of the Montreal Jewish community,” and “poetry fragments which are too incomplete for a coherent text to be established” (1, xxxix) are left out. Despite the obvious usefulness of such esoterica, neither exclusion is lamentable. Access to previously unpublished and uncollected material is especially valuable and will enrich Klein studies—especially studies of Klein’s apprenticeship—for many years.

Among these are the “xxii Sonnets” and Klein’s imagist poems. The sonnets give a detained impression of Klein’s struggle into and away from the English formal tradition; the imagist poems are striking to anyone working on Klein from the angle of his relation to modernism. His well-known mockery of free verse (see “Composition,” I, 94, and the essay “Worse Verse,” to which we are directed by Pollock’s fine explanatory notes) and his unhappy efforts at imagism indicate modernist ambivalence that can not receive detailed charting.

Pollock’s selection of copy-text is cautious and consistent. His general practice was to choose “the version which is judged to be the latest” of unpublished poems, and of published poems, “the latest published version, even when later unpublished versions exist.” The case of “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape” may have dictated this decision. Klein revised “Portrait” and other poems in the early 1950’s, although he never published the later versions. Pollock refers to these ‘fifties revisions in his “Introduction” as “very impressive,” and prints two distinct versions of “*In Re* Solomon Warshawer,” for example, on their authority. In the case of “Portrait,” the later revisions to the *Rocking Chair* text sometimes return to the readings of earlier versions and sometimes institute entirely new versions. But here the impressiveness of the later revisions had to be ignored, because a version of Klein’s masterpiece that altered key phrasing would obviously have raised hell. The ‘fifties revisions would have lost the wonderfully inscrutable “merkin joy” in favour of the bland “ego’s joy;” “the troubadour / rich and successful out of celluloid” would have degenerated into “the cinema troubadour / making his plagiary out of celluloid.” Better, certainly, to establish a copy-text policy that would protect the original force of Klein’s greatest poem.

Pollock’s chronological ordering of

Klein’s poetry has occasioned some controversy, primarily for abandoning Klein’s careful arrangements of individual collections. But the decision’s negative consequences are purely practical: the *Complete Poems* are cluttered by division into awkwardly headed chronological sections, some of which are manageable and reliable because the poems may be dated with confidence to a single year, others more unwieldy because the poems cannot be so dated and must be clustered in approximate groups. Within the second kind of grouping poems are arranged alphabetically, no other principles obtaining; when the category is as broad as “c. 1928-1931,” and the twenty poems Klein *might* have written in those four years are arranged alphabetically, a firm chronological order is far away. But the abandonment of Klein’s original order for the poems is not a particular loss to Pollock’s edition. He provides an appendix in which he lists the contents of Klein’s volumes in their original order, should any reader desire to rearrange the poems on those principles. The *Complete Poems* are always scrupulous in provision of such editorial detail, allowing for divergent approaches and contending interpretation.

The edition’s “Explanatory Notes” are invaluable, especially the detailed glosses of Klein’s Judaica that dominate the notes of the first volume. Pollock not only provides his own illuminations but discusses variant readings of fellow commentators. This generous policy provides Klein’s reader with an enormous range of gloss, anecdote and critical exegesis ready to hand. Later “Explanatory Notes” dwell more on the English and American literary traditions in which Klein located himself when he turned away from explicitly Jewish subjects. Here Pollock is a little less detailed in his treatments, partly because of the daunting eclecticism of Klein’s own reading and study, and of course the location of

Klein's elaborate intertext is the (now much clearer) task of future researchers.

My darker moments with the volumes do not in fact result from Pollock's work in any sense, but from that of his publishers. The layout of the typical page is unfortunate: poems are distinguished needlessly by strongly-marked horizontal lines running the width of the page, and line-numbers are provided awkwardly to the immediate left of the poems, providing (for example in "Portrait") some curious readings, as in "50 of the patents of nature" and "60 Pins on a map." My second disagreement is with the inexplicable decision to divide the volumes at 1934, thus producing an obese and unwieldy second volume to which one turns with physical displeasure. Many biographical reasons could be adduced, but these largely have to do with the division of Klein's works into distinct manuscript-collections that the chronological imperative appeared to have overruled. Indeed, that the volumes could have been broken anywhere at all without damaging chronological order is one of its advantages, and ought to have been seized upon.

But Pollock himself has a great achievement to celebrate. It is regrettable that an edition of this thoroughness and care, responsibility and impartiality should have on the shelf so few companion volumes from the Canadian early modern tradition. This was what was needed when *The Collected Poems of F.R. Scott* appeared in 1981; it is still desperately needed for Lampman, Smith, and Glassco; and in the next several years this edition should be rivalled by the complete Livesay, Layton, Dudek, Page. Like the *Complete Poems* of A.M. Klein, these books will indicate a broad maturing in the Canadian literary discipline. Their usefulness will endure decades beyond the fashions of literary study that depend entirely and absolutely on the existence of such masterful critical editions for their daily bread.

Cultures in Contact

Adam Ballantyne

Wisakyjak and the New World, Woodcuts by A.D. Catterson. Penumbra n.p.

Lydia Bailey

Mei Ming and the Dragon's Daughter, illustrated by Martin Springett. Scholastic \$5.95

Jacqueline White

Coyote Winter. Lester \$18.95

Reviewed by Gernot Wieland (with Alexandra Wieland)

Nature and Humanity: this archetypal theme in much of Canadian literature gains special poignancy in these three books since the original stories are told by a Cree, a Chinese, and a Hutterite respectively. All three tales are retold: the first by Prentice Downes, an American school teacher who heard it from Adam Ballantyne, a "medicine man" of Pelican Narrows, Saskatchewan; the second by Lydia Bailey who draws on "A Chinese Folktale;" and the third by Jacqueline White who had heard the tale from her deceased sister. Each story singly, and all three together demonstrate the enrichment that cultures in contact have brought to Canada.

Wisakyjak is the most complex of the tales. Its hero is a semi-divine figure who battles giant lynxes, beavers and bullfrogs, who unwittingly brings about a flood that engulfs the earth, who builds a raft on which he rescues "a pair of each type of animal," and who finally recreates the world by inflating a little ball of mud. Parts of the story clearly are an analogue to, if not an echo of, the biblical account of Noah; other parts, such as Wisakyjak's battle against the giant lynxes who had killed his friend the wolf, seem to derive from the native Cree tradition. Though the narrator of the story is an accomplished singer of tales, he does not quite achieve a complete balance between the various parts—a fault, no doubt, of the fact that the originally

oral tale reaches us through the medium of print. To give an example: although Wisakyjak has supposedly gathered “a pair of each type of animal” on his raft, yet a giant beaver bumps with his head against the raft and tries to break it up. Where does the giant beaver come from? Does it swim from the Cree tradition into the Noachic story? Wisakyjak kills the giant beaver, and, as the narrator informs us, “this is how the last of the great giant animals in those days of long ago was killed,” yet a few pages later a giant frog hops into the tale intent on using his medicine to cure the giant lynxes. Some giant animals appear to have survived the death of “the last of the great giant animals.” This may be nitpicking, but the inconsistencies in the story detract from what otherwise could be a powerful mythic narrative.

No such inconsistencies appear in *Mei Ming and the Dragon's Daughter*. Mei Ming does not have the semi-divine stature of Wisakyjak; she is only a simple country girl, and yet she saves her village from the drought through which it suffered. In her search for water, she stumbles on a clear blue lake one day high up on a mountain, but cannot pry its gate open to release the waters for the people below. Three different types of birds then tell her how she can open the gate: it is her singing, “as sweet as a nightingale’s,” with which she can charm the dragon’s daughter into helping her. This tale, like *Wisakyjak*, contains mythic elements; a selfless quest, an Orphean ability to charm even the wildest creatures (here the dragon), and a descent into the underworld (here the dragon’s den), but there are no inconsistencies, there are no digressions. It is a tale straightforwardly—and charmingly—told.

Myth plays no role in *Coyote Winter*. It is the story of a Hutterite schoolteacher who takes her class outdoors after a chinook had broken the back of a particularly harsh winter. On their walk they encounter a

coyote in an iron trap, and Mrs. Elliot frees him. When one of the children wants to know why he did not bite, Mrs. Elliot answers: “He knew we loved him.” Here the author presents no more than the tale of a good deed, and yet the message penetrates much more deeply than the ubiquitous “Ban Leghold Traps.” White’s story gains such depth not only because of the simplicity and directness of her style, but also because of her very evocative images of the coyote, whom we see cowering in fear, hesitating in surprise at having been freed, and gradually enjoying his newly gained freedom (in contrast, White’s pictures of people with puffy faces are not nearly as successful).

The drawings in *Mei Ming*, too, contribute greatly to the story. Their rich colours, their shifting perspectives, their stylized renditions of the Chinese landscape, their sheer imaginativeness reinforce the mythic quality of the tale proper. The woodcuts in *Wisakyjak* surpass the pictures in the other two books by virtue of their artistic merit; they are, however, executed in stark black and white, and thus appear almost forbidding.

All three tales show humanity in harmony with nature or restoring nature’s harmony. Though we cannot expect to commune with wolves, kingfishers, beavers or muskrats like Wisakyjak, or overhear geese, birds “the color of jewels,” or peacocks like Mei Ming, or free coyotes from iron traps like Mrs. Elliot, the underlying message seems to be that we can only succeed in our various quests if we move with rather than against nature.



Dialogic Framework

Joan Coldwell

The Tightrope Walker. Autobiographical Writings of Anne Wilkinson. U Toronto P \$39.95

Cynthia Flood

My Father Took a Cake to France.

Talonbooks \$13.95

Reviewed by Marion Wynne-Davies

These two collections, one of autobiographical writings and the other of short stories, initially appear to have little in common. The former, *The Tightrope Walker. Autobiographical Writings of Anne Wilkinson*, is a scholarly edition of the recollections and private notes of one of Canada's finest poets, Anne Wilkinson, which will be invaluable for any student of her creative writing. The latter, *My Father Took a Cake to France*, is the second anthology of tales by an author who is only just beginning to make an impression upon the literary world, and the book will be taken up and enjoyed by those wishing to discover a new writer. Clearly, read as entirely separate entities, both works deserve a place in the critical and literary canon, but at very different points of entry. However, on closer inspection Wilkinson and Flood reveal surprisingly similar narratives, themes and tonal emphases. These correspondences are not evidence of a close link between the two particular authors, but a demonstration of a dialogic framework which permeates much of twentieth-century women's writing.

To begin with, take the intense relationship between mothers and daughters which infuse both autobiography and fiction. Wilkinson had an immensely strong bond with her mother, as the diaries and autobiography reveal; two letters are reproduced in *The Tightrope Walker*, which were exchanged between them and clearly express mutual love. Mother to daughter: "I can never tell you what you have been to

me, especially in the last year... I am filled with amazed pride that George and I, plus various ancestors, produced a poet." Daughter to mother: "It would take a book for me to express what you have been to me for the last forty four years... I am proud of your valour, as I am to be your daughter." Associations between parents and children play an equally important role in Flood's short stories, but instead of the warmth and nourishment evidenced in Wilkinson's account, the characters respond to one another in harmful and distorting ways. The opening narrative, "The Meaning of Marriage," uncovers an inheritance of broken maternal bonds, from the wicked stepmother, Mrs. Perren, who has her comeuppance when the cats invade her attic, to the stepdaughter as mother weeping for a dead cat and scaring her own child who confides to the text, "I gain no comfort from my mother's nearness. Thinking of her there disturbs me still."

Another aspect of both books which has been taken up by feminist critics over the last fifteen years is that of autobiography. Joan Coldwell confronts the problems of rendering private writing in to a product suitable for public consumption in her Introduction to *The Tightrope Walker*, by arguing that she is providing essential literary and social history, that "Anne Wilkinson's journals add another piece to the steadily growing patchwork which allows us to see what the realities of life have been for all sorts and conditions of women." But in another sense, the very act of writing, of inscribing personal experience, presupposes a reader of that account, even if only a later incarnation of the self. In Wilkinson's case the shift from keeping a journal (1947-1956) to writing an autobiography specifically for publication ("Four Corners of my World" was issued as a memorial tribute in 1961) affirms the close link between the two genres, and suggests that,

for her, the boundary between private and public voices was negligible. Conversely, while Flood never asserts an autobiographical source for the stories in *My Father Took a Cake to France*, the first person narrator who emerges in several of the tales adopts a confessional discourse which flirts with the possibilities of private history and family secrets. The woman who tells us of her mother's childhood, could be the same as the one who recounts the cake episode in her father's youth, and could be the same again as the young woman who recalls her first job and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. This last event negotiates the spaces between public memory and personal perceptions through its evocation of folk mythology. Flood reminds us that everyone is supposed to remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when President Kennedy died. The narrator has left her office and joined the crowds gathering on the street,

There were so many—I had never seen so many in one place. They were quiet, or they conversed in low tones, telling each other where they had been, what doing, when the news came to them.

She begins by feeling isolated, an independent subject, but gradually allows her discourse to merge organically with the discourses of society: "In the street, among these hundreds and thousands, I felt like more than a solitary self, and this new feeling poured through me like the strength of streams of water over raw ore." Both books allow the resonance of the individual voice to become part of a public language, transforming that which is private into texts which are imaginatively meaningful for others. As such they participate in a history of women's writing, from medieval saints to nineteenth-century novelists, who gained access to a public hearing precisely because personal experience was the only valid way women had of expressing themselves.

Raw vs Clever

Lesley Choyce

Margin of Error. Borealis \$12.95

Elin Elgaard

Wafer Thin. Cormorant \$12.95

Dick King-Smith

Lady Daisy. Viking \$18.95

Claire Mackay

Exit Barney McGee. Scholastic \$4.50

Judith Wright

The Magpie Summer. Polestar \$9.95

Reviewed by Lynn Wytenbroek

A new trend in novels for young readers, particularly for pre- to early-adolescents, is what could be categorized as "raw" writing—novels or stories marked by bad language, and by continual discussions about menstruation, sexual desires or experiences, sometimes in descriptive detail. This material must be appealing to buyers of these books, either young people who feel comfortable with it or are curious about it, or adults who feel that this material is educative. However, when exceptionally well-written books like Welwyn Wilton Katz' *Whalesinger* (1990), aimed at mid- to late-teens, can cause a furor because of a "sex scene" which takes place off-stage between the end of one chapter and the beginning of another, one is forced to wonder at the complete acceptability of books such as Lesley Choyce's short story collection for young adolescents, *Margin of Error*, or Judith Wright's novel for the same age-group, *The Magpie Summer*, which are much more explicitly sexual and aimed at a much younger audience than *Whalesinger* is. Furthermore, there are so few novels coming out for young people about the experience of growing up in a rural setting, despite the primarily rural nature of Canada, that Wright's prairie novel is disappointing in its concentration on young girls' almost exclusive preoccupations with their bodies.

The reader also feels a certain self-consciousness in the style of these writings that further detracts from whatever storyline and character exposition there may be. There is little to distinguish these novels and stories from writings for adults. Sexuality, brutality, coarseness, violence, and the more sordid side of reality permeate both works, as they so often do adult realism. It may be true that for many children childhood is not the idyllic time we like to think it should be, but is childhood unrelievedly negative for all children all the time? Even if it is for some, surely books that showed some possibility of love or hope or joy in life would be of more use to them than writings that simply confirmed the inutterable bleakness, pain, and emptiness of their experience?

However, neither of these books is as self-conscious as *Wafer Thin*, a novel by Elin Elgaard apparently about child abuse. This novel is not marketed for young readers, although it is about childhood experience. The novel is clever and witty. However, the deliberately self-conscious, convoluted style makes the writing so obscure that it is almost impossible to follow.

A couple of good books have come out recently for young readers. In Mackay's *Exit Barney McGee*, a book about a pre-adolescent boy facing some real problems, the problems are neither endless nor completely unsolvable, which sets it apart from the bleak writings of Wright and Choyce. In fact, *Exit Barney McGee* is a surprising little book. It presents a fairly light-weight story about a boy who runs away from home after increasing problems with his new stepfather to join his real father who left when he was a baby. He has a series of predictable adventures along the way, meets a series of predictable people, and predictably finds his father is not all he had hoped he would be. The plot, especially once Barney gets to the city, becomes increasingly complicated and contrived,

and the coincidences grow to a roaring crescendo when his step-father, suitably humbled, arrives at the moment of Barney's greatest crisis, and wins the boy back through his sympathetic and uncharacteristic sensitivity.

Despite the irritating predictability and coincidences, this novel is actually both engaging and moving. Mackay has achieved these effects through the very humanness of the central character and through the unusual yet delightful relationship between the boy and his pet mouse, Saki, which he carries everywhere with him. Barney's own internal struggles with what is happening to him and the people he loves are well-drawn and convincing. Despite some negative features, this novel is one of the best to come out of Scholastic for some time.

King-Smith's *Lady Daisy* is another surprising novel. Written for the same pre-adolescent age group, this novel concerns Ned and his relationship with a talking Victorian doll named Lady Daisy. Ned, a typical football-playing youngster, finds his life changed utterly by his relationship with Lady Daisy. What makes this highly unlikely story refreshing and convincing is that both Lady Daisy and Ned are so well-portrayed. In a novel that is obviously working to reverse sexual stereotypes, the emphasis on character works effectively to present the gender issue, and the addition of a good cast of supporting characters, from the sensitive and understanding grandmother to the nasty school bully to the persistent and ominous antique collector, enhances the story substantially.



Tryptych

Patricia Keeney

New Moon, Old Mattress. Oberon n.p.

Doug Turner

Splinters. Oberon n.p.

Norm Sibus

Narratives and Continuations. Oberon n.p.

Reviewed by Mick Burrs

The best of Patricia Keeney's poems are built upon painfully earned metaphors and complex emotions. In *New Moon, Old Mattress*, she probes into an uncommon poetic realm with imaginative potency. In the book's longest section, the reader, exposed to searing images planted in a minefield of poems on divorce, experiences the emotional casualty list caused by one domestic war.

The poet and her lover have created a new family, but his "dead marriage" remains "unburied." On "holy nights," Keeney writes, "my sleeping child does not see the traps / we lay exhausted in." Poems such as "Christmas Eve," "Anything That Matters," and "It Must Be Love" are among the strongest in this collection, each one turning on a different aspect of the rancorous and incomplete dissolution of one marriage as it obstructs the legal formation of another, more loving relationship.

There is relief when the poet speaks of her newborn child in a series of startling phrases ("Celebration"): "you breathe too fast / and look too far to be / one of us / ... you burrow back to dream." The baby is a "Religious fanatic for milk. / Mystic with memory-haunted gaze." These and other lines demonstrate the poet's power in reawakening us to the inner lives of people, animals, and natural landscapes.

Keeney's most fanciful and poignant poem closes the book. "Geraldine" deals with the death of her daughter's favourite poet, and shows how one parent struggles to console her child over a devastating loss.

The gerbil's waking hours were spent in a cage "scratching her way through dreamless sleep / living it upon paper scraps / moonstruck ..." Every line is magical and attuned to its twin subjects of grieving child and Geraldine, creature of the moon: "I tell you Geraldine is bright again. / She need not struggle any more. She's there / the place she always wanted to climb to / on that infernal wheel."

Doug Turner's truths are rarely consoling, nearly always jolting. He writes of drunken war veterans, sexual conquests and failures, dehumanizing work conditions, the brutal deaths of animals, intellectual contemplation of suicide, even of sitting on a truck stop toilet (which makes him think of a gas chamber in a prison). Since this poet will not soften things, some poems in *Splinters* sound literal and heavy handed in approaching their subject, like "Ballet of the Bone-Birds," "Transition," and "Dinnertime 2."

But when a poet looks at the world through broken shards of glass darkly, the images that stand out are the ones that surprise you with just a glimmering of light. One poem opens: "As I walk down the road / I look up at the moon / and it's doing a beautiful / celestial striptease / behind the clouds." With this poet such beauty typically does not last: a pervasive pulpmill stink breaks the spell of his "Walk," and the rest of the poem focuses bitterly on the economic reasons for that overpowering odour.

At least half the poems in this collection are redeemed by Turner's barbed social conscience, his gallows humour. Whether unstintingly harsh in their imagery, like "Measures" and "Energy Shortage"—or sympathetically humorous, like "Hope" and "Staring"—these poems are meant to be swallowed with a spoonful of irony.

A few pieces rise above their bleaker brethren to be especially memorable, like "Nucleus," a tight, empathic poem about a

woman living with an abusive partner; "Escape," about a couple fleeing the smog, noise, and violence of the city to stay in a cabin in the mountains; and "Super," the book's most liberating poem, with its sustained comic tone, an exhilarating stroll down the aisles of our North American supermarket mentality.

In his next collection will this poet subdue his hypergloom and expand his considerable wit? One day his verse may stop heading like a kamikaze pilot toward the dead end targets of junkyards, graveyards, and horsemeat factories, all of which Turner writes about now with an intense attraction, a morbid fascination.

Norm Sibus began crafting his poetry in Vancouver in the 1960s and has gradually developed a distinct style and worldview. He is a mordant observer of humanity who somehow remains serene, compassionate, and cheerfully self-deflating. His lines, though sometimes cryptic, are always evocative and thoughtful. The rhythms of his poems seem so relaxed and natural fit, inviting readers into a balanced and reflective consciousness matching his own.

Sibus usually chooses to compose in modified blank verse, penning narrative poems and character studies that storytellers would envy for their erudite descriptions, their mood-building textures. His human subjects include waitresses, cafe customers, young and old recluses, heavy drinkers, and occasional historic figures treated as contemporaries.

The three narratives that open this volume are especially compelling: "This Business of June," "An Exile of Excess," and "The Amenities." The latter is a superb short story in verse format. By the time we finish this 84-line poem, we understand the relationship between the man and the women in her garden where "dogs tussle, then run away, / their tongues warm, bright ribbons." We sense the man's resignation to something that has changed for-

ever, like the "rather tenuous" evening and the "gaudy sunset, / unprecedented in its loveliness."

To explore and develop his themes, Sibus inclines toward spaciousness. One third of the words collected here are over 100 lines long. These atmospheric pieces are not only eccentric portraits but also metaphysical meditations, a cultivated synthesis that is stamped with this poet's personality.

"Herm," the long elegy that closes *Narratives and Continuations*, contains a sonorous refrain: "Near Darrington in the country / Herm's ashes rest—." Alternately reverent and irreverent ("Could be he'd lived too long / secluded with his whisky..."), this verse goes beyond sentiment into that special realm where the contemplation of death can still bring lyrical comfort to poet and reader.

Because he paints with words so masterfully within the solid frames he has crafted, Sibus deserved more recognition than he has so far received.

Re-memobering Lesbian Desire

Audrey Butler

Radical Perversions: Two Dyke Plays. Women's Press n.p.

The Lesbian Writing and Publishing

Collective, eds. *Dykewords: An Anthology of Lesbian Writing.* Women's Press n.p.

Reviewed by Lesley Ziegler and Peter Dickinson

In *Sister Outsider* the late Audre Lorde writes that "we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live." Audrey Butler invokes these words in her opening "Playwright's Note" to "Black Friday?," one of two one-act plays ("Claposis" is the other) which make up *Radical Perversions*. Lorde's words point to the central concerns which inform both of Butler's plays: lesbians coming out, lesbians coming to

voice, lesbians coming to power. As Butler states, "In coming out we name ourselves, and naming ourselves is an act of power."

These same issues are expressed in *Dykekeywords*, a recent anthology of lesbian writing which mixes short fiction, poetry, drama, personal reflection, erotica and humour, and which attempts to cut across racial, class and geographical boundaries in providing women with a space in which to tell their stories. Acknowledging in their "Introduction" the "awesome task" of undertaking such a project, The Lesbian Writing and Publishing Collective which put together the volume must nevertheless ask: "How can we write from a lesbian voice and still keep a safety net of invisibility around our lives?"

Not an easy question to answer. For the process of representation is a violent one, in which institutions and technologies inevitably deny the multiplicity of experience by reducing difference to sameness. The mainstream Canadian publishing industry is one of the central technologies which contributes to such acts of elision. By appropriating the label *The Canadian Publishers*, for example, McClelland and Stewart contributes to the cyclical process of meaning: it produces "Canadian" texts and so produces the meaning "Canadian." Mainstream publishing technologies therefore have both a productive and mimetic function.

What does this say about writers who choose *not* to publish with McClelland and Stewart? This question raises the possibility that many contemporary women writers have deliberately not sought incorporation of their work within the historical and national trajectory of Canadian canon formation, but have defiantly placed their work outside it. This results in neither forced nor self-imposed marginalization, but rather the creation of alternative centres, communities and counter-presses.

Consider the example of the two texts under review here. Both are published by

The Women's Press, and *Dykekeywords*, in particular is edited by a lesbian collective. Representation—and, more specifically, self-representation—in this context is clearly an issue not only of power, but of empowerment: control of the word, control of the image, control of the production of both. This is a refreshing publishing imperative, especially in an industry where the traditions of lesbian representation are as foreign as the signifying practices of lesbian life.

Both *Radical Perversions* and *Dykekeywords* attempt to address (and redress) this erasure by re-presenting what has hitherto been constructed only as an absence, namely lesbian desire. In "Black Friday?", the first of Butler's plays, thirtysomething Terry returns home to Cape Breton after a six-year absence with her twentysomething lover, Spike. In the course of discovering the "truth" about the father she idealized, a labour leader who was destroyed by a steelworkers' strike in 1967 and who abandoned the family shortly thereafter, Terry, with the aid of Spike and a former lover, Roddy, comes out to her family and re-establishes a relationship with her estranged mother.

"Claposis" chronicles the flip-side of the domestic drama in "Black Friday?" It focuses less on *coming out* than on the trials and tribulations of *being out*, on living and loving as a lesbian in contemporary urban society. Set in a vintage clothing store on Queen Street West, in Toronto, the play centres on a would-be playwright, Judy, and her relationships with the "fem-mey" aspiring poet, Beth, and the more "butch" Kate, owner of the store. The love-triangle unfolds in eleven scenes, which are arranged in reverse chronological order, thereby heightening the dramatic tension and throwing into relief the *ins* and *outs* of life *inside* and *outside* of the closet. In both plays Butler reveals a felicity with dramatic construction, as well as a deftness for dialogue, whether it be the peculiar epithets native to Cape Breton Island or the savvy

street talk of Toronto. Her characters speak their desire with honesty and pain, but, above all, with a sense of hope.

The contributors to *Dykekeywords* are equally eloquent in articulating their desire. In "Casselberry Harvest," for example, Leleti Tamu Bigwoman re-genders body and language to reflect her personal black lesbian landscape: "in the language of our foremothers casselberry must mean / sunkissed days blanketing a soft orchard, with the indigo / sweetness of you." In "Safe Sex," a series of prose-poem vignettes, Dorothy Kidd explores the "boundaries" and "differences" between women's bodies, and the "fusion and melt" when they meet in "a safer kind of sex." And in "Raven's Long-distance Love Affair," Two Feathers, a Lower Cayuga/ Onodaga Native woman, fashions a different kind of road trip when she narrates the story of five Native women musicians heading south of the border for a gig and a reunion with their bandleader's lover.

Dykekeywords also features the word of more established writers. In this regard, the anthology opens with a poem by Dionne Brand and ends with a story by Beth Brant. Brand's poem (which also appears in her 1990 Governor-General's Award-nominated collection, *No Language Is Neutral*) seems to set the tone for the whole volume: "this is you girl, something never waning or forgetting / something hard against the soul." Indeed, if there is "something" that united the voices in this anthology it is their self-conscious articulation of the lesbian body and erotic desire as pulsating, rhythmic and remembering.

The question remains, however: is anyone listening? For just as speaking is a method of resistance for these writers, so listening is an equally important resisting gesture on the part of their readers. In this context, the reading of these texts is less an act of aesthetic consumption than a form of political activism.

Les légèretés lyriques

Philippe Haeck

Parler Loin, 1 & 2. VLB Éditeur \$16.95

François Ricard

La Génération Lyrique. Boreal Editions n.p.

Reviewed by Dominique Perron

Établir une comparaison entre les essais de Haeck et ceux de Ricard, pourra peut-être a priori sembler injuste pour le premier, mais le rapprochement entre les deux ouvrages, quoique leurs propos s'inscrivent dans deux perspectives complètement différentes, est quasi inévitable puisque le hasard a fait que Ricard dans *La Génération lyrique* ne fasse pas autre chose que de décrire les déterminants idéologiques dont est tributaire la catégorie intellectuelle à laquelle appartient un professeur-auteur-créateur-pédagogue tel que Haeck.

Pour mieux établir cette catégorie, dont les manifestations sont toujours très vivaces dans l'intelligentsia québécoise, il n'est pas inutile de se remémorer les mordantes critiques lancées par Jean Larose dans certains de ses textes rassemblés dans *L'Amour du Pauvre* et publiés en 1991. Plus particulièrement, dans *La littérature à distance*, Larose s'en prenait—cette conception de l'enseignement de la littérature par le biais de la création littéraire et de la relation au "vécu" qui prévalait (et qui prévaut toujours encore un peu) dans la plupart des institutions collégiales au Québec. Plus particulièrement, il dénonçait l'affaiblissement dramatique de la qualité du français, le manque d'articulation de la pensée, et la générale insignifiance des contenus auxquelles cette pratique de la pédagogie du vécu avaient mene. Si les propos de Larose semblent cruels, il s'avère encore plus cruellement véridique de constater à quel point tous ces travers se sont texturisées, sans aucun retournement ironique, dans les essais de Philippe Haeck. Il est vrai que

les thèmes de ceux-ci sont par nature résistants à l'écriture et sa conception de la pédagogie, favorise une fluidité mystique qui tourne autour de la création ou de l'enseignement, parce qu'ils sont pour lui des objets d'abord sentis, jamais pensés et réfléchis. Ne parle-t-il pas, entre autres du "livre-parole," du "livre-cri," du "livre-désir," du "livre-chant," comme n'abuse-t-il pas d'associations du genre "jouer-travailler," "penser-sourire," "pensée-désir" ou "apprentissage-différence," qui à elles seules sont tout un programme qui ne peut être qualifié que de soft-idéologique. Mais le plus affligeant, parce que le plus virtuellement dommageable (et je pèse mes mots), c'est que cette représentation de l'approximation créacionniste en lieu d'articulation d'une démarche intellectuelle est offerte, que dis-je, imposée puisqu'elle est enseigné à de jeunes étudiants de collège, car Haeck dans "Préparatifs d'Écriture" nous expose, et longuement, ses préparations de cours et les objectifs qui en découlent. Ainsi, les jeunes québécois dont on déplore tant et plus les faiblesses en français écrit et parlé, se voient invités à rejeter une "expression rigoureuse (qui) permet à qui l'entend de penser uniquement ce qui lui convient et ce que, de toute façon, la raison lui ordonne" et "à sortir de la langue stéréotypée, académique, morte", comme s'ils avaient jamais eu la chance d'y entrer, et comme si le discours de Haeck lui-même n'était pas rempli de ces stéréotypes de la naïveté-gourou, même pas mal intentionnée, ce qui est un autre comble de l'insignifiance, parole mystique qui invite ses pathétiques adeptes à faire des "exercices-jeux avec le langage" pour ne pas "risquer votre âme-peau, votre pensée-désir". Pour en finir, je ne peux, encore une fois, que citer Jean Larose " ...l'Association Québécoise des professeurs de français (l'un des organismes qui mettent le plus en danger en ce moment—bien plus

qu'Alliance Québec—la vie du français au Québec)".

Heureusement, pour notre réconfort moral et intellectuel, *La Génération Lyrique* de Ricard s'affirme comme un brillant essai d'une écriture remarquablement efficace, sur les paradigmes socio-historiques qui ont prévalu au surgissement, et ensuite à l'établissement des baby-boomers, dont Ricard situe la naissance entre 1945 et 1957. L'un des grands mérites de cet essai—et ils sont nombreux—est d'abord de situer le phénomène démographique du baby-boom dans son contexte mondial pour ensuite s'attacher—l'étude de ses caractéristiques au sein de la société québécoise. Ainsik, l'expression "Révolution Tranquille," perd sous la démonstration de Ricard sa spécificité québécoise, car l'auteur démontre bien que le tournant réformiste des années soixante n'a pas été une exclusivité au Québec, mais s'est manifesté partout, de la même façon en Amérique et dans de nombreux pays d'Europe. Ces élargissements faits, l'auteur s'attache ensuite à montrer, en revenant au cas québécois, comment la création du Québec contemporain, avec ses orientations sociales, est redevable à ce qu'il désigne comme étant "l'idéologie lyrique," représentation propre aux baby-boomers marquée d'abord par l'urgence de couper les ponts avec ce qui a précédé, les contraintes, les restrictions de toutes sortes, ensuite par le sentiment, plus, par la certitude, que toute réalité puisse être transformée par leur seul désir et leur seul enthousiasme. Dès lors, devant l'immédiat succès de cette volonté de faire table rase d'un univers dépassé, découlerait aussi le sentiment de la non-résistance du monde, de la société, devant cette détermination—instaurer un ordre nouveau, sentiment que Ricard qualifie globalement de lyrique, expriment bien à quel point la génération de baby-boomers n'aura jamais eu à éprouver le poids et la lourdeur de ce

monde. Mais c'est aussi à partir de cette singularité que s'instaure aussi le discours critique de l'auteur contre une société entièrement investie de ces idéologies de l'allègement, du renouveau, de "l'effacement du monde comme horizon et limite de l'existence," toutes idéologies qui prennent le "moi" comme point de départ absolu de toutes perspectives. Et c'est du même élan que Ricard stigmatise, vers ses derniers chapitres, le lyrisme de cette génération qui ne perçoit plus la nécessité d' "aucun décryptage, aucune étude, d'aucun 'apprentissage,' mais seulement la capacité de sentir, de voir, d'entendre et d'éprouver de la jouissance," commentaire qui renvoie exactement aux positions euphonique et inarticulées prônées par Haeck, lui-même parfaite illustration de cette paradoxale volonté molle de l'épanouissement à tout prix, du culte de la créativité naturelle, et du refus de toute forme imposée. Mais en sus de la pertinence de l'analyse de Ricard, ce qu'il faut aussi souligner c'est l'impressionnante maîtrise formelle de son média, cette efficacité dans l'argumentation, l'élégance des formules et le bonheur de l'image où visiblement, l'auteur lui-même s'est abandonné à un certain lyrisme où cependant la légèreté du rythme est en heureux équilibre avec le poids du propos.

Timespaces

Colleen Thibadeau

The "Patricia" Album and Other Poems.

Moonstone \$14.95

John Milkhaïl Asfour

One Fish from the Rooftop. Cormorant \$10.95

Michael Bullock

Labyrinths: poems from five cities. Third Eye \$9.00

Reviewed by Alexander M. Forbes

Memories shape and connect the poems that open Colleen Thibadeau's *The "Patricia" Album*, although a broad geo-

graphical unity is also provided by the setting of many poems in southwestern Ontario. Some of the memories are located in the recent past ("Carolyn Curtis Exhibit/Water Colours," "Inwhich #2"), but others are exercises in long historical memory. In "Three Found Poems from Josiah Henson" Thibadeau paradoxically "Constructs" poems "found" in the writings of a slave who escaped to Canada in the 1830s.

In the long poem for which the collection is named, memory becomes attached to one space at one time, as the speaker commemorates a day spent in an unknown place by individuals she cannot identify. The apparent contradictions are those that are often associated with photography: a photograph album that has fallen to the speaker defines a single timespace with great precision and utter ambiguity. The album appears to the speaker to be "from 1915, not after anyway," and it records a day's outing by a small group. The only name to appear anywhere is that of the boat used by the group, the "Patricia."

The album has become a common property of the historical imagination, and the speaker takes full advantage of the fact by supplying captions. They do not, however, merely serve the photographs (which are reproduced in the text) by attempting explanations. The speaker's voice participates dialogically with the pictures, in a full Bakhtinian sense, for it is never subsumed to their silent voices. Sometimes the pictures are questioned as well as explained; at other times, they are openly contradicted. The caption beneath one photograph of two stationary women standing on sand declares that the women are "wading into the water." The reader is also told that the two women have "taken / off their hats," when one is wearing hers. Similar contradictions proliferate as the original album is assimilated to a postmodernist poem with strongly novelistic tendencies.

The reader encounters other challenges, as well. The album is arranged haphazardly, opening with a sunset and at various other points violating narrative expectation. Structural breakdowns are multiplied when the captions refuse to be bound by the sequence of pictures above them, in an analogy to their refusal to accept what the pictures apparently disclose (some captions belong to the wrong pictures, while others suggest continuities between the pictures that are not substantiated in the album itself).

The War seeps into the captions as it (perhaps) enters the pictures themselves. It becomes an invisible presence, suggesting an historical context for the discontinuities of the captioned album. One caption notes an unobtrusive mailbox, while another speculates whether one member of the excursion might be "On Leave." Strange "effects" come to be noted in the pictures, including "rockets" apparently "shooting out of the water." While the subjects of the photographs would undoubtedly have explained the "effects" differently, historical imagination permits the rewriting of a pastoral interlude from 1915 as dramatic irony.

Another war in another time and place enters John Mikhail Asfour's *One Fish from the Rooftop*. Although some of the poems specifically address the experience of a Lebanese writer in his adopted land of Canada, most are shaped by the recollection of Lebanese timespace from the perspective of Canadian.

Present experience in Canada stands in poignant contrast to what is remembered, or what can be guessed in an extrapolation from memory. In Canada, "freedoms" are "multifarious," and bread is plentiful ("A Kiss"). There are unexpected and troubling similarities (the "children of Saint-Henri" ironically go hungry), but, nevertheless, wars are experienced only through newspapers when one lives in Montreal ("A Lullaby").

If wars now exist only in newspapers for one living in Montreal, the Lebanese village of Aitaneet now exists only as a point on a map's space. Even there, however, continued existence has become shaky ("Off the Map"). If letters are sent to Aitaneet, they will have to be delivered by a "blind postman." The present population is reduced to "three old men" who roll "worry-beads" in "the midst of a memory contest" ("We Have Some Sight Left"). Aitaneet becomes a synecdoche for Lebanon, as it edges "to the sea" ("Odd Jobs").

Time is also connected to place in Michael Bullock's *Labyrinths: poems from five cities*, but here there are multiple places, as the subtitle indicates, and the connections become less direct. In an introduction, Bullock explains the groupings of his poems under the names of five places (Albufeira, London, Hong Kong, Vancouver, Tokyo), noting that these groupings mark places of compositions and not necessarily settings (although the Hong Kong and Tokyo poems strongly reflect the given settings as well). Bullock also remarks that the number of poems in each group reflects the time spent in each place. Interest is shifted from external time and space to the mind of the writer and its timespaces—something not surprising to readers familiar with Bullock's surrealism.

The collection supports Breton's hypothesis that dreams on different nights might well be continuations of the same dream. The speaker in "The Spectre of the Rose" fails to grasp the archetypal rose of love for which he had yearned, only to encounter flowers, in the next poem, that "bleed poisonous juice" ("Dream Flowers"). Rappaccini's garden is recreated by the repression of a love that was at least partly unconscious to begin with. The connection between the two poems is extended into the next, "Fish," in which Bullock achieves a supreme paradox of surrealism: conscious, metafictional surrealism. Here a

fish becomes a metaphor for “the dreamer’s fruitless longing,” but the fish is withdrawn from unconscious waters, to be examined in the light as a dream. “Dark shadows”—“perfidious delusions”—are seen moving along the fish. But “the dream” can be held only so long; “the fish dissolves.”

Breton’s fish was, of course, soluble, and a fish made to be soluble can readily reconstruct itself, as Bullock’s does by the time it reaches Vancouver (“Thin Blue Line”). Bullock explores not only the dark places of surrealism, but the strangely humorous places that have always marked the most impressive surrealist writing. Dream fish, whatever metamorphoses they undergo, continue moving through the labyrinths that connect the different timespaces of the mind in its acts of composition.

Maps

Dan Jalowica

Port Ebony. Black Moss \$10.95

Philip Stratford

The Rage of Space Poems. Oberon \$19.95

W.J. Keith

Echoes in Silence. Goose Lane \$12.95

Reviewed by Alexander M. Forbes

Port Ebony offers Dan Jalowica’s own version of *Heart of Darkness*. If Conrad’s text is never mentioned, it is because mention is unnecessary: unnecessary not because Jalowica is consciously following Conrad (which he may or may not be doing), but because he visits the same places. *Port Ebony* is the record of a journey already taken by Marlow; it thus becomes a version of *Heart of Darkness*, whether or not Marlow’s own map was ever used.

The sufferings witnessed by Marlow are seen again: “Nothing ever changes but the angle / of entry of suffering” (“Portuguese Recall”). “Vision teases raw being / held captive” (“Fortress”) while “Ambition coils

snake-like” (“Retreat”). Fogs darken the riverscape (“Big House Blues”), lifting only to disclose the Inner Station, a place of “lost signifiers” where “Yet another journey closes” (“Port Ebony”).

In Port Ebony, “A bitter / pulse staggers / through arteries / of need” (“Attention”), a “renegade image” climbs “naked from imagination” (“Return to Sender”), and “skin meets sunken history” (“Cross-Town Pickup”). “Idols perch” (“Idols”) where “horizons close off” (“Prophecy”).

The reader is removed from this darkness, only to be left to another. A woman (unidentified: the Intended?) is seen pushing “into dusk” (“Albatross”). But the “riverbeds” cannot be forgotten: “voices wake, / calibrate stars and bird song / by dirty white moonlight / arc to a roar” (“New World”).

The reader who follows the maps provided by Philip Stratford in *the Rage of Space Poems* moves in very different directions. The geography is, literally, that of space, and the astronauts who people the poems move, in every way, beyond darkened terrestrial boundaries. Spare lines are embedded in the silences they evoke, directing the reader to a circumambient mystery. Earthly perspective is redefined within ever-enlarged spatial, and ultimately metaphysical, contexts. It is for his work in translation that Stratford has long been known to Canadian readers, and the present poems are themselves acts of meaningful translation.

Far from being erased, a sense of presence is made only more insistent by the translations, for “presence does not depend on nearness / like our awareness of the farthest stars” (“Perhaps Beyond the Sea of Stars”). Cartesian certainty is redefined in Berkeleyian terms as the speaker sees a “light” that permits a new self-affirmation: “I saw I am I see” (“Celestial Events”). An enlargement of spatial perspective likewise does anything but lessen human signifi-

cance: a "satellite image / of hordes of passengers / in the Tokyo metro" challenges Pound's darkened metro, seen from earth ("Ptolemy Counted All the Stars").

Implicit in *The Rage of Space* is the work on thermodynamics conducted by scientists such as Ilya Prigogine. For Stratford, as for Prigogine, time becomes apparent in the irreversible processes of nature that become most evident, paradoxically, in conditions of maximum randomness. Time is an arrow, with a definite and meaningful direction that cannot be reversed at will, as "big bang" theory suggests: "becoming became / exploding / in the one universal / Let There Be." Time is "inscribed on space" as "energy and mass / articulate / outward light / echoing everlastingly." These echoes *are* echoes: they are temporally determined reverberations that proceed from a definite beginning.

Echoes in Silence, by W.J. Keith, is a map of personal experience. In the volume are recorded attempts to recapture the past through writing. The attempts prove imperfect, however—or unsatisfactory, when successful—until a new understanding of time is attained.

The "poems (though invented) are true, the life / false (though accurate" ("Prologue: Fabricated Truth"). But even writing can become false, for it can become an act of suppression rather than or recognition ("On Returning to England"). And there is much to suppress, such as the childhood experience of war. Striking images of war appear in "War Sequence," but the consequence for the writer is the indirect association of writing with fear and violence. Sometimes the association is remarkably literal: whenever "the house shuddered," the speaker was told to "bite / on a book of flabby cloth; the tooth-marks / remained long afterwards" ("Blitz, 1940s"). A "rocket's signature" came to be "inscribed" on what had been "smooth green turf" ("Diary Entries

[completed after forty years]").

In the "Proust Poems," Proust appears as an object of reading, a subject for reflection, and a complement to the speaker's own process of writing and remembering. The fictional framing of the poems is delightful: the first poem ("Prologue: Pacific Flight") shows the speaker reflecting on Proust while flying across the "international dateline." Time is "doubly lost."

Self-reflexive passages show the speaker seeking, like Proust, "to recapture the child / I was "only to create "another" (Myself, Writing"). The speaker learns that what is finally remembered is often either "illusion" ("I Imagine Combray") or else "the fact of forgetting" ("On His Deathbed").

Upon recrossing the dateline, however, the speaker recognises the possibility of a genuine recovery of time, and the possibility of a genuine overcoming of time's fixed direction. Significantly, such perceptions come "in a timeless zone at this jet-age altitude" ("Epilogue: Return Flight"). A glimpse of timelessness permits a new perspective to emerge, one in which memory is seen as something potentially more than a cognizance of illusion or forgetting. Although time remains an arrow when seen from the perspective of human experience, as the previous poems have shown, it can also be seen as something even more meaningful. "Day" is "gained" and time "recaptured" as "hours" are "lost" ("Epilogue: Return Flight").

The new attitude to time is reflected in a new attitude to writing, and to the self. The "blank page" is no longer an "insert image of the betrayed / botched possible," but a place now ready to record a "miracle" ("Blank Page").



Chiaroscuro

Margaret Blackwood, Anne M. Kelly, & Kerry Slavens

Gravity and Light. Cacanadadada \$12.95

John V. Hicks

Month's Mind. Thistledown \$11.00

Reviewed by Alexander M. Forbes

Margaret Blackwood, the first of the three poets represented in *Gravity and Light*, writes a poetry of incompleteness. In her poems, loneliness is the dominant emotion and memory often the only completion of experience.

Memory is inseparably connected to loneliness in poems about childhood ("The Fall of Icicles," "Between the Graveyard and the Sea"), the loss of innocence ("Laundry Day in the Neighbourhood"), arranged marriage (The Trellised Window"), and the breaking of personal relationship ("Letters from the Desert"). Failures of language are responsible for separations ("Letters from the Desert," "Island Requiem"), but they can also be the effects of memory working upon isolation. A contemporary Miss Brill sits along "by the bandshell," remaining silent although she 'could tell you where the streetcars were," and "point out the old trolley lines." Now, however, "people might laugh" if she were to speak ("By the Bandshell").

The poems by Blackwood are not invariably sombre. In "The Battleground at Home" a domestic scene is called with a grimly ironic humour reminiscent of Mansfield, and "The Sawdust Lawn" relives a miserable summer with the equally grim humour of Joyce Carol Oates. It is in the poetry of Anne M. Kelly, however, that humour first erupts in *Gravity and Light*, although, even here, humour is counterpointed by moments of significant gravity.

Humour first erupts when Venus does, in an association that is not coincidental and which will be rewritten in many of Kelly's

poems: "Botticelli got it all wrong: Venus / was belched from the waves spitting / mad, puking up seaweed and octopi roe." She "wasn't about to pose / naked on a half-shell" ("The Birth of Venus [And What Happened Afterwards]"). Where love is frequently associated with memory and loneliness in the poetry of Blackwood, it is repeatedly associated with humour in that of Kelly ("Contemplating Marriage," "Yewfemizums," "Blind Date with an Entomologist"). Humour assumes many forms in Kelly's poetry, sometimes appearing as metaphysical ("Plumbing," "The Lovers Come to Life, Drop Out of the Major Arcana"), and sometimes as surrealist ("Quilting," "The Effect of Art May Not Be What You Expect: Why My Parents Burned the Chagall").

There are a number of serious poems here as well, and they recall powerfully the human tendency to employ science and technology toward self-destructive ends. Pilots in El Salvador use "infrared sensors" to bomb anything "that registers enough human warmth," including hospitals ("Infrared"). "Daydreaming in Hades" concludes with Pluto (who likes to drink as well as to record the words of the dead as they arrive in the underworld), hearing "a new version of his name." Pluto smiles, "slurs the syllables with a thick tongue, / and writes 'Plutonium'" in "*The Dictionary of the Dead*."

In the poetry of Kerry Slavens, light is cast even upon the darkest places by similes and metaphors that are genuinely perceptive and illuminating, a distinctive mark of Slavens' style. Touching dying salmon in a river is like "Pulling silk from hangers": "their skin" comes "neatly from their bones" ("In Middle October"). F. Scott Fitzgerald makes an unexpected appearance as he waits "for his decade to return, a carrier pigeon sent out / that never came back" ("American Rain"). Synaesthesia is employed powerfully in the

story of a blind girl who became an inadvertent witness to the first explosion of the atom bomb: she declares that "This is what the colour of gold must feel like," only to be told by her sighted companion, "Now I know what it's like to be blind" ("The Blind Girl's Digression").

In *Month's Mind*, the eighth volume of the extraordinary series of poems that began to appear in 1978, when John V. Hicks had already turned seventy, other patterns of light's alteration with darkness are afforded. The emotional range of the poems is great, as is the literary. One encounters dramatic monologue, dialogue, allegory, and apostrophe; prose poetry is represented, as is the sonnet and the children's rhyme; Ovidian metamorphosis coexists with surrealist narrative.

Many poems are about memory, and some are about death. In "The Presence of Memory," the last of a group of prose poems collectively entitled "Interludes," memories are encountered in their respective solitudes. "Each memory bears form of a solitude; they cannot exchange on for another" or "countenance union of what may never be united." Although ugly shapes of death appear in "The Black Animal" and "The Floater," two of the other "Interludes," in "The Late Summer Weeds" the solitudes of memory encounter death with acceptance.

Acceptance is made possible, ultimately, by love, and *Month's Mind* is a book about love. Although seen in its "ordeals"—"earth under, heaven above" ("Celestial Bears Have Long Tails")—human love is celebrated ("I Like the Way Your Body," "Out of This Dream," "Prairie Interview"). So, too, is divine love ("Magdalene"). *Month's Mind* is the word of a poet who has thought long and deeply about love, as well as death; about light, as well as darkness.



Past Perfect / Past Imperfect

John Pass

The Hour's Acropolis. Harbour \$9.95

Patrick Lane

Mortal Remains. Exile Editions \$14.95

Reviewed by Alexander M. Forbes

The Hour's Acropolis afford the unexpected experience of hearing baroque music played in a classical setting, on modern instruments. One reinterprets what one sees as a result of what one hears.

What are glimpsed in *The Hour's Acropolis* are the Doric columns of the Parthenon, variously suggested throughout. *The Hour's Acropolis* is itself a verbal Parthenon, however, raised upon the columns of the small poems that comprise it. The lines are straight and the columns symmetrically arranged.

But sounds are heard that require one to rethink all apparently straight lines, whether lines of sound or sight. The sounds, like the air in which they are carried, are "alive / and unpredictable." Apparently straight lines of ascending sound being to bend as they pass apparently straight columns, prompting the recognitions that, ultimately, "Space is no line," nor a simple "curve" or "corner" ("Breezes And"). Lines appear straight only because perception is limited to segments.

What is seen, in life and science no less than in architecture and poetry, are but the segments "between fixed / points on infinite trajectories" ("Into Our Lives"). "A line / is not a line." "Even Euclid... missed the point," a "complexity of points spinning away / in planes and surfaces, hyperbolic / and elliptical geometries / of the furthest forms..." Pythagoreans, "dreaming proportion" and "limit / in an infinite system" likewise encountered the perpetual "problem of the irrational / numbers": the "ratio" of the "boxed diagonal / to the four

walls inexpressible / in a simple fraction” (“Of Science”).

Nature remembers what science and art might forget, as “Chinese poppies” fall apart under their own weight, “stems s-bending out / to take the weight” (“So Vivid”). Although a “curve” might afford no better a description of the geometry of space than a straight line, the s-curve of the baroque, which forms a spiral as it is projected in time, at least has the virtue of reminding us of our limited perceptions, and of processes that do not terminate with the visible: it is, after all, “the invisible,” as Pass observed that makes us “see” and be “seen” (“Us in Everything”).

The very spiralling of our inheritance, the “spiral ladders” of DNA, prompt questions that reach beyond the visible: “if created how / and why / and if not how / and why the burgeoning / flourishes, the DNA fanfare?” “Evolution’s baroque period” becomes apparent, making “Perpetual elaboration our niche” (“Variety”).

In light of human history, “Long loop[ed] in the dramas / of passion and indifference” (“To Divine”), it should not be surprising that humanity’s limited conception of “harmony” has been but a “whim” (“Our Whim”). We are “memory plus prophecy” (“To Divine”); time cannot be overlooked in the space that is human, and linear structures are subject to time—time which, as Einstein demonstrated, bends with space. The Acropolis bends in spacetime even as baroque music spirals when played: the Acropolis is the place of an hour.

The present reevaluation of experience is also of concern to Patrick Lane. In *Mortal Remains*, however, the past that is narrated is largely personal. It is an imperfect past, filled with the violence and death familiar to readers of Lane, and it comes as little surprise that the speaker refuses, unlike the speaker in *The Hour’s Acropolis*, to evaluate the lines of experience except upon the basis of what can be seen.

The past carries into the present a record of fragmentation. Bodies are wrenched apart to become “parts, a breast, a thigh, a hand” (“In the Dark”). In “Woodshed” the speaker remembers his childhood as an “emptiness” he made “of himself,” leaving nothing but “fragments of his flesh / left hanging in the air, a far-off hand, a foot...”

Family relationships are invariably destructive. The speaker remarks of his father that “he thought of / my death, as a man will whose son has chosen / to destroy” (“The Far Field”). But mother and son fare no better, as is often the case in Lane’s poetry: a mother’s face returns to her child as “a strange emptiness” that is “mostly pain” (“Mother”). Marital relationships are similarly imperfect, as seen in “The Happy Little Towns,” which recounts “The steady years of trying,” and the speaker’s wife “taking the flowers I picked in the fields / and placing them in a jar where we watched them die.”

Even animals suffer brutally: a cat is beaten to death (“The Birth of Narrative”); a turtle is buried by children (“The Children”); animals are attacked by each other (“The Last Farm”). But there is a cycle that is completed in the suffering of animals, one that draws people into the suffering. In “The Last Farm” (a version of Progressive insanities of a pioneer), metamorphoses of people into attacking or starving animals are followed by a collective metamorphosis that turns everything into “the endless dust.”

Amidst the horror, brief moments of light are unfolded; the recollected child of “Woodshed,” for example, waits “for a single beam of light to make him / whole.” But “what little light there is / will not reach into the corners” (“Notation”). And an even more serious impediment is suggested by the speaker when he acknowledges that while his eyes “are open,” what “they see is a darkness all their own” (“In the Dark”).

Nick's Picture in *A Jest of God*

Henry C. Phelps

In Margaret Laurence's 1966 novel, *A Jest of God*, the final encounter between the two summer loves, Rachel Cameron and Nick Kazlik, suddenly ends when Nick abruptly and without explanation shows Rachel a seemingly innocuous photograph of a young boy. Immediately and silently, Rachel makes several far-reaching assumptions about the picture. Then she asks aloud to be taken home. The two never see each other again.

This episode is undoubtedly critical in the novel, and highly enigmatic. Yet it has attracted little attention from critics. In his lengthy discussion of *A Jest of God*, George Bowering does not mention the photograph, referring only to Nick's pronouncement that "he is not God... he can't solve anything" (218). Clara Thomas asserts merely that the photo "remains as much a mystery to us as to Rachel" (91); Kenneth James Hughes assumes unquestioningly that Nick deliberately "misleads" Rachel with the mysterious picture (110). A close examination of the episode, however, clearly reveals important points about both Nick's and Rachel's characters, and provides an intriguing way of interpreting the conclusion of the novel.

Throughout, the incident is presented ambiguously. It takes place in the lovers' temporary trysting place on the banks of

the shallow, brown Wachakwa River, amidst the weeds and tall grass with their ironic parody of an Arcadian bower. After they make love, Rachel suddenly remarks, "If I had a child, I would like it to be yours." This statement is not intended as any sort of threat or challenge; it is deliberately "unforced... and so restrained as well, when I might have torn at him." Yet Nick obviously reads much more into her simple remark: "I'm not God," he replies after a long moment, carefully "not looking at" Rachel. "I can't solve anything" (148).

In an instant, the spell between the lovers is broken. The two become "apart," and a long silence follows as they dress and light cigarettes. Then Nick continues the conversation. He asks her, as if casually, "What are you thinking?" (148), but then before she can fully respond interrupts her to point out the nearby cemetery and mention his visit there the previous week, presumably to see the grave of his deceased twin brother Steve.

Rachel's response is an abrupt and significant change in topic: "Nick, why don't you ever say what you mean?" He replies with puzzling intensity, evidently again discerning some hidden meaning in what she is saying, "Don't make a major production of it, eh? I've said more than enough, about everything." At this instant he pulls out the mysterious picture, saying: "Look—did I ever show you this?" (149)

This context for the snapshot is carefully established as fraught with unexplained meaning and emotion. Laurence further

heightens the ambiguity of the episode by almost totally refraining from commenting directly on her characters' tone of voice, facial expression, or motivation. When Nick points out the cemetery, he does so—according to Rachel—“as though battling for distance” (148). Then, moments later, he responds “defensively” (149) to her portentous query about saying what she means. Yet no comment at all describes Rachel's thoughts and feelings when she asks that question.

Further, the mysterious snapshot itself is described only in curiously imprecise, suggestive terms: it evidently has been in Nick's wallet “for some while,” and the boy's face and eyes “speak entirely of Nick” (149). Nowhere is it stated explicitly how old the picture might actually be, or that it portrays a younger version of Nick Kazlik. As well, Rachel's response seems almost deliberately misleading. She appears to refer to the photo as an *object*, not to the figure in it as a *person*. “Yours?” she asks. (Not “You?” or as she thinks to herself—but does not say aloud—“Your son?”) Nick's reply is framed in the same ambiguous terms: “Yes,” he says. “Mine.” (Not “Me” or “My son.”) Even the language the lovers use in this exchange reinforces the uncertainty.

The end of the incident, and of their affair, follows immediately. Though utterly devastated by Nick's action, believing that the picture is of his son and that he is therefore married and a father, Rachel makes no effort to clarify the situation. She says aloud merely, “Nick—I have to go home now.” And her lover, agreeable “as always,” immediately acquiesces (149). Shortly after, Nick abruptly leaves Manawaka for his home in Winnipeg without even saying goodbye.

Already enigmatic, then, Rachel's understanding of the snapshot is further complicated several weeks later when she is informed by Nick's elderly mother that he is in fact *not* married and never has been.

Bewildered, Rachel decides that the mysterious photo must have been of Nick himself as a boy, and that he deliberately lied to her about it—or at least allowed her to be misled—presumably to escape her rather unsubtle hints about marriage. Almost at once, still confused about the nature of this incident—and indeed their whole relationship—she concludes that despite their intimacy over the summer, she actually had no idea “what was happening with [Nick] or to him” during this time (190).

The identity and nature of the puzzling snapshot remain uncertain to the end of the novel. Yet must we accept this ambiguous conclusion, or can the figure in the photo—and Nick's purpose in showing it to Rachel—be identified more precisely, or at least more usefully for interpreting the work? Laurence offers two possible identities for the child: Nick as a child, or Nick's son. However, there is a possible third candidate—one who can clarify many of the puzzling aspects of Nick's behaviour. Several elements in the riverbank scene suggest that the figure in the snapshot might be Nick's deceased twin brother, Steve; and further, that Nick implicitly assumes Rachel sees it as such. Her seeming indifference to the photograph motivates his ostensibly callous behaviour in abruptly leaving Manawaka.

Several points in the scene support this idea. First, repeated references are made to the late Steve Kazlik in the course of this encounter between Nick and Rachel, in contexts that clearly reveal Nick's ambivalence and depth of feeling for his twin. Indeed, the text strongly suggests that the central problem of his life—perhaps for years previous, but at least during this summer—has been this fraternal relationship, with all the complex consequences that Steve's premature death caused in the Kazlik family.

At the beginning of the lovers' tryst, Nick suddenly mentions that his father has

called him "Steve" in an "apparently accidental way" (142) several times in the previous week. A few minutes later, for the first time in a conversation with Rachel, he mentions his mother—then quickly returns to the subject of his brother: "Steve was like her," he says. "The old man always feels that Steve was like him, but he wasn't. He was like her" (146). After his abrupt announcement, "I'm not God," Nick mentions his visit to the cemetery the previous week, and—clearly caught up with the memory of his brother—suddenly shows the mysterious snapshot to Rachel.

Given the context of this moment, is it not quite possible that his action is an oblique but unmistakable reply to Rachel's question of a few moments earlier ("Why don't you ever say what you mean?")? Nick wants to show her the picture of his twin brother that he has carried close to him for so many years (a much more likely act than to carry an old photo of oneself around) because he wishes, wordlessly, to demonstrate to her just how important Steve *was* to him—and indeed still is. *That* is what he "means" throughout their conversation on the riverbank, but cannot bring himself to state directly.

In response, Rachel's seemingly casual and dismissive reaction to the picture—one word!—followed by her abrupt request to be taken home, could be seen by Nick as the final demonstration of her impenetrable self-absorption. Such seeming callousness on *her* part could be sufficient grounds to prompt his sudden, probably angry return to Winnipeg shortly afterwards.

A reading of the scene from this perspective at least allows Nick's behaviour to be seen as both consistent and understandable. As G. D. Killam has pointed out, the problem of communication failure "is central in Margaret Laurence's novels." The enigma posed by Nick's snapshot and the failure of the two lovers to successfully communicate poignantly illustrates the

devastating consequences of simple misunderstandings. In this episode, Laurence dramatizes this problem more clearly perhaps than anywhere else in her work.

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Last Page

A range of recent works on postcoloniality recurrently examines such issues as the viability of history, the legitimacy of critical perspective, and the function of style. Yasmine Gooneratne's *Diverse Inheritance* (CRNLE, n.p.) collects several of the essays that the author (a Sri Lankan-born Australian poet and critic) has written over recent years; giving the commentaries an autobiographical context, she focuses on the double inheritance of learning English early (recognizing it as a tool of deracination and as an enabling power that permits culture-crossing), and her essays in practice trace something of the political revolution that has turned "Commonwealth literatures" into postcoloniality.

Bernth Lindfors' collection, *The Blind Men and the Elephant* (CRNLE, n.p.), declares itself to be self-consciously old-fashioned in its interest in biocritical commentary; that said, the essays (on Ekwensi, Brutus, Ngugi, Soyinka, Tutuola, and Jahn) deal primarily with a history of critical reception, which in the case of Tutuola and Jahn produces remarkably effective contextualizing essays. On other occasions, the writer's resistance to stating what he himself considers obvious sometimes impedes the clarity of what he has to say. Two other collections from the Centre for New Literatures in English at Flinders University (Adelaide) are Annie Greet's anthology, *Raj Nostalgia*, a collection of ten essays on Rushdie, Sahgal, Narayan, Kipling, Forster, and Scott, which includes some instructive commentary on nostalgia in recent popular films depicting a version of "India;" and *Only Connect*, an anthology edited by Guy Amirthanayagam and Syd Harrex, on a range of subjects from Sri Lankan poetry and Bicultural poetry in New Zealand to Orwell and Ginsberg and Pound, which proposes that "process, not fixity" is the hallmark of the great writers of new societies.

Two books deal with Australia: Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra's *Dark Side of the Dream* (Allen & Unwin, \$22.95), and Ross Gibson's *South of the West* (Indiana UP, \$12.95). *Dark Side*, subtitled "Australian literature and the postcolonial mind," examines canonical themes and deconstructs their value systems, paying primary attention to unitary taxonomies and their alternatives (gender and multiculturalism, for example); of particular importance are the chapters on aboriginal images, voices, and cultures. Gibson's book, subtitled "Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia," reflects on a number of subjects, from Poe in the South Seas and the idea of "exotic" to the idea of "nature" as the myth of one class (though it changes, generation by generation, into the outward embodiment of the self); of special interest here are the numerous analyses of recent Australian films as part of the writer's investigation into the "wild-style postmodernism" that (along with "nationalism") constitutes one of the chief elements in the current Australian cultural baggage.

Three books, in parallel fashion, look at writing in the Caribbean: Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Duke, \$15.95), a self-indulgent evocation of rhythm in the Spanish Caribbean, translated by James E. Maraniss; Barbara J. Webb's *Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction* (U Massachusetts P, \$25); and Simon Gikandi's *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Cornell UP, n.p.). Webb's book, by looking at the work of Carpentier, Harris, and Glissant (from Cuba, Guyana, and Martinique, respectively), proposes to redefine the poetics of the novel in the context of New World Culture, using the myths of El Dorado, the Maroon, and Carnival as a framework; while the separate analyses sometimes seem a little

mechanical, Webb's distinction between "historical time" (a notion she rejects, that would equate historical fiction with realism) and "historical memory" (which she sees as an animating force) provides an instructive perspective on cross-cultural dialogue. Gikandi's work, however, is simply one of the best books on Caribbean writing. Focusing on James, Lamming, Selvon, Carpentier, Marshall, Hodge, Edgell, and Cliff, Gikandi notes that literature here is "haunted" by the fact of "discovery" and the subsequent "inauguration of the historical moment," but he is less concerned to establish a notion of "origin" than he is to observe how writers have coped with the condition of "since." Lamming, for example, is praised as a writer who recognizes that the "discovery" of the West Indies was never an "originating" model but always rather a projection of desire and ideology. In Lamming's work and that of other writers, Gikandi then proceeds to examine a variety of tropes—from cricket and exile to creolization and sugar—not only to demonstrate how they function as conditions of containment but also to show how the forms of Caribbean writing constitute ways of freeing the community and the self from them.

Finally, three general studies bear upon postcolonial studies in three quite separate ways. Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Harvard, n.p.) stunningly traces an historical as well as a cultural (maybe even an anatomical) revolution, arguing that pre-Enlightenment attitudes to the body established sexual differences as culturally less significant than gender categories, and that the "making" of the categories of sexual difference, in post-Enlightenment times, has been both disruptive and artificial:

The ways in which sexual difference have been imagined in the past are largely unconstrained by what was actually

known about this or that bit of anatomy, this or that physiological process, and derive instead from the rhetorical exigencies of the moment.

Poststructuralists will find the book an absorbing confirmation of what they suspect: that even the most fundamental differences that people take for granted at any given time are "constructs" of convention as much as empirical "truths."

Some poststructuralists might even like the special "Teaching Postcolonial and Commonwealth Literature" issue of *College Literature* (October-February 1992-3), though most will recognize that the issue is more a self-congratulatory demonstration that marginality is politically respectable in the United States "too." Stephen Slemon's article "Teaching at the End of Empire" is of much interest, as are one or two other essays in the collection; most of the rest of the issue is badly-written, undigested, authoritarian dogma, which assumes, apparently, that literature is henceforth to be read without any sustained reference to text. Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (Verso, n.p.), by contrast, shows that theory can be written effectively and well. Ahmad, through a critical analysis of Jameson, Said, Rushdie, and the "migrant intellectuals" phenomenon, demonstrates how "allegory," for example, functions differently in the "third world" than it does elsewhere, and in the process critiques the "three-worlds model" that is so popular in worlds one and two. In particular, Ahmad shows how nationalism also functions in different ways in different cultures, and (using his commitment to Marxist theory to revitalize the *idea* of nationalism) how the anti-nationalist leftwing conservatism of the "migrant intellectuals" (declaratively in the service of "ethics") constitutes an enclosure as great as any that the old empires might have designed in the name of taste or power. w.n.

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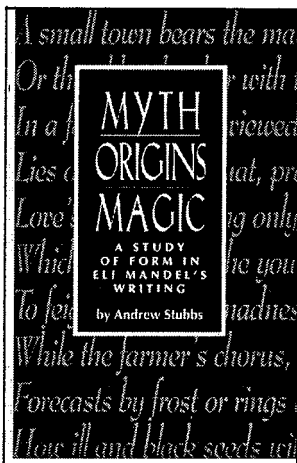
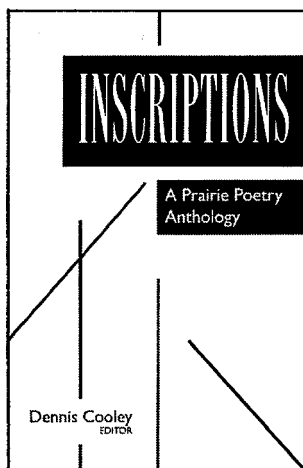
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